

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT FORUM

MONDAY, 11 MARCH 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Quick, Councillor Pryer, Councillor Bowden(present as substitute)

Also in attendance: Councillor Alexander, Councillor Dudley, Councillor S Rayner

Officers: Louisa Dean, Julia White, Nabihah Hassan-Farooq

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Shelim, Clark and Majeed.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th November 2019 were agreed and approved.

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF TOURISM SERVICES IN THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD

Louisa Dean (Head of Communications and Marketing) gave a presentation on the above titled item. Members were informed that the presentation would outline the future delivery of tourism across the borough through collaborative and partnership working. The Forum were told that the Royal Windsor Visitor Information Centre (VIC) was open 363 days per year and provided an accommodation booking service, box office for borough attractions and events (with advantage card discounts for residents), public transport ticket, visitor information and a small amount of retail products. Councillor Dudley queried whether the borough received any commission from ticket sales and it was confirmed that there was a bespoke arrangement for companies which ranged from 10-15%. It was highlighted that there were ticket sales for local events that were hosted for free, such as the Windsor Wednesday at Ascot Racecourse and for other paid events such as the Windsor festival through the VIC. Members of the Forum were informed that there was a wide range of other services available through the VIC which included, free entry to Windsor Castle for advantage card holders, discounts for LEGOLAND and Saville Gardens. There had been an increased footfall to the VIC and that this had risen over the summer months with both residents, domestic visitors and international visitors. Members of the Forum were told that the marketing team had resourced the Royal Borough tourism website, e-communications, social media, digital signage, brochures, travel trade campaigns and public relations. The Marketing team were also responsible for conducting research, delivery of the tourism strategy, business development, volunteering and skills, training and apprenticeship services.

The Forum were informed that currently there were contracts in place for 2019 for; website and e-communications; visitor guide; social media and PR; Venues directory, buyer events, social media, digital communications; Windsor and Eton Map; Box Office and Concierge Scheme Hotel Partners. It was highlighted that 68% of the tourism service costs were recovered through the current contracts in place as above. At present apprenticeships were offered across the locality in Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead. Members were told that there were numerous business partnerships and visitor attraction partners, and these included pubs, hotels, shopping centres, Great Western Rail, photographers, bloggers and Maidenhead Mums. The Forum were told that train tickets were available for purchase on the Visit Windsor

website and that this was a unique offering which other local authorities did not provide. It was highlighted that Windsor was the second most visited town in the UK after London and attracted 8.2 million visitors and 1.7m nights in the borough's hotels and B&Bs. It was outlined that there had been £567m spent by tourists in Windsor, £37m spent on average in the local economy every month, £188m generated by overnight stays and £253m generated from day trips. The Forum were informed that 8816 individuals were employed locally and for those living nearby and that 10.5% of the population was employed as a result of tourism in the borough.

Members were informed of various tourism delivery models which had been implemented by other local authorities, which consisted of not for profit CIC arrangements, limited companies with some council funding, formation of a not for profit company with external funding/support. The Forum were told that a council decision was made that the tourism function should be held within a private sector led entity and that the priority was to reduce tax payer funding to the function in advance of the responsibility transferring out. Alternative models for the delivery of tourism services were outlined which included:

- Public/Private Partnership (PPP)
- Destination Business Improvement District (DBID)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Charitable Trust
- Company Limited by Guarantee

Members were told that there was also an option to propose an alternative model to the council to seek ongoing funding (council funding currently in place until October 2019).

At the conclusion of the discussion, Councillor Quick (chair) stated that the presentation was looking at the delivery of tourism through different models and that insight from other towns with a similar demographic would be welcome. It was stressed that tourism was a priority for the borough but that the council decision was to look at delivery of this function through a private entity and to reduce tax payer money. It was noted that clarity was needed over the next few months to ensure that a delivery model would be in place and meeting the needs of tourism for the borough. Councillor Quick requested that a briefing paper be written and circulated to all members.

ACTION- That Louisa Dean and Julia White prepare a briefing note outlining all of the tourism delivery service delivery models and circulate to members.

