

# Report to Environment & Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item:  
**A.5**

Meeting Date: Thursday 14th April 2016  
 Portfolio: Culture, Leisure and Young People  
 Key Decision: Not Applicable:  
 Within Policy and Budget Framework NO  
 Public / Private Public

Title: TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE  
 Report of: The Director of Economic Development  
 Report Number: ED. 19/16

**Purpose / Summary:**

To update Members of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on progress with regards to the operation of the Tourist Information Centre and Assembly Room.

**Recommendations:**

That Members note the content of the report.

**Tracking**

Executive:	
Overview and Scrutiny:	
Council:	

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The upgrade of the existing Tourist Information Centre (TIC) to provide improved access from street level to the first floor and improvements to the internal fabric of the building has provided the facilities to enable the TIC to act as the gateway to Carlisle's Historic and Cultural attractions. The TIC plays an important role in orientating visitors, providing information on key historic assets and the wider offer, showcasing Carlisle.
- 1.2 As the strategic hub for visitors coming to explore Carlisle and the adjacent regions, the TIC provides the obvious starting point for the visitor journey, whether it is a short walk around the Historic Centre of Carlisle, or exploring further afield to Hadrian's Wall, Lake District or Scotland.
- 1.3 The overall aim of phase 2 was to increase interpretation and modernise the service to be more customer friendly and fit for purpose. Given the breadth of the customer base, consideration given to the range of media used to communicate the information and interpretation to the widest possible audience.
- 1.4 New lighting has made a significant improvement and with the new lobby area, the entrance to the building is an inviting space, open and airy. The two information points which customers can use to browse at their leisure, provide up-to-date information on local attractions. The three screens incorporated within the discovery wall provide an opportunity for advertising and displaying information on events which are taking place in the city. The projector screens on the six windows provide a unique opportunity to promote what is "GREAT" about Carlisle after hours.
- 1.5 The Assembly Room has been sympathetically restored back to its former glory by exposing the original fireplace, extending the panels on the ceiling, improving the lighting and refurbishing the window bays. The room now is a beautiful light and airy space that adapts itself well to any event that is taking place.
- 1.6 In light of the opportunities presented, the aim is for the TIC and Assembly Rooms to be more commercial.

## **2. MARKETING STRATEGY**

- 2.1 Promotion of all aspects of the Old Town Hall are currently being developed with the main aim being to raise the awareness of the TIC services, retail offer and Assembly Room. This is being done in a number of ways and activity is also being closely monitored. The Team are concentrating on an online presence by creating a

website for the Old Town Hall; this will be a dual purpose site to promote the TIC and the Assembly Room. Ongoing marketing promoting our offer is being carried out through social media channels, Press Releases and partnership working.

## 2.2 MARKETING ACTIVITY

Marketing Activity	Timing	Monitoring Methods	Person Responsible
Old Town Hall website – this is dual purpose, promoting the TIC and Assembly Room	May 2016	Google Analytics	Laura Thompson and Marketing & Training Consultant
Facebook for the Assembly Room to advertise events, share pictures and increase awareness	April 2016	Increase in general activity	Laura Thompson and Michelle Masters
Twitter for the Assembly Room	Feb 2016	Increase in enquiries, retweets	Laura Thompson and Michelle Masters
Newsletters	May 2016	Increase in enquiries/footfall	Laura Thompson and Michelle Masters
Paid advertising in parish magazine	June 2016	Increase in enquiries/footfall	Laura Thompson and Michelle Masters
Press Release	ongoing	Increase in enquiries/footfall	Laura Thompson
Discover Carlisle Guide	April 2016	Repeat visitors/use of voucher for TIC/increase in enquiries	Communication Team and TIC staff
Information point at the Carlisle Citadel Train Station for steam days	June 2015	Increased footfall/ use of voucher on the steam train leaflet	TIC staff

## 3. RETAIL

3.1 The Tourist Information Centre now stocks a diverse range of local and nationally produced souvenirs. The new retail area is reduced in size from the former layout but now concentrates on providing a high quality offer of locally produced products, targeted at the customer. We are mindful of the need to promote the offer and monitor stock turn over and adjust our purchasing plan to ensure that we provide a range of goods, appropriate to the time of the year and customer need. We also monitor sales and income via a stock system that records all incoming and outgoing stock and the valuation. Mini Stock takes are done throughout the year with an annual check being completed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March.

