COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	**COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL**
Name and date of Committee	**CABINET - 7 DECEMBER 2020**
Report Number	**AGENDA ITEM 11**
Subject	**UPDATE ON PROPOSED JOINT TOURISM SERVICE REVIEW**
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr. Tony Dale - Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Philippa Lowe, Business Manager Localities Tel: 01285 623515 Email: philippa.lowe@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To set out the scope of a review and option appraisal for the Shared Tourism Service.
Annexes	Annex A: POWERPOINT SLIDES which include: Snapshot of Visitor Economy, Impact of Covid-19, Tourism Team structure, work plan, and Covid-19 recovery response
Recommendation/s	a) *That the report be noted;* b) *That the review be undertaken and following completion, the outcome of the review and options appraisal be reported back to Cabinet.*
Corporate priorities	Enable a vibrant economy
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Internal consultations with various officers at Cotswold and the wider shared team working with West Oxfordshire District Council.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out details of a proposed review of the Tourism service. To ensure the review is well grounded it will need to take into account the Green Economic Growth Strategy and the Council's priority to 'Enable a Vibrant Economy'.

1.2. The review also needs to be framed within the context of the wider visitor economy and the complex network of external relationships and players within the system. This reflects both the fact that visitors are not governed by administrative boundaries and also the need for interventions which rely on wider collaborations.

1.3. Key partners and stakeholders include Visit England, GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership, and Destination Management Organisations, businesses in the local economy (not just hospitality and accommodation), neighbouring local authorities and Publica partner organisations.

1.4. The review work will examine several options around future delivery models and opportunities for how the service could work in the future. It will focus on a number of key areas including funding and financial profile, governance, role of members, performance reporting and scrutiny (effectiveness of outcomes delivered, return on investment and economic added value), communication plans and relationships with key external partners. With regard specifically to the funding of the shared service, the current funding split with partners is not equitable and this will need to be addressed as part of the review.

1.5. It is also of note that there has been a radical shift in the way visitors and businesses communicate, access information and book services. Covid-19 has rapidly accelerated this move to more online, digitally based solutions and an increasing reliance on social media. The better businesses are geared up to allow on line services, the greater resilience they have and the better they can perform.

1.6. Understanding this context is important to the review as is building a picture of the return on investment which has implications for the design and delivery of tourism services, including the Council's funding model which currently supports the work of Visitor Information Centres.

1.7. The visitor economy, as a sector, plays a key part of the local economy and contributes to the district's appeal as a place to visit and invest. The visitor economy also has a key role to play in strengthening the high street, supporting the vitality of local communities and the viability of local services as part of the Covid-19 recovery plans.

1.8. The tourism and hospitality industry supports 18% of employment in the district and 8% of all employment in Gloucestershire. It contributes a total business turnover of £412 million a year in the District (£1.61bn to the County) and supports 5,221 FTE jobs in the District. This is based on data published prior to the pandemic. Annex A provides an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on the sector and a snapshot of the local visitor economy, the volume of visitors, spend and value to the wider local economy.

1.9. The Council's shared tourism team have worked successfully for many years to market the area and its businesses, focusing their efforts to influence visitor behaviour to the benefit of Cotswold District's wider local economy. They work closely with all sectors within the visitor economy including local attractions,

accommodation and experience providers, as well as event organisers, restaurants and shops. (See Annex A for team structure, team work areas and Covid-19 response efforts)

1.10.   The current structure of the team dates back to 2015 when a new shared tourism team was set up to work across West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Council areas. The tourism team works with colleagues from West Oxfordshire District Council, local businesses and local communities on projects and initiatives to support the wider visitor economy and have, since Covid-19, directed their attention to recovery work (Annex A provides examples of their work).

1.11.   The team also have responsibility for managing and running 'Cotswolds Tourism', which is a destination management organisation (DMO) with responsibility for promoting the wider Cotswolds. The DMO brings together a partnership of organisations which includes other local authorities (West Oxfordshire, Cotswold, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, and Stroud) alongside the Cotswolds National Landscape (Cotswolds Conservation Board).

1.12.   The Cotswolds DMO draws its membership from this wider Cotswolds area, not just the area within the Cotswolds AONB (National Landscape) boundaries: the whole of the Cotswold District Council administrative area is included. 145 businesses from within the District are members of the DMO.

1.13.   The Cotswolds DMO offers major opportunities to the local visitor economy: access to far wider audiences for local businesses, far greater press and media interest, improved funding and grant aid opportunities, more opportunities for businesses to network, gain industry insights and training support.

1.14.   The primary work of the tourism team in support of the DMO membership and partners is the 'controlled' marketing of businesses, events and activities that take place in the Cotswolds Tourism area. The objective is to influence visitor behaviour, increase visitor spend, extend the season, encourage visitors to less visited areas and to promote active tourism rather than passive sightseeing.

2.   **MAIN POINTS**
      The following section sets out the main elements of the review, focussing on a number of key headings.

2.1.   **Corporate Priorities**

2.1.1.   The final outcome of the review must be informed by the Council's aims and objectives for the Visitor Economy to ensure that the structure and priorities for the service enable delivery of corporate priorities.

