



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

17TH JANUARY 2019

AGENDA ITEM (13)

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE GRANTS - 2019/20 TO 2021/22

Accountable Member	Councillor C Hancock Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Partnerships
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing Group Manager 01285 623304 jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk
Purpose of Report	To seek approval to continue to provide financial grants totalling £54,000 to existing community providers of Visitor Information Centres for a three-year period.
Recommendation	That Cabinet approves the provision of £54,000 to existing community providers of Visitor Information Centres for the three-year period 2019/20 to 2021/22.
Reason for Recommendation	<p>Despite inflation, grants have remained constant for 10 years, with no increase since 1st April 2009.</p> <p>The grant review undertaken during December 2018 found that it is still more cost-effective for the Council to operate a VIC via a third party than directly itself.</p> <p>If grant funding is continued at the current level of £54,000 for the next three financial years, this still provides a comparative saving to when the Council operated the VICs (e.g. during 2008/09, and when the VIC was still in-house, Stow-on-the-Wold VIC operating costs were in excess of £78,000). Whilst it is acknowledged that there is a move by visitors toward greater use of the internet to research their destination, research, backed up by continued strong footfall levels, shows that the provision of VICs is still a valued aspect of the visitor experience, spend and stay as well as supporting the local economy.</p>
Ward(s) Affected	Bourton Village, Tetbury with Upton, Campden & Vale, and Stow (location of facilities)
Key Decision	Yes
Recommendation to Council	No

Financial Implications	The current budget allocation provides a total annual grant amount of £54,000, which is allocated as follows:	
	Tetbury	£10,000
	Chipping Campden	£10,000
	Bourton-on-the-Water	£24,000
	Stow-on-the-Wold	£10,000
	It is proposed that grants continue at existing levels for the next three years and, if accepted, the total three-year financial commitment on the part of the Council would be £162,000.	
Legal and Human Rights Implications	None	
Environmental and Sustainability Implications	None	
Human Resource Implications	None	
Key Risks	The Visitor Information Centres rely heavily on grant-funded support from both the District and Town/Parish Councils. If this funding was withdrawn, it is likely that over a short time they would close or reduce the service they offer.	
Equalities Analysis	Not applicable	

Related Decisions	Previous funding decisions - Cabinet, 1 st November 2012 and 21 st January 2016.
Background Documents	Related Cabinet reports
Appendices	None

Performance Management Follow Up	The Partnership Agreements held with each VIC request monthly and quarterly data submissions which support the monitoring of the VICs over the year.
Options for Joint Working	All VICs work closely with the Council's tourism team.

Background
1. During December 2018, the Cabinet Member, a Business Manager from Customer Services,

and a Shared Visitor Information Centre Officer met with representatives from each of the organisations that are providing VIC services across the District to review performance to date, understand any issues and discuss resources and future plans.

2. At each of the meetings the level of funding was discussed - and, notwithstanding the fact that funding had not increased for a number of years, all the organisations/individuals accepted that the District Council budgets were under significant and increasing pressures and appreciated the funding granted over previous years.

3. All have limited resource of paid staff, to help reduce costs, and primarily rely on local volunteers.

4. If the Council could commit to funding for a further three years, as detailed above, this would help with stability and allow the VICs to explore areas to ensure continuous improvement that would also help sustain the local economy.

5. All VICs are continuously competing with the various digital commercial businesses, and have experienced a decrease in their on-line bookings; however, they all still maintain a strong, and in some cases increasing, footfall which again helps the local economy and tourism within the district in general.

6. All our local VICs are exploring innovative methods to increase their income and looking to source local merchandise/crafts not only to increase sales revenues but to promote local small businesses.

7. Bourton-on-the-Water will be developing their website and enhancing the promotion of local hotels and businesses. Since the Chamber of Commerce was dissolved, the VIC has taken on much of the work to support local businesses. It has also been maximising opportunities for volunteer assistance by providing work experience, which has enabled work experience volunteers on occasions to run the VIC.

8. Chipping Campden is updating 'Campden on Line' in which it will promote the VIC. It is also exploring the use of drones to promote the area with 3D footage on line.

9. Stow-on-the-Wold is exploring the possibility of implementing a 'heritage hub' in partnership with the Civic Society. It is also looking to implement a 'Meet and Greet' service for coaches arriving with tourists to promote the area at first point of contact. Stow has also been at the forefront of engagement with businesses and getting them to sign up to the tourism charter, further leveraging tourism opportunities and generally supporting tourism jointly with business. Stow has also won an award from Gloucestershire County Council for its innovative approach, and is being cited as an example to others.

10. Tetbury has undergone a full refurbishment of the VIC to entice more footfall. It has also experienced an increase in overseas visitors and 15% of the total footfall has been attributed to this. Tetbury relies heavily on tourists as its main source of income and, therefore, concentrates on promoting local crafts. Tetbury has also embraced the 'What do you think' campaign which has seen the service climb up the digital search ranking to the benefit of local businesses - this is a pilot scheme, run in conjunction with GFirst LEP and Visit Tetbury.

11. The VICs have all reported that the introduction of the three-year grant funding commitment has enabled them to leverage further benefits, for example giving confidence in agreeing new leases of their units and developing the shared offering via the library service in Stow-on-the-Wold.

12. Evidence from the data collected and discussions with representatives show that the grant funding helps to secure a value for money service in the provision of tourism information and as a

vital support for the local economy. The VICs, like all businesses, continue to face difficult futures in terms of rising fuel and utility costs, business rates, competition from online companies and potentially lower income levels. A three-year funding commitment as proposed will help to alleviate such pressures.

(END)