

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 2 September 2013

Portfolio:	Leisure and Community
Subject:	Review of Tourist Information Centre
Report of:	Director of Community
Strategy/Policy:	Community
Corporate Objective:	Leisure For Health and For Fun

Purpose:

This report reviews the current arrangements for the management of the Fareham Tourist Information Centre and considers future arrangements for the service.

Executive summary:

A Tourist Information Centre (TIC) has been provided in Fareham at Westbury Manor since 1984 and the present facility is operated by a group of dedicated staff who provide a high quality service.

An agreement is in place between Fareham Borough Council and Tourism South East (TSE) to operate the Fareham TIC. In 2013/14 the Council will pay £36,000 for the provision of the service.

The promotion of Fareham Borough as a tourist destination is not a corporate priority and in the 2009 Residents Survey, residents indicated that the provision of a Tourist Information Centre was a low priority.

The need to identify efficiency savings in recent years, in order to set a balanced budget, has resulted in reductions in the payment that the Council makes to TSE. In 2012/13 a 16% reduction was implemented and the Government 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review requires the Council to deliver further efficiency savings.

Opportunities to reduce the cost of the service have been discussed with TSE including the potential to utilise volunteers to assist with operating the service. However, at present the opportunities explored are either not viable or do not achieve a reduction in the current operational costs.

TSE have implemented arrangements to continue operating the service in the short term. However, the discussions with TSE have concluded that any further budget reduction could only be achieved by reducing opening hours and this would mean that it would be difficult to operate a viable service.

Recommendation:

- (a) Implement a 15% reduction in the funding for the Fareham TIC from 1 April 2014.
- (b) that in the event that the 15 % reduction in funding is not acceptable the current agreement for the operation of the Fareham Tourist Information Centre is terminated on 31 March 2014 and the Council becomes a Destination Partner with Tourism South East who will provide and manage web pages promoting attractions and events in the Borough of Fareham.

Reason:

To deliver efficiency savings as required under the Government Comprehensive Spending Review 2013.

Cost of proposals:

There will be a cost of £1500 per annum associated with becoming a Destination Partner with TSE. This can be met from the reduction in revenue funding as a result of terminating the agreement to provide a TIC, £36,000 in 2013/14. This will result in a net saving to the Council of £34,500.

Appendices: None

Background papers:

Tourist Information Centre Review - Leisure Policy Development & Review Panel - 7 November 2012

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 2 September 2013

Subject: Review of Tourist Information Centre

Briefing by: Director of Community

Portfolio: Leisure and Community

INTRODUCTION

1. A Tourist Information Centre (TIC) has been provided in Fareham at Westbury Manor since 1984 and before that it was located in Ferneham Hall.
2. The promotion of Fareham Borough as a tourist destination is not a corporate priority other than the promotion of the town centre as a shopping destination.
3. In recent years, the need to identify efficiency savings in order to set a balanced budget has resulted in a reduction in the payment that the Council makes to the operation of the Fareham TIC.
4. The Government 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR 13) requires the Council to deliver further efficiency savings. In light of the situation, this report reviews the current arrangements for the management of the Fareham TIC and considers future arrangements for the service.

BACKGROUND

5. The Fareham TIC is located on the ground floor of Westbury Manor and is currently open 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Friday and 10am to 4pm Saturdays and Bank Holidays.
6. Westbury Manor is in the Council's ownership and there is an agreement with Hampshire County Council Museum & Arts Service to provide the museum. The agreement includes provision for Tourism South East (TSE) to operate the TIC in the building at no charge, with the County Council meeting all utility costs.
7. The agreement between Fareham Borough Council and Hampshire County Council for Westbury Manor to be used to host the museum service expired in November 2012. A variation to the agreement is in place and this will be reviewed annually with a 12 month notice to terminate.

8. Consideration is being given to the future provision of the museum service as part of Hampshire County Council's Strategic Review of Museum & Arts Services. A decision on the future arrangements is expected in summer 2013.
9. During 2009, the Council carried out a consultation exercise to establish resident's views on 'high priority' and 'low priority' non statutory services. The survey was taken to all CAT meetings, and was included in the 2009 Resident Survey. The residents consulted indicated that the provision of a Tourist Information Centre was a low priority.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

10. The need to identify efficiency savings in recent years, in order to set a balanced budget, has resulted in reductions in the payment that the Council makes to TSE. The most recent in 2012/13 involved a 16% reduction in funding. This required changes to the service in order to manage within the available budget.
11. In 2013/14 the Council will pay £36,000 to Tourism South East (TSE) to operate the Fareham TIC. This funding covers the cost of staff, staff training and general operating costs. There are currently the equivalent of 1.6FTE (59 Hours) staff employed to operate the service.
12. The agreement is in place between Fareham Borough Council and Tourism South East is for a 12 month term with a 6 month notice period for termination.
13. The agreement does not include the provision of a website or visitor information brochure.

