

 EXECUTIVE – 5th January 2017		Agenda Item No. 9
Title	Review of Visitor Information Centre (VIC) arrangements	
For further information about this report please contact	David Butler David.butler@warwickdc.gov.uk Strategic Economic Development Officer 01926 456017	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive: 14 March 2012 (item 5) 12 September 2012 (item 5) 14 November 2012 (item 10) 17 April 2013 (item 11) 02 June 2016 (item 7)	
Background Papers	Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Shakespeare’s England Region (2015-2025)	
Contrary to the policy framework:	No	
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No	
Key Decision?	No	
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes (ref 816)	
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	No	
Not applicable		
Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	09/12/16	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	09/12/16	Tracy Darke
CMT	09/12/16	Bill Hunt/Andrew Jones/Chris Elliott
Section 151 Officer	09/12/16	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	09/12/16	Andrew Jones
Finance	09/12/16	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	09/12/16	Cllr. Noel Butler; Cllr Michael Coker
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Engagement with Warwick Town Council, Leamington Town Council and Leamington BID.		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		
Reports will be taken to the Employment Committee on March 22 (2017) to establish the roles and on June 15 (2017) to present the final redesign of the new integrated service.		

1. Summary

- 1.1 In June 2016 Members agreed to a review of the provision of the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Leamington, located in the Royal Pump Rooms. The underpinning principles for the review were that we should retain the commitment to face-to-face services as they are valued, that members would like to see the service extended and improved, but that budgets were constrained and that no additional funding was available.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Executive endorses the proposed future model of service delivery as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraphs 3.6-3.7.
- 2.2 That, subject to approval of recommendation 2.1, Executive approves the principle of Warwick District Council taking over responsibility for the Leamington Visitor Information Centre (VIC) on 1 April 2017, or as soon as practicably possible thereafter, with VIC staff being directly employed by Warwick District Council with transfers of current staff employed by Warwick Town Council under the TUPE regulations as applicable.
- 2.3 That Executive agrees to end the current grant arrangement with Warwick Town Council, for payment of £15,000 per annum, in respect of the Leamington VIC on expiry of the current grant period on 31 March 2017.
- 2.4 That Executive agrees that the Royal Spa Centre Box Office is relocated from the Town Hall and, together with the Art Gallery & Museum reception is co-located with the Leamington VIC in the Royal Pump Rooms.
- 2.5 That, subject to approval of recommendations 2.3 and 2.4, Executive delegates authority to the Head of Development Services and the Head of Cultural Services, in consultation with the Business Portfolio Holder and the Culture Portfolio Holder, to utilise the £15,000 allocated for 2017/18 as grant to Warwick Town Council, to instead deliver ICT infrastructure upgrades to enable the Royal Spa Centre Box Office and Art Gallery & Museum reception to be co-located to the VIC area within the Royal Pump Rooms.
- 2.6 That Executive delegates authority to the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Business Portfolio Holder, to re-negotiate and agree the payment of the Tourism Grant (additional to the £15,000 grant referred to above) to Warwick Town Council, up to a maximum value of £25,000.
- 2.7 That Executive notes that an additional phase of the Review will be undertaken to examine the provision of Visitor Information services in Kenilworth, involving engagement with stakeholders on the recent Kenilworth Visitor Audit, with the intention of delivering improvements to the range and accessibility of information within existing budgets

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 In November 2012, Members agreed to develop the 'hub and spoke' model for service delivery of visitor information in the District, which resulted in the granting of £40,000 p.a. to Warwick Town Council for the provision of the management of both the Warwick and Leamington VIC's along with other tourism activities.

