

Title: Update of Destination Management Organisation arrangements to include Shakespeare’s England and emerging Local Visitor Economy Partnership

Lead Officers: Phil Clarke, Martin O’Neill, Joanne Randall

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Ella Billiald and Cllr Chris King

Wards of the District directly affected: All

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	14.01.25	Cllr Chris King
Finance	14.01.25	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services	10.01.25	Kathryn Tebbey
Chief Executive	04.01.25	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	14.01.25	Dave Barber
Head of Service(s)	14.01.25	Phil Clarke
Section 151 Officer	14.01.25	Graham Leach
Monitoring Officer	14.01.25	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group	10.01.25	Darren Knight
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for 06 February 2025	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes (initial Equalities screening for AccessAble)	

Summary

This report provides an update of the activity that has taken place with other local authorities across Warwickshire and Coventry and the two Destination Management Organisations Shakespeare's England and Destination Coventry to take forward the new Coventry Warwickshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP).

The report also provides an update on the progress made by Shakespeare's England against the Conditions of Grant, set by this council, for the funding period 1 September 2022 – 31 August 2024 and proposes new conditions of grant for the forthcoming funding period from 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That Cabinet notes the progress made by the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) and continue to support the development of the partnership in its aim to provide governance and strategic support to the tourism sector across Coventry and Warwickshire.
- (2) That Cabinet notes the progress made by Shakespeare's England since the last funding period August 2022 – July 2024.
- (3) That Cabinet approves the revised grant conditions attached as appendix 1 to cover the period from April 2025 to March 2026, subject also to these being agreed by Stratford-on-Avon District Council, and delegates authority to the Head of Place, Arts & Economy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place, to agree any minor modifications to these as necessary.

1 Reasons for the Recommendation

- 1.1 As Members will be aware, Cabinet has received three reports relating to the creation of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs); in July and September 2023 and in June 2024. Since the June 2024 report there has been significant progress in the development of accredited LVEPs across the country as a result of recommendations from the 'De Bois' report commissioned by the last government, and published in September 2021, to review how tourism sector support and management is delivered across the country.
- 1.2 The accredited Coventry and Warwickshire LVEP was formed in September 2023 and its main purpose is to provide regional governance, strategy and leadership to the promotion of tourism across the sub region of Coventry and Warwickshire. The Coventry and Warwickshire LVEP partnership has been formed by bringing together the Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) of Destination Coventry (DC) and Shakespeare's England (SE) and joined by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to represent the needs of those areas of Warwickshire not currently covered by SE which is focused on support to South Warwickshire.
- 1.3 Since the last Cabinet report, the LVEP partners (SE, DC and WCC) have signed the Memorandum of Understanding, and produced a Growth Plan and a Destination Management Framework that have all been approved by Visit Britain/ Visit England.
- 1.4 The Governance Structure of the LVEP was reported to Cabinet in June 2024 and comprises of an Advisory Board, a Local Authority Officers Group and an Elected Members/ Councilors Advisory Group. Under these arrangements, SE and DC will continue to operate with their own Boards. SE is a separate legal entity, and DC

now sits under the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. This council has representation on the SE Board through Cllr Chris King supported by the Head of Arts, Place & Economy (Philip Clarke) and Strategic Economic Development Officer (Joanne Randall) on the Destination Management Plan (DMP) group.

- 1.5 The LVEP has developed a Growth Plan and a DMP Framework which has been agreed and accepted by all local authorities and has been submitted to Visit Britain/ Visit England who have also accepted it. Currently SE and DC have their own DMP Frameworks but will work towards delivery of the shared LVEP Framework. In future the individual DMPs may be replaced by the shared LVEP DMP but this decision will be taken by their individual boards.
- 1.6 The 'partnership' has been working on a Growth Plan running from April 2024 - March 2025. Currently there is a mandate until March 2025 however it is anticipated that the new Government will continue to recognize the LVEP structure and that it will be carried forward beyond March 2025. The LVEP is further supported by the West Midlands Destination Development Partnership (DDP) which is managed by West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) on behalf of West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
- 1.7 The aim for the 'partnership' is to work together through this transition period to explore how SE, DC and the local authorities can work together to promote the visitor economy across Coventry and Warwickshire. This will consider matters such as pooling of resources to support greater efficiencies and joint marketing. It will also explore the potential, and desirability, of even closer working including through creating a new sub-regional DMO. This would need to be agreed by all partners, including SE.
- 1.8 It should be noted that at the present time, the branding and identity of SE and Destination Coventry (and their respective websites) will be maintained.
- 1.9 Further member engagement has been arranged to give elected members the chance to network and learn more about how the LVEP can work to support the sector in their area. Cllr King will be the representative on this group.
- 1.10 **Shakespeare's England Progress to date since last report.**
- 1.11 Warwick District Council currently supports the work of SE through a contribution of £75,000 per year. Performance against this contribution is measured through a series of Grant Conditions which are reported to the SE quarterly Board meetings. A comparison has been made with performance at Jan 2024 (when the last report was submitted to councilors to assess value for money) against current performance December 2024 to show the progress made by SE and where some targets require to be addressed.
- 1.12 SE has met the majority of the grant conditions and has made significant impact with its social media strategy. It is recognized that it has been a difficult year for both SE and DC with staff churn, on-going uncertainty and additional workload for staff to progress the LVEP partnership.
- 1.13 **Key successes:**
- 1.14 The last Tourism Economic Impact Assessment (TIEA) shows that the sector is very nearly back to 2019 figures in pre-Covid Pandemic figures. Major achievements include the following:-
 - SE has made significant progress in its online presence and its marketing campaign 'Write Your Own Story'. Social media followers have increased massively with some posts having gone viral. SE have also undertaken PR

