

# **Executive Committee**

## **15 December 2016**

### **West Dorset Tourist Information Centres**

### **Service Review**

#### **For Decision**

#### **Portfolio Holder(s)/**

Councillor M Penfold (Enabling Champion)

#### **Senior Leadership Team Contact:**

M Hamilton, Strategic Director

#### **Report Authors:**

Nick Thornley (Head of Economy, Leisure & Tourism)

Matt Ryan (Tourism & Events Manager)

#### **Statutory Authority**

Local Government Act 1972.

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 To consider the public consultation results on the options of relocation to Dorchester Library or replacement of the existing service with an unstaffed Tourist Information point for Dorchester Tourist Information Centre;
- 2 To consider the future delivery of the Dorchester Tourist Information Centre;
- 3 To provide an update on Sherborne and Lyme Regis Tourist Information Centre reviews.

#### **Officer Recommendations**

- 4 (a) That Dorchester Tourist Information Centre is relocated to Dorchester Library by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and continues to be funded and operated by WDDC; achieving an annual revenue budget saving of approximately £80,000;
- (b) That discussions continue with Dorchester Town Council and Dorset County Museum, or others as appropriate, to determine future delivery of the service from 2020;
- (c) That discussions continue with the Sherborne Community Arts Centre trust (SCACT) and Lyme Regis Town Council with regard to the future delivery of the TIC service in Sherborne and Lyme Regis.

## Reason for Decision

- 5 To progress the future delivery option identified for Dorchester TIC, ahead of concluding discussions regarding the future of Sherborne and Lyme Regis TICs.

## Background and Reason Decision needed

### Background

- 6 West Dorset District Council operates four Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in Bridport, Dorchester, Lyme Regis and Sherborne at a current total annual operating cost of approximately £353K, excluding central recharges of £221K.
- 7 The Council started a review of the Tourist Information Service in 2014. The review aims to identify sustainable methods to deliver tourist information for the future through options that deliver a modernised tourist information service, whilst achieving indicative savings of £300,000.
- 8 A Scrutiny working group was established by the former Efficiency Scrutiny Committee in order to undertake a scrutiny exercise for the Service Review of West Dorset Tourist Information Centres.
- 9 As part of the Service Review programme, extensive stakeholder engagement was undertaken in June 2015, in the form of a widely-available survey that was extensively promoted and drop-in sessions for the public, with the results informing options for future service delivery.
- 10 The transfer of Bridport Tourist Information Centre to Bridport Town council was approved by Executive Committee 15 August 2016.
- 11 For Dorchester TIC, two options for future service delivery were identified and a decision to undertake public consultation on these options was endorsed by Executive Committee 15 August 2016.  
  
Option 1 – relocating the tourist information service into Dorchester Library & Learning Centre, South Walks Rd, Dorchester  
  
Option 2 – replacing the existing service with an unstaffed Tourist Information Point
- 12 An 8-week period of public consultation on these options was held between 16 August and 11 October 2016.
- 13 During the consultation period, a petition was raised to 'Save the Tourist Information Centre in Antelope Walk or replace it in a near location and of the same standard which is excellent and provide the much needed tourist visit and local destination for our county town'. This received over 1000 signatures and was considered by Full Council at its meeting on the 3 November 2016. The Council resolved that the petition be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

- 14 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the report of the scrutiny working group with regard to the future of Dorchester TIC and considered the above petition as part of the scrutiny process on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016. The Committee supported the proposal to relocate the TIC service into the Dorchester Library at the current time in order to maintain the service, agreed to the report of the scrutiny working group being the formal response of the committee and confirmed the equality impact assessment. Members also supported a review of the location of the service after one year of operation and ask that the district council provides a capital contribution in the case that the tourist information centre moves out of the library into new premises in the future. The draft Committee minute extract relating to this item, along with the formal report of the committee is attached at Appendix 1.

