

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	24 July 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	Tourism Information Services Contract Re-tender

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider these findings and recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) the draft specification for Tourism Information Services be approved;
 - 2) the Executive Director of Business Operations in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for the Public Realm, Culture and Tourism be authorised to procure a contract for Tourism Information Services for a three year period at a fee of up to £18,000 per annum;
 - 3) the £5,000 per annum savings against the current contract price be directed towards events and marketing; and
 - 4) officers liaise with Wealden District Council to investigate the benefits of a joint procurement process for Tourism Information Services.
-

Service Manager: Brenda Mason

Introduction

1. In June 2013, Members approved the award of a contract for the provision of tourism information services to Brochure Connect at a fixed price of £23,000 per annum. This followed the outcomes of the Scrutiny Committee's Tourism Working Group, tasked with reviewing and making savings within the Council's tourism budget (Minute CB13/9 refers). A three year contract commenced on 1 April 2015.
2. The contract expires on the 31 March 2018 and Members' views are now sought on the future delivery of this service.

Background

3. It is important to consider the future provision of tourism information services in context with the other support that the Council provides through its tourism budget to the visitor economy. Providing information to visitors when they are at the destination represents only a part of the Council's approach to supporting tourism. Our strategy also includes working in partnership with key stakeholders to promote the district to visitors; assisting visitor events to develop and grow; and encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more money within the district. These strategic elements are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Tourism Marketing

4. The Council supports the 1066 Country Marketing Partnership as the principal vehicle for promoting tourism across Rother, Hastings and parts of Wealden; to include Rye, Battle, Bexhill, Hastings, Pevensey and Herstmonceux. The public and private sector partnership exists to develop the 1066 Country brand, find ways to sustain and enhance its appeal and to provide a sustainable network for businesses to work together.
5. Members will recall 1066 Country Marketing Partnership has recently published a refreshed strategy and associated marketing plan, based on up-to-date visitor research. The strategy can be downloaded here: <https://www.visit1066country.com>. The new strategy sees a focus on “families”, “cultural explorers” and the “i-generation” markets, with a greater focus on promoting individual towns and on the use of digital media. The focus over the next year will include the production of a narrative containing key messages that both 1066 Country and its members can use to promote the destination in a consistent way that reinforces the brand identity; alongside a new responsive website.

Visitor Events

6. The Council also provides support to new and existing visitor events in the form of pump priming funding over a three year period. This funding is currently available in Bexhill and Rye. Battle Marketing Group has elected to spend their events allocation from this Council on marketing and promotion.
7. Over the last four to five years, Bexhill event pump priming funding has helped to establish three key annual visitor events in the town: Roaring 20's, Motofest and the Festival of the Sea and has also helped a number of other events to develop their offer and attract a larger or wider audience. There is more work to be done to put these events on a self-sustaining basis and officers are working with the Portfolio Holder and ward Members to enhance the value of the return on this investment both in Bexhill and Rye tourism.
8. The event funding for Rye and surrounding area is administered by Rye Town Council via a Service Level Agreement and has supported a number of events including the Christmas Festival, Rye Arts Festival and a Ukulele Festival.
9. The Council financially supports tourism activity for Battle through the Battle Marketing Group; this is a group of key stakeholders and businesses in Battle, who use the Council's funding to produce the Battle visitor guide, events leaflets, PR campaigns and one-off projects such as the Keane Trail, social media event led campaigns and Geo Tourist apps.
10. Other support is given by officers to festivals and events across the district. This includes guidance on funding applications, training in areas such as promotion, seeking sponsorship, and officer time where available to help develop each event.
11. The tourism budget also supports product and infrastructure projects on a one-off basis; this can include the development of interpretation or marketing materials, product development including walking / cycling routes for example and other projects.