3.2 Our purchasing plan ensures that we now stock a good selection of locally produced, quality goods. Some examples include:-

- Herdy – Keswick
- Cartmel Chocolates – Cartmel
- Carwinley Preserves – Longtown
- The Carlisle Brewing Company – Carlisle
- Felltarn Friends – Keswick
- Temporary Measures – Keswick
- Jewelmere – Maryport
- Little Fingers Jewellery- Carlisle

#### 4. MONITORING

4.1 Evaluation and monitoring is an important part of maintaining a good stock system. In order to consistently achieve high standards we must be aware of both the needs of our visitors and the quality of their experiences while in the TIC. We regularly monitor our stock using a variety of methods as outlined below

- Conduct regular visitor & stock surveys
- Periodically analysing our statistics
- Keep a record of requested stock to ascertain any stock omissions
- Regular evaluation of our stock sales to ascertain which items are popular
- Evaluate the results of our annual stock check
- Keep a record of and investigate any complaints

#### 5. MARKETING

5.1

How	What
<b>Website</b>	Use the Old Town Hall website online shop to showcase our popular and locally produced items and ticket sales.
<b>Social Media</b>	Top sellers and new items are to be promoted on the TIC social media accounts each week. Photographs are to be used to enhance these posts.
<b>Press Release</b>	Any new developments or speciality products are to be promoted with a press release provided by the communications team at Carlisle City Council.
<b>TV screens</b>	The TV screens are to be used to advertise event tickets and TIC services. Include new or speciality stock items and special offers.
<b>Email</b>	When replying to email, highlight stock items when appropriate to enquiry.
<b>Retail Display</b>	Keep the retail areas looking fresh with rotation of stock products. Seasonal stock to be displayed on prominent retail units.

#### 6. STOCK

6.1 The purchasing decisions for all new items of stock are at the discretion of the management who are responsible for ensuring value for money and saleability.

In considering new products, we apply the following criteria:

- Price
- Shelf life
- Minimum order quantities
- Customer demand
- Existing stock
- Product quality
- Specific to the area
- Display Space & Theme
- Season
- Locally produced within a 30 miles radius

6.2 Pricing is important to ensure that the retail offer is commercial. In considering our prices we are mindful of product quality, other local suppliers, their prices and display of the product. We follow a widely used retail formula in setting prices and when marking products down for sale.

## 7. **ASSEMBLY ROOM**

7.1 Assembly Room lettings have already begun to show an increase with income from September to March of £1,700. If the current trend is maintained the target of £2,500 should easily be exceeded in 2016/17.

7.2 A wedding Licence has been applied for which is currently in its 3 weeks consultation period. We envisage the Assembly Room being used for exclusive wedding ceremonies, renewal of vows, christenings etc.

7.3 There is now a premises licence in place, which means the sale of alcohol is permitted with the Assembly Room and TIC.

7.4 We are also seeing a return of regular bookings with a monthly craft fair organisation using the Assembly Room for the whole of 2016. Feedback from customers has also been very encouraging with excellent comments from past and future users. For example:

*“The new access is great both for stallholders and visitors to the event. The new entrance is light and modern and draws visitors in well. The easily visible lift access is also great for older visitors and families with pushchairs. The room itself is light and airy and the new furniture is great”*

## 8. FINANCE

- 8.1 Expenditure on the purchase of supplies and services is closely monitored and controlled so it is kept to a minimum.
- 8.2 Energy saving measures installed as part of the building refurbishment has resulted in a reduction in gas and electricity bills.
- 8.3 Staffing costs are constantly being monitored and being accessed with customer demand.

## 9. STAFF

- 9.1 Staffing levels are being monitored and adjusted to meet with customer demand. The office operates on a seasonal basis with increased staffing in the summer period; currently this is being managed by casual staffing to cover the weekends and busier periods. The skills of staff are maintained through continual training to meet the Tourist Information centre requirements internally and externally. Training is identified through regular one to one meetings and appraisals.

### 9.2. Staff Training Plan

<b>Training Activity</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Delivered by</b>
Social Media	May 2016	Marketing and Training Consultants Kate Wilson and Michelle Masters
Over the counter sales	June 2016	Laura Thompson
Customer services	Ongoing	Laura Thompson/ Jo Mills
Familiarisation Visit	Two each year	Laura Thompson/ TIC staff

## 10. VISITOR STATISTICS

- 10.1 Visitor numbers had increased slightly from September to December 2015 following the opening of the newly refurbished building, however they have declined recently compared to 2014 figures. This is mainly due to the adverse weather conditions and as a consequence of the flooding in December 2015.