## **Dorchester TIC**

### **Background**

- 15 Since 1995, Dorchester TIC has operated from large commercial town centre premises in Antelope Walk, with a current approximate annual throughput of 170,000 recorded by an electronic door counter. Approximately 25% of these seek staff assistance. For the past five years, throughput to the centre has declined by an average of approximately 6,000 admissions each year. Staff also currently deal with over 7000 telephone enquiries per annum.
- 16 The 2016-17 budget for Dorchester TIC is approximately £153k excluding internal recharges of almost £71K, the main costs being budgeted employee costs (£141K) and premises costs (£48K).
- 17 Income is generated through retail sales, commission from ticket sales and rental of display space within the premises. Gross income of approximately £260K generates a net income of approximately £40K per annum.
- 18 A comprehensive service is provided to visitors and local residents, including free information provision in person, by telephone and email, ticket sales for events and transport, accommodation bookings, shopper's parking permits as well as real-time information provision through social media.
- 19 The TIC is open Monday - Saturday year round and currently employs a part-time manager, a full time assistant manager and six part-time tourism assistants.
- 20 During the service review, a variety of options for Dorchester TIC have been considered to meet the savings required by the service review process, including integrating the service into the new Shire Hall attraction, relocating to SWH reception or Dorchester Library and continuing to take a commercial approach within the existing premises. Discussions were also held with an operator of a private Dorchester attraction, the County Museum and Dorchester Town Council.

- 21 The Town Council supports the proposal of the District Council to transfer the TIC to Dorchester Library; however it is keen to explore with other parties, long-term future delivery options in light of the potential local government reorganisation and the planned development of two major heritage facilities in the town, Dorset County Museum and Shire Hall Dorset.

Dorset County Museum has expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of integrating the TIC service into the Museum reception following its refurbishment.

- 22 Further information on each option considered is included in the attached draft business case at Appendix 2, but in summary, relocating the TIC into Dorchester Library offers the most viable and sustainable option identified for future service delivery and protects both the staff and service as far as possible for the future, whilst making savings that contribute towards the Council's ongoing financial challenges.

### **Public consultation**

- 23 In August 2016, the Executive Committee resolved to undertake public consultation to gain views on two options for future service delivery and the associated impact of the options, relocation of the tourist information service into Dorchester Library and replacement of the existing service with an unstaffed Tourist Information Point.

The consultation material stated that replacement of the service with a tourist information point would not be the preferred option.

- 24 The consultation was open for 8 weeks and was available as an online questionnaire, with paper copies being available at the main district council offices in Dorchester and the TIC in Dorchester.
- 25 1312 responses were received together with 2 petitions and correspondence from 6 individuals expressing concern at the future plans or support for the existing service.
- 26 The majority (52%) of respondents to the consultation agreed to some extent with a move to the library, while 43% disagreed to some extent.
- 27 A summary of the consultation results is included in the Business Case at Appendix 2, with the full consultation report available at [www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/DorchesterTICconsultation](http://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/DorchesterTICconsultation).
- 28 The Committee is requested to consider the results of the consultation as part of deliberations towards the future provision of Dorchester Tourist Information Centre.

### **Integration into Dorchester Library & Learning Centre**

- 29 As part of Dorset County Council's 'Forward Together' transformation programme, a report was presented to People's and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016, outlining a proposed 'Community Offer for Living and Learning' initiative.

- 30 Key elements of this include the integration of services which can best be delivered from buildings, as opposed to exclusively online, into 'Living and Learning Centres'. These will be strategically located in the most flexible, efficient and accessible buildings.
- 31 This community offer has been developed as a positive proposition for local communities and service users, maintaining access to services in the future within the context of funding cuts. It will require working in partnership with community organisations and other public services.
- 32 Dorchester is not one of the assigned pilot areas to develop this approach; however Dorchester Library & Learning Centre is seen as a key building for the future and has already successfully incorporated a Dorset Police Contact Point and Skills & Learning BDP (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole) into the building.
- 33 Relocating the TIC service into a dedicated area, fitted out to its requirements and located on the ground floor of the library, presents an opportunity to:
- Work alongside other similar customer focussed frontline community services in partnership with DCC
  - Provide a cost effective and sustainable solution for future service delivery
  - Relocate within the current financial year when the Antelope Walk lease expires
  - Achieve estimated overall savings on operating costs of approximately £80K per year (excluding recharges). A one-off cost of approximately £50K would be associated for the relocation.
  - Continue to provide all core services with an opportunity to develop and adapt as the centre evolves and offer additional services
  - Continue to offer Monday-Saturday opening
  - Improve accessibility to the service by relocating to a building adapted to those with protected characteristics, which is located adjacent to a large car park in the town centre.
  - Work with library staff to enhance the provision of community and local event information, which already exists in the library foyer
  - Potentially further reduce costs in the long term by combining staff resources
  - Offer the best long term security for the service in light of potential future local government reorganisation.
- 34 The Business case at Appendix 2 provides further detailed information on the proposed relocation of Dorchester Tourist Information Centre to the Dorchester Library and Learning Centre.