campaign with PLMR/Advent to increase printed coverage.

- SE has launched the new website which has been well received.
- SE has created a new Dashboard to report to the SE Board.
- SE has produced and delivered against a two-year business plan and currently have worked developing the LVEP Growth Plan and Destination Management Framework. SE Board may require a separate SE Business Plan.
- SE has made a good start in promoting Green Tourism and have undertaken the green tourism accreditation as an organization and have developed a two-year sustainability plan to include the promotion of BEIS audits to businesses and sustainable travel through the app 'YouSmartThing'.
- SE has demonstrated through VE/VB statistics that SE are brings about a higher than national average return on investment.
- SE has held quarterly Tourism Forums across the South Warwickshire area.
- SE has engaged with the Travel Trade directly and indirectly through working with partners and has promoted the area to a number of tour operators in Europe and worldwide. A recent engagement with Chinese Travel Trade in November 2023 has resulted in tours being booked and visitors travelling to the area through Bamboo Travel this year. Through the LVEP and working with WMGC opportunities to promote the area worldwide will increase.

1.15 **Areas for improvement:**

1.16 There are two conditions that have not been met.

- The membership offer and in particular the free listing offer to be made to hospitality, leisure and tourism businesses and organisations has not been achieved. The offer has been delayed initially through technical issues developing the automatic update link, then waiting for the website to be refreshed and more lately waiting for annual membership subscriptions to be collected to avoid conflict with members over the free listing.

It is now important that this is introduced as early as possible in 2025. This is disappointing as it was a major driver for the increased funding and there had been an expectation was that this would be in place from early 2023.

- The other condition is in attracting new membership which is also behind target. It is recognised that this is, in part, subject to external economic factors beyond the control of SE. Recent discussions with SE in setting the new Grant Conditions (see below) indicate positively that SE is working to achieve the membership targets set in the last funding period.

Shakespeare's England funding for 2025/26

1.17 It is recognised that SE has been operating in a time of considerable uncertainty, having had to recalibrate its activities as the visitor economy recovers from the pandemic, as well as deal with the new opportunities – but also workload pressures – created by the LVEP initiative.

1.18 As noted above, there is budget provision (subject to the budget report which is a separate item on this agenda) to enable the council to continue to support SE at a level of £75,000 for the next financial year 2025/26. It is understood that Stratford-on-Avon District Council is positively considering maintaining an equal level of support for 2025/26, subject to its own budget discussions.

1.19 It is right and necessary, however, that both councils review the Grant Conditions under which these contributions are made. Following the above

review of SE's performance against the previous set of Grant conditions (see above), and also recognising the need for SE to devote considerable energy over 2025/26 to work with DC and other local authority partners to explore the opportunities and added value of the LVEP, a new set of revised Grant Conditions is proposed for 2025/26. These are attached in appendix 1. It should be noted that these have been prepared in conjunction with Stratford-on-Avon District Council as Grant Conditions to be applied by both local authorities. As such, they will also be subject to the relevant approvals at SDC. It is possible that, as part of this, there may be requests for minor modifications to be made to these, and as such delegated authority is requested for the Head of Place, Arts & Economy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place (who is also the SE Board member) to approve these changes.

