

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Prosperity and Economic Regeneration

Date of Meeting: 5th November 2012
Report of: Strategic Director (Places and Organisational Capacity)
Subject/Title: Vision for Visitor Information in Cheshire East
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jamie Macrae

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 In February 2011, Cabinet endorsed the Cheshire East Visitor Economy Strategy including a recommendation to make it easier for visitors to plan and book their visit to Cheshire East and to improve the provision of visitor information services throughout the borough. A strategy for Visitor Information within Cheshire East has therefore been developed outlining a number of models which can be applied to relevant towns and villages within Cheshire East.
- 1.2 Both the Visitor Economy Strategy and the strategic work on visitor information identified a need to maintain high quality visitor information services in Nantwich to serve the town and surrounding areas. Due to the Council's asset transfer process, Nantwich Civic Hall transferred to Nantwich Town Council in April 2012. As this housed the existing visitor information provision as part of the Customer Service Point the move highlighted the requirement to secure the future of visitor information provision in Nantwich and South Cheshire. The proposed original move to the library would have resulted in a reduction in services offered. This would have had a detrimental effect on those businesses and events that have relied on Nantwich TIC to sell and profile activities for visitors. This report profiles the vision and strategy for Visitor Information in Cheshire East along with a specific recommendation for visitor information provision in Nantwich.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That

- (1) the visitor information strategy for Cheshire East as set out in Appendix 1 be approved; and
- (2) Nantwich Tourist Information Centre be transferred to Nantwich Town Council on the basis set out in paragraph 10.1 of the report.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Visitor Information Strategy for Cheshire East provides a cost effective solution to Cheshire East Council enabling visitor information to be provided,

integrated and improved in future years. The recommendation to transfer visitor information provision in Nantwich over to Nantwich Town Council will reduce costs to CEC and will lead to an overall improvement in service.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 Nantwich South & Stapeley; Nantwich North & West

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 Cllr Penny Butterill; Cllr Arthur Moran; Cllr Peter Groves; Cllr Andrew Martin.

6.0 Policy Implications including carbon reduction and health

6.1 The visitor economy strategy may inform the development of other strategies, particularly economic strategies. A healthy, competitive and high performing economy will contribute to the health, wealth and well being of the population of Cheshire East. This can help shape the scale and location of employment opportunities and encourage accessibility. The Visitor Economy of Cheshire East is worth £578m (STEAM 2010), sustaining 8693 jobs.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 To assist the transfer, especially during the early years of delivery, it is proposed that there would be, on a reducing scale, an incentive to the Town Council. This would be through an agreed subsidy (based on the existing Customer Services budget) from April 2013 of £12k in year one, reducing to £6k in year 2 and £3k in year 3. This will reduce to nil after that. The process will be for Cheshire East Council to raise a purchase order to Nantwich Town Council; Nantwich Town Council then send CEC an invoice for the contribution on an annual basis for the 3 year period.

8.0 Legal implications (authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1 As the transfer of the Tourist Information Centre involves the transfer of a service the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations 2006 (TUPE) will apply. As a result any staff deemed to be assigned to the service will transfer to the employment of Nantwich Town Council pursuant to those regulations. Potentially one employee may be assigned. As part of that transfer Cheshire East Council will have to provide employee liability information to the Town Council, engage in the appropriate consultation with any affected employees and attend to pension issues.

8.2 As the transfer of the Tourist Information Centre is not a transfer of asset but a transfer of service it is not considered to be part of the Nantwich Transfer of Assets report agreed by Cabinet on 5th September 2011. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Nantwich Town Council will need to be produced before the transfer is completed.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 The risk of not implementing the visitor information strategy for Cheshire East would be a reduction of visitor information available, initially within South Cheshire. This would have knock-on effects for visitor numbers to local attractions due in part to the location of the visitor information service in the future; as well as in the value of the visitor economy to Cheshire East.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 Cheshire East's Visitor Economy Strategy recognises that the market town of Nantwich and the rural area of South Cheshire are classed as spatial priorities and as such are outlined in the Council's Economic Development Strategy and are directly relevant to the visitor economy sector. Nantwich is already seen as being of significant established value to the Borough's visitor economy which is why a quality visitor information service is crucial.

Due to asset transfers within Nantwich, visitor information has become a priority and the following states the case to work with Nantwich Town Council to ensure the future of visitor information provision for Nantwich & South Cheshire as part of the strategy for visitor information in Cheshire East. If agreed the model and process will be rolled out to other towns and villages in the borough.

Objectives

The objectives for visitor information services in Cheshire East are:

- A modern, customer focussed and transformational Visitor Information Service.
- Recognised as an integral part of the community, promoting & selling the local area and further afield; what's on and local products to locals and visitors alike
- Contributing positively to the visitor economy of Cheshire East.
- Ensuring Cheshire East is promoted where and when visitors require it.

Strategic Approach to Visitor Information

Following the adoption of the Visitor Economy Strategy in 2011, a new approach to improving visitor information was developed. In 2011, two of Cheshire East's TIC's came under the direction of the Visitor my Service, and was clear that in order to survive and ultimately thrive they must develop new ways of working. For the service to be sustainable, additional income must be developed, efficiencies sought where available and the reliance on running costs being covered by Cheshire East Council reduced. New ways of working include working with community organisations regarding the visitor offer and the sourcing of quality local products for re-sale; where possible incorporating the 'town' branding such

as 'Make it Macclesfield'; extending the reach of the 'Welcome Courses' to up-skill relevant Cheshire East businesses in showcasing what Cheshire East has to offer as a place to visit; and promoting the local area in more effective way than has been historically done. The offer is now firmly focussed on Cheshire East as a location. The approach helps to identify a role for Visitor information Centres, but also develops a hierarchy of other visitor information provision that can help to ensure that visitors have a broad range of relevant provision through other venues such as libraries, visitor attractions and retail outlets. The Visitor Information Strategy for Cheshire East can be seen in full in appendix 1.

Nantwich Tourist Information Centre

From April 2012 Nantwich Town Council took control of Nantwich Civic Hall. Nantwich Tourist Information Centre although based within the Civic Hall was not part of the initial asset transfer; therefore a proposal to secure its long term future was put together. A plan has been agreed on the short term future for this financial year and a proposal for the Town Council to run the service after this date is proposed, with the detail being progressed through Visitor Economy, Customer Services and Nantwich Town Council. The current customer service net budget for this operation is £12k per annum. To assist the transfer, especially during the early years of delivery, it is proposed that there would be, on a reducing scale, an incentive to the Town Council. This would be through an agreed subsidy (based on the existing Customer Services budget) from April 2013 of £12k in year one, reducing to £6k in year 2 and £3k in year 3. This will reduce to nil after that. The advantage of this approach includes a reduction in cost to the council over time whilst maintaining an important visitor information service. The Town Council is fully aware of the costs associated with running a TIC and has shown a willingness to reduce and absorb the costs going forward.

The following outlines the role Cheshire East Council will continue to play in terms of overall consistency, co-ordination of message and development of visitor information in Nantwich.

With regard to the future of Nantwich, it has been discussed that Cheshire East Council and Marketing Cheshire work closely with Nantwich Town Council to share knowledge, experience, buying patterns and training, whilst the Town Council will ensure the service meets the needs of the community. There will also be regular dialogue with local organisation including Nantwich LAP and Nantwich Flourish. This will mirror work currently happening in Macclesfield and Congleton as well as the work completed on visitor information in the borough's libraries. This means Nantwich will share a common vision, development and co-ordinated message as the rest of Cheshire East; and along the implementation of the visitor information strategy will improve the current available offer in Nantwich.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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