## **Sherborne TIC**

- 35 Sherborne TIC has operated from its existing premises since 1995 and currently welcomes approximately 55,000 customers per annum.
- 36 The 2016-17 budget for Sherborne TIC is approximately £69k excluding internal recharges of almost £47K.

- 37 The current preferred way forward for Sherborne TIC is to continue operating the TIC in its current premises until relocation and transfer of the service can be progressed or, if this cannot be realised, that the TIC continues to be operated by WDDC for a period of up to 3 years.
- 38 The initial option was to relocate the TIC to the refurbished Digby Hall and transfer the service to Sherborne Town Council.
- 39 WDDC has provisionally allocated £500K to the refurbishment of the Digby Hall on condition that it delivers the outcomes it requires, one of which is the inclusion of a reduced TIC service.
- 40 The Town Council set up a working group on this and District Council officers were invited to discuss a way forward for the TIC with this group. The working group expressed concerns about the inclusion of the TIC in the Digby Hall project, as well as wider concerns about the feasibility of progressing the Digby Hall project overall in light of the changing plans of other groups with similar aims (Sherborne House, SCACT, Sherborne School for Girls).
- 41 The recommendation from the Town Council's working group was supported by the Town Council at a meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> June; that the Town Council does not enter into formal discussions with WDDC regarding the relocation of the TIC to the Digby Hall.
- 42 The Town Council has therefore confirmed that the discussion regarding the inclusion of the TIC into the Digby Hall has ended and acknowledges that this decision means that the £500k is no longer available for the Digby Hall.
- 43 The current option being investigated is to relocate the service to the proposed new Arts Centre and transfer the service to the Sherborne Community Arts Centre Trust (SCACT).
- 44 Officers have met representatives from SCACT and a proposal has been received from the Trust to incorporate Sherborne Tourist Information Centre into the proposed new 'Paddock Gallery', an art and education centre in Sherborne.
- 45 The project is currently at a detailed planning stage and the Trust is working with several professional partners and other Trusts, undertaking stakeholder engagement and formal briefings. A formal planning proposal is due to be submitted early in 2017.
- 46 Funding has been secured through a private foundation.
- 47 The aim is to create an inclusive community resource alongside high quality exhibitions and is an opportunity to create a tourist destination in the centre of the town, attracting local, national and international visitors. The site would include a gift shop and a café.

The proposal suggests that:

- The TIC area, located at the entrance to the attraction, will deliver a modern information area and act as the primary reception to the gallery.
  - Existing TIC staff will be retained and transferred to the Trust (TUPE transfer)
  - All tourism services will continue to be offered, including ticket sales, event promotion etc
  - Opening hours will be broadly similar to the existing service, six days a week, year round
  - A one off capital contribution will guarantee the long term security of the service
- 48 It is likely that the new Paddock Gallery will take up to 2 years to complete. Assuming an opening date for the new attraction during 2018, the cost of operating the TIC service for an additional 18-24 months from April 2017 needs to be factored in to considerations. Due to the minimal staffing levels and timescale, the existing operating costs are unlikely to change significantly during this time. Officers are awaiting clarification on a number of points from the trust and will revert back to the Overview and Scrutiny working group once clarification is received.
- 49 In the event of neither option being feasible, an alternative would be to close the service and replace it with an unstaffed Tourist Information Point (TIP), though this is not officers' preferred option.
- 50 It should also be noted, that the engagement survey in Sherborne prompted the highest number of responses. Local residents account for a high percentage (70%) of Sherborne TIC's customers and this option of a TIP will not fulfil their requirements nor reflect the findings of the engagement survey.