2 Alternative Options

- 2.1 There are three alternative options available to the council.
- 2.2 The council could support the recommendations but amend or remove the Grant conditions for 2025/26. This option is not supported. The Grant Conditions are considered important to ensure that SE delivers good value that aligns with this Council's own priorities in terms of supporting the visitor economy. The conditions attached in appendix 1 have been discussed both with colleagues from Stratford-on-Avon District Council and with SE. Officers consider them to be both realistic in view of the overall resources available within SE and the other workload priorities facing the organisation, and also sufficiently challenging as "stretch" targets. They will be monitored through quarterly Board Meetings.
- 2.3 The council could seek more stretching targets on the basis of an increased financial contribution for 2025/26. This has not been factored into the setting of the budget or into the wider MTFS. It is therefore not supported.
- 2.4 The council could withdraw financial support for SE. For all the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, this option is not supported. By working with Stratford-on-Avon District Council, and with the many businesses that are members of SE, the value of the financial contribution from this council is considered greater than if the Council was to work on its own. The proposed Grant Conditions are considered a good way of ensuring that our contribution remains value for money. It is also relevant that during this time of significant change in the way that DMO's are being organised, SE provides a more effective conduit for progressing these discussions than if the council was acting alone. SE provides considerable expertise and added value in the promotion and support to tourism sector locally, nationally and globally which could not otherwise be achieved with the same level of funding from this council if it was to not continue this level of funding.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. The council has a seat on the Board of SE. If SE ceases to exist as a legal entity and becomes part of a larger organisation, the council will need to understand its legal and governance relationship with this organisation. This will be subject to a separate report in due course as appropriate. It is hoped that more detail will become available following the joint stakeholder meeting and issues will be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. The council contributed £100,000 per year towards the running of SE for the funding period September 2022 – August 2024. The funding has now reverted to the previous budgeted funding level of £75,000 per year from 1 September 2024. In the event that SE is replaced by another organisation, the council will need to consider its financial responsibilities to this organisation. This will be subject to a separate report in due course as appropriate.

5 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy which sets three strategic aims for the organisation.
- 5.2 Delivering valued, sustainable services –
SE and the LVEP bring a level of expertise and added value to the promotion of tourism locally, nationally and globally
- 5.3 Low cost, low carbon energy across the district –
SE have developed a sustainability plan and is promoting Green tourism to local businesses.
- 5.4 Creating vibrant, safe and healthy communities of the future –
SE and the LVEP are supporting the local visitor economy to ensure that the South Warwickshire and the Sub-region stays as vibrant as possible for both visitors and residents. This is an important element of our vision to make Warwick District a great place to live, work and visit.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 SE is actively exploring and promoting 'green tourism' to the sector. The recent extended grant funding was to enable SE to expand this approach which it has achieved. The DMO has embarked on a significant project alongside the WMGC and DC in respect of the Global Destination Sustainability Movement Index (GDMI). The DMO has started to work through its own accreditation programme to attain Green Tourism accreditation. SE has accessed UKSPF funding for a 2-year project to improve its sustainability performance and to support the sector through becoming accredited to enable it to perform green benchmarking assessments. SE is also promoting the BEIS Green Audit grant funding and support being delivered by CW Chamber of Commerce to businesses. SE is also working with partners to promote 'sustainable travel' through the use of the app 'YouSmartThing' where travellers can plan their travel. SE has produced a two-year sustainability plan which it will deliver over the next two years to 2026.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 There are no direct equality implications arising from this report. However, SE is working with AssessAble (an app detailing mobility access to hospitality venues) and intends working with organisations to provide accessibility audits. The proposed grant conditions will target a number of organisations to be badged on the website with mobility information and to undertake accessibility audits.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

9 Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications of the proposal. However, investment in a strong tourism, leisure and hospitality offer locally benefits residents and visitors alike and supports a vibrant local economy.

10 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 There will be reputational and financial risks for the council now that the new Coventry & Warwickshire LVEP has been formed. There is an expectation that the council will continue to be a full partner in a new LVEP, as it does with SE. The council has a seat on the SE Board and currently contributes £75,000 per year towards the running costs of SE. Where appropriate and necessary, further decisions in relation to the new LVEP, and this council's role in it, will be brought back to the council for further approval.
- 10.2 Conversely, there is a risk associated in not actively exploring how a new LVEP may benefit the district. The previous government made clear that it sees LVEPs as the way that DMOs are organised nationally, and it is appropriate that the council considers the role of SE in this moving forward.
- 10.3 There will be a considerable risk to the promotion and support of the local visitor economy and tourism sector if this council was to reduce or withdraw funding to SE or support for the LVEP.

11 Consultation

- 11.1 None required

Background papers:

Please provide a list of any papers which you have referred to in compiling this report and are not published documents. This is a legal requirement.

You must also supply these when submitting the report.

Supporting documents:

This is not a legal requirement but may assist others in identifying documents you have referred to in producing the report.