

# MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

17<sup>th</sup> April 2018

## Tourism: Visitor Offer and Promotion

### Portfolio Holder(s)/ Briefholder

Cllr Kosior

### Senior Leadership Team Contact:

M Hamilton, Strategic Director

### Report Author:

Trevor Hedger

### Statutory Authority

Local Government Act 2000 – Promotion of economic and social wellbeing

### Purpose of Report

- 1 This report is to clarify the offering to visitors and review the active promotion of tourism.

### Recommendations

- 2 Members are asked to note the report.

### Reason for Decision

- 3 This report is in response to an item in the Management Committee Action Plan to “Clarify the offering to visitors and review the active promotion of tourism”.

### Background and Reason Decision Needed

#### Background

- 4 The value of tourism to Weymouth and Portland in Dorset is set out below. The data is taken from the 2016 Value of Tourism Report 2016, produced by SW Research Company, and published January 2018.

|                       | Weymouth and Portland | Dorset  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Value to the economy  | £212m                 | £1,810m |
| Employment FTE        | 3660                  | 34223   |
| Employment %          | 19                    | 13      |
| Staying Visitor trips | 486k                  | 3.72m   |
| Bed nights            | 1.78m                 | 14.9m   |

|              |      |       |
|--------------|------|-------|
| Day Visitors | 2.1m | 26.2m |
|--------------|------|-------|

- 5 The tourism industry is supported and promoted at international, national and local levels by:

VisitEngland/VisitBritain – Government funded organisations delivering domestic and overseas promotion, managing Discover England Grant Fund, developing the product.

Dorset Tourism Association – a CIC and Dorset LEP sub group, recently formed, to improve the overall awareness, effectiveness and quality of tourism provision, in Dorset.

Visit Dorset – a Partnership of Dorset local authorities, including the Borough Council, collaborating and funding tourism promotion ([www.visit-dorset.com](http://www.visit-dorset.com), social media) and development projects in partnership with the private sector.

Weymouth Area Tourism Association – currently an informal body, supported by officers from the Borough Council seeking to share and coordinate activity and share information from across the diverse sections of the sector within the Borough. Members of the Association report positively on the performance of some segments of the local tourism economy.

Weymouth BID – promotion of the town through a website, staging of events, and support for town centre initiatives.

Individual local tourism businesses and commercial marketing agencies through their own activities and publications

- 6 The Borough Council plays a significant role in supporting the sector through its management of:

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| Harbour  | Car parks      |
| Beach  | Events         |
| Toilets  | Museum support |
| Town Centre management                                   |                |
| Support for TIC/TIP network                              |                |
| Public Realm and open spaces                             |                |
| Ownership and management of the Hotel property portfolio |                |

- 7 The Borough Council changed its approach to TICs in 2013, supporting the establishment of a new TIC at the Heights Hotel on Portland, and a network of Tourist Information Points in Weymouth. Recent plans by the BID to set up a new TIC for Weymouth have been supported but are not yet concluded.

### **Tourism Promotion**

- 8 Since 2012, and excluding private sector activities led and funded by others including Weymouth BID, tourism promotion for the Borough has been carried out through the Visit Dorset Partnership work of local

authorities (Christchurch and Weymouth and Portland Borough Councils, East Dorset Purbeck and West Dorset District Councils). This partnership is supported financially by approximately 500 businesses and is recognised as a lead tourism body by Visit England. Each council contributes to the core system (the Destination Management System), the visit-Dorset website and to collective marketing activities.

- 8 Visit Dorset activity is funded through advertising income and through contributions from each of the participating local authorities. The Destination Management System (DMS) is similarly funded by contributions from each of the participating local authorities.
- 9 The DMS holds information about accommodation, attractions, activities, retail and events and feeds these through to the visit Dorset website. The website allows consumer searches against a variety of selection criteria including geography, type and date or availability.
- 10 With the increasing rise in popularity of online travel agencies, OTA's, the website has the ability to link an accommodation provider's entry with its choice of OTA including Booking.com, Late Rooms, Expedia, Eviivo and Guestlink (which in turn links to many other OTAs). It also includes its own Visit Dorset booking channel.
- 11 The website is supported by extensive social media activity including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and a search engine optimisation strategy to ensure a good performance in search engine rankings. The website receives over 2m visits pa, and the social media work attracts 57k followers across all platforms.
- 12 The Visit Dorset team also engage in other activities to support the sector and promote the area including:
  - A regular feature in Dorset magazine
  - Responding to local national and international media enquiries (>1 per week)
  - Production and distribution of 140k Explore Dorset and 57k Explore Weymouth and Portland leaflets encouraging visitors to explore the area and visit events, local attractions etc.
  - Organise and coordinate Residents' Week (encouraging local people to visit local attractions out of season for subsequent word-of-mouth promotion to guests).
  - Consumer "e" newsletter sent monthly to 65k contacts
  - Maximise opportunities from TV and film productions to support area promotion including Dunkirk 2017
  - Run many competitions with Visit Dorset members throughout the year to encourage visitors and promote the area
  - Work in partnership with VisitEngland and VisitBritain on arranging media (press, travel writers, bloggers etc.) trips to the area
  - Support and work in partnership with local area/town groups and forums across the Visit Dorset area

- Commission videos for use on websites and to share on social media to promote various themes including coast/activities, food and drink, rural Dorset and an overarching video Love Dorset (viewed over 160k times via social media)
- Industry channel site off from the main website to act as a hub for training, research and industry news
- Business development events – focus on digital marketing/social media in 2017
- Business Twitter account and “e” newsletter
- Participate in appropriate VisitEngland challenge fund projects including South West Coast Path –“Discover England’s Walking Trails” and the National Coastal Tourism Academy’s “England’s Coast” £1m projects.
- Sponsor an award at the annual Dorset Tourism Awards
- Support and promote the Dorset Ambassador scheme
- Fund industry research to monitor the economic value and relative performance of tourism locally

13 In addition to the contribution to the Visit Dorset promotion, there is a small budget (c£6k) available for promotion of the Borough.