2.1.2.   The Council's Corporate Plan (2020 – 2024) has a stated priority to "Enable a vibrant economy" and an aim to secure successful businesses in the visitor economy with higher value spend and more even footfall. The associated actions are:

● Deliver the actions set out in the Cotswold Tourism destination management plan

● Make the Cotswolds a vibrant year-round destination

● Promote high-quality visitor experiences

● Increase tourism's contribution to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of our communities

2.1.3.   To deliver this priority the Council needs to be able to strengthen key partnerships and ensure it has a strong and valued voice. Cotswold District Council has an important role to play in supporting the generation of sustainable jobs in the visitor economy which contribute positively to the distinct, high quality places we are proud to live in, work in and visit.

2.1.4.   This overriding context needs to be a driving principle for the review work.

2.2.   **Business Needs**

2.2.1.   In shaping the future model for the service, the needs of the business community are a critical element. The impact of Covid-19 on the local economy has been and continues to be significant and the visitor economy has been disproportionately adversely affected. Building greater resilience for the sector through improving their digital offer, developing skills, enhancing the quality and value of jobs and the link to Green opportunities are all potential elements of the wider support for visitor economy businesses.

2.2.2.   Annex A includes slides which provide headline details about the effects of Covid-19 and the on-going challenges and risks for the sector. The review needs to take into account the wider impact on the visitor economy, what support is required in the future and what role the District Council should play.

2.2.3.   The review work needs to include direct business engagement to understand what support is needed during Covid-19 recovery, in the rebuilding phase and to help future resilience within the visitor economy.

2.3.   **Communications Strategy**

2.3.1.   Whilst communication to the visitor economy businesses is well developed, internal communications within the Council need to be improved. The review therefore needs to establish a suitable communications strategy that ensures joined up working across the Council and visibility of the work being undertaken and outcomes delivered.

2.3.2.   An agreed means of communication with Members also needs to be developed together with a strategy for external communications which acknowledge the Council's contribution to supporting the visitor economy and the value of the tourism team's work.

2.4.   **Cotswolds Tourism Destination Management Organisation**

While working in partnership under the Cotswolds Tourism DMO banner has many potential benefits for the Council, it is timely to review the delivery model to include an options appraisal of:

2.4.1.   Funding and resources: what levels are equitable and what potential income streams are available?

2.4.2.   Governance: what needs to be in place to ensure robust governance, suitable accountability arrangements and service level agreements with partners?

2.4.3.   DMO model: what options are available? What is the most appropriate and sustainable model and how does that work in relation to resources required to support the wider local economy and economic priorities of the Council?

2.4.4.   Neighbouring DMOs: Explore options for closer working relationships which would

be of benefit to local businesses in the visitor economy such as joint membership schemes, project collaboration, coordinated campaigns and shared business networking and support opportunities.

2.5. **Governance, performance monitoring and scrutiny**.
To support the work of the team and delivery of the Council's priorities, the review will need to consider options to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to report on the outputs from the work of the tourism team and also set out the level of member involvement in Destination Management Organisations.

2.6. **Collaborations and relationship with external partners**

2.6.1. While acknowledging that 'The Cotswolds' is the pre-eminent leisure brand in the visitor economy, it is important that the Council can also benefit from its connections within Gloucestershire and the role it plays at a regional level. The review will examine how the Council positions itself in relation to the delivery of the GFirst Local Industrial Strategy where businesses in the tourism sector are seen as cornerstone businesses; part of the backbone of the economy and which provide a platform for economic recovery and growth.

2.6.2. The review needs to consider how the Council works with neighbouring DMO's and Councils and how the Tourism Team can work more closely with GFirst LEP to ensure that the views and needs of the visitor economy in Cotswold District are taken into account and that advantage is taken of any potential funding opportunities.

2.7. **Management of assets**

2.7.1. The last few years have seen a rapidly increasing trend towards the use of digital technology in all walks of life. This has been particularly noticeable in the visitor economy, where digital is now the default means of marketing and information provision. The tourism team have been part of this move with their Cotswolds.com website (over 1.2 million unique visitors a year) and strong social media following (over 100,000 followers). The Covid-19 pandemic has vastly accelerated the move to digital: not only must most attractions, accommodation and even meals be pre-booked online, but printed materials are seen as a potential health hazard. This trend is never likely to be reversed.

2.7.2. The Review will need to be clear about the needs of visitors and businesses to be supported as part of building greater resilience for the future.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1. The process will review options for equitable funding arrangements that take account of Council priorities and associated resources and costs to support delivery of those objectives.

4. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1. This report has no legal implications.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. The report raises no specific risks; however the review process will assess any identified risks associated with future delivery models.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

6.1. No recommendations are made in this report which impact on equalities.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The tourism team encourage businesses to be environmentally friendly in their practices and promote the development of green tourism in the District. The Council, together with the DMO can provide a leadership role to support and emphasise the sector's role in helping the local economy to become carbon neutral.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

8.1. The report sets out the proposed approach to undertake a review which will identify appraised options.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. None.

(END)