

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 28 April 2015

BY: Depute Chief Executive – Partnerships and Community Services

SUBJECT: Tourist/Visitor Information Centres

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with information on the provision of Visitor Information Centres (VICs) in East Lothian.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the contents of this report.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Tourist or Visitor Information Centres (VICs) are operated by Visit Scotland. They are typically staffed bases, providing a range of services including bespoke information provided by staff, tourist leaflets and maps related to a local area, a means of booking accommodation and of selling gifts.
- 3.2 As visitors increasingly rely on social media and the internet for both pre and on-arrival information and accommodation booking, nationally, VICs have experienced lower footfall.
- 3.3 In 2007 VisitScotland (VS) undertook a review of its VIC provision. The Centres which existed in East Lothian at that time reflected local concentration of visitors. Centres existed at Old Craighall (seasonal), Dunbar and North Berwick (both all-year). The review designated these Centres as having Category 3 status, indicating a rural/small town location with low footfall. These VICs were funded through a contribution by East Lothian Council to VS. This contribution also funded marketing and promotion of the area.

- 3.4 In 2007, due to falling demand, the seasonal centre at Old Craighall was closed by VS and the information service at the Brunton Hall, enhanced.
- 3.5 As part of the ongoing review of VIC footfall, the Dunbar High Street presence became a seasonal offering in 2009 and was thereafter proposed for closure by VS. Footfall fell from 11,847 in 2009-10 to 10,767 in 2010-11. The refurbished Dunbar Townhouse Museum that opened in 2012 provided the opportunity to host information and with VS training to museum staff, an alternative council-funded provision was put in place. A range of leaflets and maps and a large-scale display map were provided through the partnership between East Lothian Council and VS.
- 3.6 In April 2011, the North Berwick VIC (Quality Street) became seasonal as the number of visitors to it did not justify year-round opening by VS. Footfall had fallen by 13% between 2009-10 and 2010-11 to 28,596 and then by a further 21% between 2010-11 and 2011-12, to 22,583.
- 3.7 VS proposed to close the North Berwick VIC from spring 2013 and the Council was able to offer the Coastal Communities Museum (CCM) as alternative provision. However, with The Open at Muirfield in the summer of 2013 and with the CCM not opening until September 2013, the Council negotiated with VS that the Quality Street VIC remain open for that summer. A number of issues relating to the use of the CCM are currently being resolved by the Council and VS. The agreement with VS allows for VS staff to be deployed within the North Berwick VIC during key events and at busy times – such as during The Scottish Open at Gullane in July 2015.
- 3.8 Outwith the VS provision, the Community Council in Haddington voluntarily provided tourist information within the doo'cot. The John Gray Centre development provided the opportunity for this provision to be contained therein and information provision and desk space for Community Council volunteers was put in place. The Centre opened in spring 2012 and training provided for volunteers, funded by the Council. Footfall in this provision cannot be accurately measured.
- 3.9 Having a continued VIC presence in council buildings in Dunbar, Haddington and North Berwick, ensures that visitors seeking on-arrival tourist information have a means of doing so without the need for the Council to pay for separate provision and is a cost-effective option given footfall numbers and visitor trends. Council staff are provided with visitor information training and leaflets on offer and maps on display direct visitors around the county.
- 3.10 In response to the shift in visitor behaviour, the Council has developed a website – www.visiteastlothian.org – and an extensive social media presence, complemented by specific and general marketing material. Of note are the Visit East Lothian leaflet, the East Lothian Golf Guide and the Watersports Guide.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 This report is not applicable to the wellbeing of equalities groups and therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – none additional

6.2 Personnel - none additional

6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

AUTHOR'S NAME	Susan Smith
DESIGNATION	Team Manager, Economic Development, EDSI
CONTACT INFO	Tel 01620 827174, e-mail ssmith@eastlothian.gov.uk
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