ROLE OF THE FAREHAM TIC

14. TSE collates visitor information for the Fareham TIC. These indicate that the TIC had approximately 18,376 visits in 2012/13. This is a reduction from 2011/12 when there were 21,974 visits.
15. The indication is that currently, visits to the TIC are mainly from local people who use the TIC to book theatre seats, events, coach trips, National Express, boat trips and attractions, many of which are outside the Borough.
16. In addition the TIC supports local events that take place in the town centre, the museum and local activities such as Fareham in Bloom. Bookings for events organised by the Councils Parks & Open Spaces team are also coordinated by the TIC.
17. Booking by the TIC for accommodation in the Borough has also seen a reduction from 25 in 2010/11 to 8 in 2012/13. This appears to be a reducing trend in accommodation bookings and reflects the availability and ease of booking accommodation via the internet.
18. Other significant trends are the reduction in telephone enquiries from 2360 in 2009/10 down to 1904 in 2012/13. In comparison email enquiries have increased from 2321 in 2009/10 to 2742 in 2012/13.

19. The TSE consider that there are other areas that they could provide additional value to the Council by extending the range of services they provide for the public. These include the following:
- Increase the TIC's role as a promoter and selling agent for Council venues ie specifically Fernham Hall
 - Act as an outlet for other Fareham Borough Council services such as parking permits and garden sacks
 - Play a more prominent role in promoting and welcoming visitors to the town centre by organising ambassadors/volunteers to act as 'greeters'
 - Take information to residents and visitors through a 'roaming' TIC service – this could include the selling of tickets for local events
 - There is also an opportunity for the Centre to provide a reception service for the Museum

FUTURE OPTIONS

20. Previous reviews of the Fareham TIC have considered opportunities to reduce the cost of operating the service and the potential to relocate the service to an alternative town centre location. However a search for suitable and financially viable premises has not provided a workable alternative.
21. Currently the accommodation in Westbury Manor is provided rent free and there is no contribution from the TSE towards building maintenance costs. In the majority of the alternative locations considered, these costs would be in addition to the current financial contribution for the operation of the service, thereby adding to the current cost of the service.
22. Consideration has previously been given to relocating the service back to Ferneham Hall but TSE considered the location to be unsuitable as it was isolated from the main town centre area. The opportunity to utilise the Council Connect facility in the Shopping Centre was also rejected on the grounds that there are no storage for leaflets or stock and concerns about security when undertaking financial transactions.
23. In the event that TIC facilities in Westbury Manor were unavailable, there are alternative locations to provide bookings for events, coach trips, National Express, boat trips, attractions and the like from local Travel Agencies, Bus Station Office and the Ferneham Hall box office.
24. Phase one of the HCC Museum & Arts Service Review resulted in permanent front of house staff at Westbury Manor Museum being replaced with volunteers in order to deliver efficiency savings. Members of the Leisure & Community Policy Development & Review Panel asked that consideration be given to the use of volunteers in the Fareham TIC.
25. Visit England guidelines state that the Tourist Information Service should employ paid, professional staff dedicated to providing tourist information only and TSE do not use volunteers in their managed TIC's. TSE have confirmed that they would not consider the use of volunteers at the Fareham TIC.

26. The current Visit South East England web pages, which refer to Fareham, list facilities in the general area rather than specific local borough attractions. TSE are willing to provide a service that would promote sites and attractions in the Borough of Fareham if the Council became a destination partner which would cost £1500 per annum.
27. This web based package would include the following:
- A dedicated landing page for Fareham on www.visitsoutheastengland.com that receives on average 58,000 visits per month, with up to 8 images, you tube video, relevant links, optimised content, the page would be featured within the Hampshire section of the destinations page.
 - Digital packages that offers destinations and businesses content within the themes listed. This offers the opportunity to feature Fareham on a themed landing page, with dedicated content and a banner advert.
 - Great Out Doors
 - Family Days Out
 - Dog Friendly
 - Conferences and Weddings
 - Indulge Yourself
 - History and Heritage
 - Events - As part of the package, TSE would add up to 20 events.
 - Access to <http://www.tourismsoutheast.com/join-us/destination-partners.html> with lots of information and advice for Destination Partners.
 - Attendance at the TSE biannual Destination Management Forums.

CONSULTATIONS

28. Following discussions with representatives from TSE a report was prepared and presented to the meeting of the Leisure & Community Policy Development & Review Panel on 7 November 2012.
29. The Panel members discussed the matter at length and considered the current role of the TIC, in particular to what degree it assists in promoting facilities in Fareham; its contribution to the local economy and whether the current arrangement provides value for money.

RISK ASSESSMENT

30. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report

CONCLUSION

31. This report has explained the current role and function of the Fareham TIC and TSE themselves have provided performance information plus ideas for how the service could be developed further.

32. Staff who work in the Fareham TIC provide a well respected high quality service and TSE would like to continue to provide a visitor information service in the town centre along similar lines as at present.
33. In the main, options that have been considered require current funding levels to be maintained or increased and this is not considered viable given the current financial pressures on the Council.
34. A further reduction in funding and the uncertain future of the Westbury Manor building present a significant challenge to operation of an effective and viable TIC service.
35. The promotion of Fareham as a Tourist Information destination is not a corporate priority and in the 2009 survey, residents indicated that the provision of a Tourist Information Centre is a low priority
36. CSR 13 requires the Council to deliver further efficiency savings and as a low priority discretionary service the TIC will be required to contribute further budget savings.
37. The current arrangements can continue in the short term by making adjustments to the service. However, the discussions with TSE have concluded that any further budget reduction could only be achieved by reducing opening hours and this would mean that it would be difficult to operate a viable service.
38. TSE have indicated that they are able to provide and maintain pages linked to the Councils website, on the Visit South East England and Visit Hampshire websites that would host a comprehensive range of information about attractions and events in Fareham Borough for a relatively small cost.