Visitor Information: Current Service

12. Brochure Connect, a tourism promotion company, currently provides the tourism information service under contract to the Council. The three year contract has a value of £23,000 per annum and is due to expire at the end of March 2018.
13. The provision of visitor information has a dual purpose of both keeping the visitors within the district by promoting what is on locally, and also to encourage repeat visits. The service currently provides a series of information points across the district where visitors can pick up visitor information on attractions, events and things to see and do in the district. Brochure Connect are contracted to support three Tourist Information Points in prominent locations within the three main towns in the district and a further ten Local Information Points across the district. Each point promotes 1066 Country and directs the visitor to the 1066 Country website for more information.
14. Tourist Information Points (TIPs): The TIPs are located in central locations in the three main towns in the district. Each TIP is accessible to visitors and residents and is clearly branded both internally and externally as an information resource for visitors. Disabled access is a requirement of the contract. The TIPs are able to hold information on attractions, events and things to do across the whole district. In each TIP, the host business ensures that their staff are available (within reason) to help with face-to-face visitor enquiries. The TIP in Bexhill also offers access to the internet for visitors wishing to look up further information.
15. Local Information Points (LIPs): The LIPs are located in key tourism locations across the rest of the district and offer a dedicated space to rack literature on local attractions, events and things to see and do and where possible the display of posters. In many cases the host business is happy to answer visitor enquiries when their own business is not too busy.
16. Since commencing the contract in April 2015, Brochure Connect has now established a network of three TIPs and 30 LIPs (the contract requires 10 LIPs). A full list of current TIPs and LIPs can be found within the draft specification attached as Appendix 1. The growth in the number of LIPs across the district has been driven both from demand from the businesses in Rother and through Brochure Connect confirming they would look to secure additional locations throughout the duration of their contract to ensure an even geographical coverage of points throughout the district. Some of the additional LIPs are located in the main towns to ensure a good coverage within each town as well as across the district.
17. The TIPs and the majority of the LIPs are serviced weekly to ensure the literature is topped up and in date. Staff from Brochure Connect share intelligence with the TIPs and LIPs on new leaflets or information as it becomes available.
18. Where there is space within the TIPs and LIPs events posters are displayed to promote upcoming events and festivals. This is a well-used service by Rother's event and festival organisers who can struggle to find resources for additional marketing activity.

19. Also included within the contract is an element of support for key local stakeholders/groups to ensure that businesses are aware of the service and benefitting from the service. Brochure Connect also offer a discount to any local Rother business who take up further brochure distribution outside of the district.
20. Performance of the contract is monitored by officers through quarterly meetings with key personnel at Brochure Connect, receiving feedback from businesses using the service and a summary report from Brochure Connect each year.
21. Officers report that the service has been well received amongst the business community and is well used. Event and festival organisers using the service are expanding their audiences beyond their own locality and are increasing the tourism offer to Rother as a whole. Feedback from the businesses hosting the information points have also been very positive with evidence of increased footfall and new requests to host a point being received by Brochure Connect.
22. Correspondence from users of the service have been received which is positive and shows the impact of supporting this service in terms of business growth and opportunity. Principally the letters were from Battle, Rye and rural event organisers. Businesses state that it would not be viable to undertake this level of brochure distribution themselves and having used the service they have been able to reach audiences that otherwise may not have been aware of their offer.

Future Delivery of Tourism Information Service

23. Based on feedback from the business community that use the service, and from the businesses that host the information points, the points are all well used and help to promote the districts attractions and businesses to visitors. Promoting the district's visitor attractions, amenities and events helps to keep visitors within the district, to encourage repeat visits and increase visitor spend within the local economy.
24. It is recommended that this service is continued by going back out to the market for a new three year contract with a revised specification to reflect the business feedback, visitor need and business opportunity for growth within a new contract.
25. The TIP and LIP network is now well established across the district. The current provider has been able to offer additional services to businesses within Rother by offering a discount to provide brochure distribution outside of the district. There may well be further commercial opportunities identified through the new contract.
26. Officers recommend that a procurement process for Tourism Information Services be undertaken with a view to awarding a contract from 1 April 2018 for a three year period at a budget of up to £18,000 per annum reduced from £23,000 per annum. As a minimum, the service should support three TIPs to be located within each of the main towns in the district with a further network of 18 LIPs to maintain an even geographical spread across the district. A revised draft specification is attached as Appendix 1.

27. In reducing the contract value, officers propose to cover the costs of running the service with an expectation that the now-established service will provide commercial opportunities for the contractor.
28. Wealden District Council is also looking to procure brochure distribution services from 1 April 2018. Subject to approval from Members, officers will liaise with officers from Wealden District Council regarding concurrent procurement of these services through the East Sussex Procurement Hub, which may bring efficiencies in the tender process for both districts.
29. Savings achieved through a more cost-effective Tourism Information Service, estimated at £15,000 over three years, can be focused on support for tourism events and marketing. It may however be necessary to use some of the saving to pay for amending brown signs and finger posts within the three main towns in Rother and updating the 1066 Country information panels across 1066 Country in the first year of the new contract, if locations of the TIPs and LIPS have changed.

Conclusion

30. Members' approval is sought to recommend to Cabinet the tendering of a Tourism Information Services contract at a budget of up to £18,000 for a three year term, with a saving of £5,000 per annum being allocated to supporting tourism events and marketing.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director of Business Operations

Risk Assessment Statement

There are no significant risks associated with tendering this contract.