**TIC Visitor Stats 2012 -  
2016**

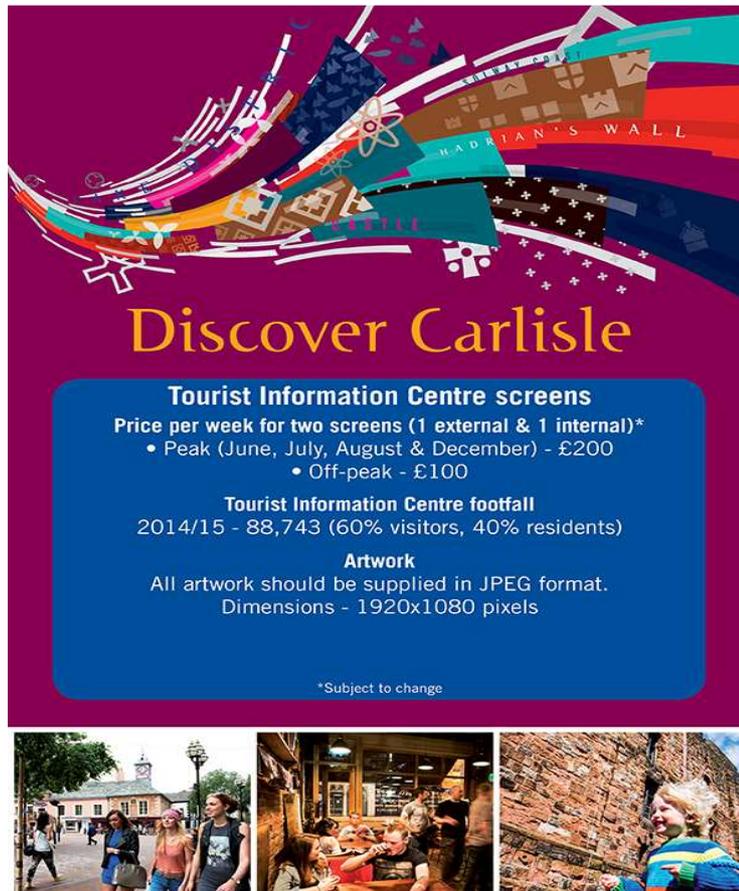
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Jan	4210	1869	4050	1943	3132
Feb	5256	2773	4989	2003	3879
Mar	8628	3193	7632	4420	4920
Apr	8129	3970	7725	7725	
May	9711	5043	9141	4948	
June	12334	5970	9993	6021	
July	12502	11099	11652	9826	
Aug	11751	13979	13650	12997	
Sept	9163	9316	8570	9383	
Oct	7614	7984	7309	7456	
Nov	7177	8030	8588	8154	
Dec	6015	5271	4639	5044	
	102490	78497	97938	79840	11464

NB

2012	TIC in Old Town Hall
2013 Jan - July	TIC in The Lodge Castle St
2014	TIC Old Town Hall
2015 Jan - July	TIC in Scotch St
2016	March Figures incomplete

**11. INCOME**

11.1 Additional income streams are being developed and the main area that's being looked at is for advertising on the internal and external screens. Businesses are being approached and take up has already begun. The rate card below sets out the cost of advertising.



## 12. NEXT STEPS

- 12.1 To progress with the implementation of the business plan, marketing strategy and training to strengthen the commercial operation of the TIC and Assembly Room with the aim of maximising income whilst providing the customer with a first class experience and building a loyal customer base.
- 12.2 To act as the information hub for Carlisle, working closely with partners and promoting the Carlisle offer in the widest sense. To progress the opportunities for joint working with local attractions which include: Carlisle Castle, Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle Cathedral, the Cumbria Museum of Military Life and the Guildhall.

## 13. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 Members are asked to note the content of the report in order that they are aware of and understand the progress being made with respect to the operation of the Tourist Information Centre and Assembly Room following refurbishment of the building.

## **14. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES**

**14.1** Continued implementation of the business plan for the ongoing operation of the Tourist Information Centre and Assembly Room contributes directly and indirectly towards the promotion of Carlisle, regionally, nationally and abroad as a place with much to offer – full of opportunities and potential.

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**Appendices** None  
**attached to report:**

**Note:** in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None

### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS/RISKS:**

**Chief Executive's -**

**Deputy Chief Executive –**

**Economic Development –**

**Governance –**

**Local Environment –**

**Resources -**