Laura Comley Smith read out a statement on behalf of Amanda Bryett (Founder and Director of Windsor Tourist Guides Ltd). (as appended to these minutes) Councillor Quick stated that tourism was key to the borough as there were a large number of residents and individuals who lived close by who were employed as a result of tourism. It was highlighted that there were no plans to close the tourism facility and that the forum were invited to discuss a plan for helping and shaping delivery of the tourism service and its future funding arrangements. Debbie Keanan addressed the panel on behalf of Roberta Latter and read out a statement which outlined how tourism had thrived in the borough and the importance of it to local residents and visitors.

Councillor Dudley commented on the high turnout of attendees at the meeting and stressed that tourism was vital to the Royal Borough and its economy. He outlined that tourism was important to the borough and that there had been a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce to understand the advantages and disadvantages of delivery tourism through different models. It was highlighted that there many businesses that were focussed on tourism for the borough but that there was no business voice that was liaising with the council. Councillor Dudley highlighted that there was a National Future High Street Fund and that RBWM was currently in the Phase 2 bid which was for £25m for Maidenhead and Windsor. It was felt that there was no business voice that could consult upon the bid and that there was a real need for a unified

business voice to work together with the council and major stakeholders to delivery tourism in an effective and thriving way.

Sue Watts, centre manager of Windsor Royal Station, stated that there was a business forum; the Town Partnership Boards which had worked to create the Windsor UK CIC. It was highlighted that there was international coverage for Windsor, extending to China and that the Royal Wedding had increased footfall and tourism expenditure for the area. Councillor Quick stated that the Windsor UK CIC could be the negotiating body with the council as opposed to the Chamber of Commerce. Councillor Bowden (Chair of the Windsor, Eton and Ascot Town Partnership Board) addressed the Forum and stated that the Partnership Board would be eager to discuss this with the support of the Town Manager. It was highlighted that the Windsor CIC was registered but that there were details yet to be confirmed, such as terms of reference, constitution and bank account confirmation. Councillor Dudley stated that the Windsor UK CIC could be used to improve things for the borough and that this could be used for the bid that had been submitted to improve vibrancy for the locality. Councillor Quick highlighted that a sub-committee could be formed with Councillor Dudley, partners and stakeholders to look at whether there was a legal right of transfer for the CIC to a bid and whether this could form a consultative voice for the delivery of tourism in the borough. Councillor Dudley queried whether the Crown Estate would like to be involved and it was confirmed that they would check whether they would be able to and inform the council.

Craig Staddon, head of sales at Ascot Racecourse, felt that it could be easy to lose sight of smaller parts of Ascot when looking at tourism and that there was a disconnect between this area and Windsor/Maidenhead. It was discussed by members that the focus was to work together with all areas to deliver tourism in a collaborative way. Councillor S Rayner agreed with all of the comments made and that there was overall pride in tourism for the area but that there was a need to look to the future for better delivery of this function. Councillor Quick highlighted that there was income generated by visitor marketing but that this was not enough to cover the overall cost of the tourism function and that it was important to look at the delivery of this service through other boroughs before making a recommendation. Don Yates (French Brothers) felt that there may be a loss of employment prospects for local people and that this was concerning for businesses. It was also stated that there were concerns for smaller businesses and that they may be left behind when the group was made as their voice would not be accounted for. Councillor Dudley highlighted that small businesses would not be left behind in the decision making process and that a high percentage of funding was spent on business relief rates.

Members of the Forum were disappointed with the disbandment of the Tourism Development Forum and felt that there would be dilution of communication between the council and smaller businesses. Councillor Quick outlined that there had been a boundary review which had recommended that the number of elected members should be decreased from 57 to 41 and that the council had to work creatively and reasonably across a large number of committees, forums and outside bodies to ensure representation was available. It was noted that the Tourism Development Forum would be able to raise matters under the relevant Town Forums and that the items would be considered and discussed.

Councillor Bowden highlighted that there were good events scheduled which included Windsor Horse Show, Art installations of lions across the borough, Queen Victoria jubilee celebrations, international state band performances and that throughout the year, events such as the Town manager run, Pancake race, pumpkin carving and the Christmas lights would all attribute to the increased footfall of the area and contribution to the economy. Members of the Forum places a vote of thanks on record to Julia White (Visitor Manager) and her contributions to tourism and the forum.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY; That a working group be formed to look at the future delivery of tourism across the borough.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.02 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....