- 3.2 The agreement governing the 'hub and spoke' arrangement comes to an end in March 2017, and so a comprehensive review of the future options of Leamington VIC has taken place to ensure that the Council can continue to provide a cost-effective solution to visitor needs. These options have been discussed with partners and offer several ways forward that would deliver the current and aspired-to levels of service.
- 3.3 Following the Executive approval of the Tourism Review in June 2016, a variety of models were explored for the operation of the Leamington VIC. This review was based on seeking improvement for visitors, especially around the quality of service delivery and the length of opening hours. The VIC currently operates over fewer hours than the rest of the functions in the Royal Pump Rooms, meaning that the space is secured by a large security shutter whilst the building is still in use – deterring visitors to the Art Gallery and Museum and café, and creating a negative impression. Furthermore, there is a desire to improve the value of interactions with visitors, offering a greater depth of knowledge and service where possible.
- 3.4 In seeking alternative models for the operation of the VIC service the starting point was that the face-to-face visitor information service in Leamington was valued, that we would like to see the service extended and improved, but that budgets were constrained and that no additional funding was available. As a result two models were proposed; one involving merging with other similar WDC functions (Appendix 1) and another involving extended opening hours through increased use of volunteers managed through the existing 'hub and spoke model' (Appendix 2).
- 3.5 Both models potentially provide an improved service to visitors by extending the current opening hours. This would be of benefit to those wishing to access the VIC service in the Pump Rooms as well as those visiting the Art Gallery & Museum who may be deterred by the metal shutters that are used to segregate the closed VIC when the Pump Rooms remains open.
- 3.6 Appendix 1 proposes a model that brings the VIC delivery in-house and, following a redesign consultation, integrates the staff with those providing a similar function in the Art Gallery & Museum and with the Box Office, currently located in the Town Hall. By integrating the teams and co-locating the functions, synergies will be produced that would provide the customer with an improved, more comprehensive service at first point of contact and over the desired longer opening hours. Given the much higher footfall in the Royal Pump Rooms compared to the Town Hall, there is reasonable expectation of opportunities to generate additional income above the current level.
- 3.7 Once the staff have transferred in-house, a focussed service redesign and consultation would be undertaken in order to integrate the teams, with the intention to present to Employment Committee in June 2017. Given the requirement to bring the VIC staff in-house prior to consultation and the creation of an integrated team, the extended opening hours sought for the VIC are unlikely to be able to be delivered until after the 15 June 2017 Employment Committee. However, once approved the physical relocation of the box office and the amalgamation of the teams can take place. There will be the need to put training plans in place and ensure that the transition of the service is done as smoothly as possible and that staff are fully engaged throughout the whole process.

- 3.8 Appendix 2 offers details of a proposed model that retains the current management arrangement of Warwick Town Council (WTC) managing the Leamington VIC, but utilising their established pool of volunteers to extend the opening hours without incurring additional costs. WTC have experience of successfully recruiting and managing volunteers having done so in the Warwick Visitor Hub. The model has the additional advantage of maintaining the existing and experienced management function, and would be able to deliver the extended opening hours immediately.
- 3.9 However on balance, the combination of increased opening hours, improved customer service and increased synergies between teams, the model proposed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 above is considered to offer the greatest benefits for both the Council and for the customer.
- 3.10 To relocate the Box Office and reception function the communication infrastructure to both the customer facing and back office areas would require investment. Given that it would be inappropriate to award the VIC element of the Tourism Grant outside of the Council when the service is now being provided in-house, it is proposed to instead utilise this element of the grant to deliver the required improvements in 2017/18.
- 3.11 Warwick Town Council is currently in receipt of a Tourism Grant made up of two parts – a) £25,000 for tourism activities and b) £15,000 for the management of the Leamington VIC. As part b) of the grant will be repositioned as detailed in section 2.5, Recommendation 2.6 allows for the renegotiation and renewal of part a) of the grant to ensure future delivery of tourism activities in Warwick town
- 3.12 Currently the visitor information is an unmanned stand in Kenilworth Library, Smalley Place. Officers will engage with stakeholders and end users to assess this provision and seek ways of improving its accessibility, relevance and prominence to the visitor within existing budgets. There has been a recent Visitor Audit for Kenilworth and associated action plan, attached as Appendix 3, and this will form the starting point of reviewing and improving the visitor information provision, with particular reference to Priority 4 – Optimising the Experience.