## **Lyme Regis TIC**

- 51 As previously reported, Lyme Regis Town Council (LRTC) proposed a holistic approach to linking service reviews with assets and other services' within the Town. This includes the future delivery of some form of information service.
- 52 Discussions have been ongoing and a recently revised proposal has been received from the Town Council clerk. Officers are going through the detail of this and profiling the overall financial information before bringing forward to members.
- 53 The 2016-17 budget for Lyme Regis TIC is approximately £71k excluding internal recharges of almost £51K.
- 54 The current preferred option is to continue to operate the TIC service in its existing premises until strategic discussions are concluded with the Town Council or, should agreement not be reached, that the TIC continues to be operated by WDDC for a period of up to 3 years. The alternative option is to close the TIC and establish an unstaffed Tourist Information Point (TIP), though this is not officers' preferred option.

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

- 55 The recommended option for relocating Dorchester TIC into the library will generate significant annual savings, in the region of £80K per annum, excluding recharges and the one off costs of circa £50k associated with the move. With the latter being funded from the Tourist Information Centre budget and the achieved savings.
- 56 There will also be redundancy costs associated with the proposed re-structure and streamlining of current staffing that the Council will meet from the savings achieved.

### **Legal**

- 56 The Council has a statutory duty to consult on proposals relating to the delivery of functions exercised by the Council in relation to their continuous improvement (section 3 LGA 1999).
- 57 Stakeholder engagement was carried out in June 2015 with regard to all four TICs. Public consultation on the options for Dorchester Tourist Information Centre was undertaken between August and October 2016 and results have been taken into consideration.

### **Equalities**

- 58 An equality impact assessment has been prepared for the relocation of Dorchester TIC to Dorchester Library. There is evidence of a positive impact due to the improvements in accessibility that the Library offers, both to customers/visitors and employees with protected characteristics.
- 59 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has determined the equality impact assessment for Dorchester Tourist Information Centre as part of the service review to ensure that equality issues have been fully considered and that any adverse impacts of the proposed changes on different groups have been considered and, where possible, mitigated.

### **Economic Development**

- 60 The operation of the West Dorset TICs generates an economic benefit by influencing visitor spend.
- 61 TICs make a contribution to the local economy by providing a welcome to visitors, encouraging them to spend more time and money in a locality and improving the chance of a return visit.
- 62 There is likely to be little long term change in the economic benefits derived from Dorchester TIC given that the centre in the Library will continue to offer the same core services. Customer throughput and TIC usage has been on a downward trend for several years and this, together with a likely small reduction in customer numbers in any new location, may



lead to a reduction in the benefits derived for the local economy from the TIC service in the short term.

- 63 However, WDDC's investment in the development of visitdorset.com, the tourist website for Dorset, which is operated in partnership with other Dorset councils and receives over 2 million visits per annum, is seen as a more efficient and modern way to ensure that visitor information is provided to the widest possible audience and that visitor spend is generated by securing bookings and through the extensive marketing of the area.

### **Risk Management (including Health & Safety)**

- 64 The risks associated with the relocation of Dorchester TIC to Dorchester Library are seen as low although members are asked to note that there is limited support for relocation in general from some stakeholders.
- 65 The risk and adverse impact associated with not relocating the TIC service is the uncertain long term sustainability of the service in light of potential local government reorganisation.

### **Human Resources**

- 66 The proposed option for Dorchester TIC will require a re-structure and streamlining of current staffing.
- 67 Employees and Unions will be consulted as part of the re-structure in accordance with the Partnership's recognised procedures.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

- 68 The Unions have been updated on the service review and the Dorset Councils partnership branch of Unison has provided the following comments:
- The branch welcomes the breadth and depth of the report into the Dorchester TIC and believes that the most feasible and sustainable option has been selected.
- The branch is pleased that the preferred option will mean that Staff are to be retained by DCP. We have already stated that we would hope to see any reductions to staff managed if possible by vacancy management and then by redundancies by volunteers at the compulsory rate.
- 69 Extensive stakeholder engagement was carried out in June 2015. Over 2100 responses were received and the key findings are included in the attached draft business case.
- 70 An 8-week period of public consultation has been undertaken, starting in August 2016. The results of the consultation have informed the deliberations of the Scrutiny working group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Appendices**

- 68 Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Dorchester TIC minute and formal report of the committee
- 69 Appendix 2 – Business Case (Dorchester Tourist Information Centre)

## **Background Papers**

- 70 Documents include the service review project scope, initiation document, risk assessment and Executive Committee Report-West Dorset Tourist Information Centres 9 August 2016.

## **Footnote**

Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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