### **Offer to Visitors**

14 During 2016, and following a successful application to Dorset LEP for Growth Deal 2 funding, the Borough Council was awarded £600k to complete studies required in order to deliver the Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan. This included a sum to complete a tourism study for the Portland-Weymouth-Dorchester corridor.

The scope of the study was to “to identify the changes required in the tourism offer across the area to attract new and repeat visits through increasing more out of season and shoulder month visitors with a higher spending profile.” The study was to:

- 1 Review the current tourism accommodation provision across the area and identify improvements to the current tourism product mix, service and quality standards in order to increase share of existing and identified markets and local distinctiveness.
- 2 Recommend any diversification required of the accommodation offer to support the development of attracting new visitor markets, improving the quality of service provision and standards of the current stock and encouraging the development of new accommodation.
- 3 Identify opportunities to be realised through the regeneration of Weymouth Town Centre with the aim to attract new visitor markets with a higher spend i.e. recommending type of services, facilities and activities that would/may appeal to these new markets,

including cultural visitors, for consideration as part of the Weymouth Town Centre Redevelopment and Western Dorset Growth Corridor.

- 4 Assess where the Western Dorset Growth Corridor currently sits within the market place and the future potential change required to access other growth and sustainable visitor markets, including conference markets suitable for current and proposed facilities.

Through a competitive tendering process, Blue Sail, a leading national tourism consultancy, was appointed. Their report, delivered in July 2016, included a Destination Audit of the visitor offer for Weymouth and Portland, undertaken in April and May 2016.

The report and its actions has been shared with the current and previous Tourism Brief Holders.

- 15 The audit was complimentary about:

Weymouth

Road access, amount of car parking, attractive vibrant quayside (north and south), the beach and activities for young children, busy private attractions

Portland

Good road signage to key attractions, well signed car parks, well maintained toilets, the importance of the natural environment as Portland's greatest asset

And noted room for improvement:

Weymouth

Sense of arrival at the Rail Station, feeling of cleanliness (despite absence of litter), beach activity for older children, signage and wayfinding, appearance of the Pavilion, physical quality of some of the accommodation stock, absence of key retail brands, conflict of the NTE offer with the family and more mature markets, absence of street animation

Portland

Public realm, reason to stop and look, accommodation offer, retail offer, NTE offer, supporting tourism in the borough through its potential as an activity hub

- 16 The report noted that Weymouth and Portland

- Are both a traditional seaside resort and a sailing port attracting 1.87m day visitors, many staying elsewhere in Dorset
- attracts a very wide range of markets and that visitors use the town as a base to explore the wider area as well as a destination

- Holidays to the seaside last longer than the average trip length but spend is slightly lower than the average
- Seaside holidays ... tend to be popular with families and also with people in the less affluent social grades
- Seaside trips are more likely than average to involve visitor attractions and outdoor activities but less likely to involve activities related to history and heritage or arts

17 The report identifies four priority market segments to support growth in the tourism market through gradual evolution of the market:

Weymouth:

**ASPIRING FUN FAMILIES** - Families, parents 25-50, with children up to age 13; socio-demographic C1– aspirational - for themselves and kids; Living within 4 hours travel – mainly north and east of Dorset

**GET-AWAY BREAKERS** - Aged 60 plus; Couples and groups of friends; Socio-demographic C1; Living within 3 hours travel – mainly north and east of Dorset

**SAILING FRATERNITY** - Couples, groups, families, friends into sailing and coming specifically for events (Participants and Spectators): Socio-demographic groups AB

Portland:

**ACTIVITY SEEKERS** - All ages, socio-demographic groups ABC1C2 – families, friends, couples; All levels of expertise - enthusiasts, accommodation and dabblers, learners and tasters; Range from those passionate about their sport/activity to those who want to try things out or have some fun while on holiday; Living within 5 hours – prepared to travel if the place offers what they want; Variable spend depending on activity

18 Since the publication of the report there have been a number of developments that start to address the Blue Sail identified areas for improvement

- A new visitor attraction (Castletown D Day museum)
- Appointment of Town Centre Manager and delivery of town centre improvements programme including signage scheme (Spring 18)
- Progression with the Peninsula redevelopment, focussing on accommodation and new attractions (informed by Blue Sail report)
- Coastal Community Funded esplanade lighting in development
- Targeted social media campaigns specifically focused on visiting Weymouth and Portland in shoulder months and towards the target markets
- Funds awarded for works at the Pavilion
- A new hotel asset management policy (Sept 17) to facilitate leaseholder investment product quality

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan**

Building a Stronger Local Economy

### **Financial**

None associated with this report

### **Equalities**

None associated with this report

### **Environmental**

None associated with this report

### **Economic Development**

Tourism is identified as a sector of local importance in the Councils Western Dorset Economic Growth Strategy

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

No implications

### **Human Resources**

No implications

## **Consultation and Engagement**

None

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

None

## **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.

**Report Author:** Trevor Hedger

**Telephone:** 01305 252378

**Email:** [thedger@dorset.gov.uk](mailto:thedger@dorset.gov.uk)

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