4. **Policy Framework**

- 4.1 The recommendations relate to the key strands of the FFF programme as follows:

Service:

Maintain or Improve Services – the offering of a visitor experience over a longer range of opening times will deliver an improved service.

People:

Engaged and Empowered Staff – through recent consultation of staff for a different review, the issue of the shortened VIC opening times was raised by Art Gallery and Museum staff as having a detrimental effect upon attendance, and this will directly resolve that issue.

Money:

Achieve and Maintain a Sustainable Balanced Budget – the recommendation delivers an improved service at the current budget.

4.2 One of the five key themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is Prosperity. The Tourism sector has a vital role to play in the prosperity of the District – it directly maintains over 4,300 jobs and brings in an estimated £260m per year. The priority for tourism is to make sure that, through collaboration with private and public sector partners, we maximise the draw of our tourism assets to attract and retain visitors to the District.

4.3 **Impact Assessments** – Equality Impact Assessments will be conducted as part of the re-design process.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

5.1 The ongoing costs of the Leamington VIC, and associated grant, are within the current budgetary framework. Currently Warwick Town Council employs the staff to run the VIC, for which the District Council is invoiced. The current year District Council budget for these staff is £27,900. Members should note that the running costs of the VIC, including the staff budget, are budgeted for in addition to the grant allocated for the management of the VIC and are therefore unaffected by the proposed reallocation of the £15,000 grant.

5.2 Warwick Town Council is currently in receipt of an annual Tourism Grant of £40,000, comprised of a long-standing grant of £25,000 and £15,000 that was added when the Town Council took on the management of the VIC. The grant agreement concludes at the end of March 2017, although the full amount remains within the budget framework for future years. Recommendation 2.6 allows for the renegotiation of the remaining £25,000.

5.3 The recommendations contained in this report will mean that the portion of the grant covering the management of the VIC we will be repositioned for 2017/18 to enable the transfer of the Box Office and associated upgrading of communication infrastructure. In line with standard practice, the Town Council will need to submit a relevant and appropriate business case to unlock the remainder of the grant for appropriate tourism activities.

5.4 There are potential budgetary implications within the TUPE process that can only be detailed at the conclusion of the process. Should the transferring staff wish to take up our terms and conditions there will be an additional cost regarding pension contributions. However, it is expected that these additional costs would be offset after the consultation period by savings delivered by co-locating and increased revenue generation.

5.5 Any additional costs coming out of the further review in recommendation 2.7 should be funded from the £15,000 which should be available for appropriate tourism activities in future years.

6. **Risks**

6.1 There is a risk with the transferring of staff and the restructure process that might lead to the loss of existing staff members. However, there are opportunities within the consultation process to ensure that all staff are engaged with the process and have opportunity to inform final proposals. Through this process management aim to reduce the loss of staff whilst ensuring plans are in place to recruit and/or cover any gaps that may appear. Once the re-design is complete the integration of the teams will provide greater resilience.

6.2 The creation of the new integrated role will mean that there may be an initial knowledge gap for the staff matched to it. To remedy this, a detailed training plan will be in place to ensure that excellent customer service is delivered, and will be developed as part of the established consultation process.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

7.1 The Council could choose to shut the Leamington VIC without exploring alternative delivery models. This would offer up savings to the Council in the region of £45,000, or the money saved could be used elsewhere to support Tourism. Closure would, however, be detrimental to the visitor experience, be reputationally damaging both within the community and within the tourism industry and have a negative impact on the other functions within the Royal Pump Rooms.

7.2 The Council could choose to adopt the proposal detailed in Appendix 2. This proposal would deliver longer opening hours which would benefit visitors to the VIC and to the Pump Rooms. However, this would not deliver the service benefits of co-location with other elements of service delivery such as the Box Office and Gallery Assistants, as made possible in the recommended option.