

WIRRAL COUNCIL

Policy and Performance – Regeneration and Environment Committee

14 July 2015

SUBJECT:	SUPPORTING WIRRAL'S TOURISM BUSINESSES IN 2015-16 AND BEYOND
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	EMMA DEGG (HEAD OF NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ENGAGEMENT)
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR THE INVESTMENT STRATEGY
KEY DECISION?	NONE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to present Members of the Policy and Performance Committee with an overview of the Council's tourism team past performance, current delivery in 2015-16 and plans for the future.
- 1.2 An annual tourism team implementation plan has been informed by detailed visitor research and the creation of a "vision" led by the Wirral Tourism Business Network (i.e. a business-led partnership from the accommodation, attractions, coastal, food and drink, golf, and history & heritage sectors). Delivery is also driven by one of the Council's key priorities, which is to support a healthy, safe and prosperous borough, by helping to sustain and grow Wirral's economy.
- 1.3 The latest statistics for the borough's visitor economy confirm that the ongoing annual implementation plan is working both efficiently and effectively. Wirral's tourism economy is currently valued at over £355 million; employing 4,800 full-time equivalent jobs and attracted over 7.5 million visitors in 2014. The visitor economy has grown by a substantial 41% since 2009, adding £103 million to Wirral's local economy; employment within the sector has increased by over 20%, and visitors to the borough have also risen by 14% during the same period.*

(* Wirral's visitor economy statistics for 2014 are validated by Global Tourism Solutions (UK) Limited and the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership).

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 Rationale

- 2.1.1 The rising levels of competition between locations in the UK to attract both visitors and investors; combined with a slow to recover financial marketplace, makes the promotion of successful destinations of vital economic importance.
- 2.1.2 VisitBritain, the national tourism agency funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; is responsible for promoting Britain worldwide and developing its visitor economy. It highlights that Tourism is the UK's 5th largest industry; supporting over 3 million jobs within over 200,000 SMEs, and contributes over £127 billion annually to the country's GDP.
- 2.1.3 A recent report undertaken by Deloitte on behalf of VisitBritain (i.e. "Tourism: jobs and growth") highlights that continued tourism business support, targeted marketing and investment are crucial over the next decade for further growth.

2.2 Where Are We Now?

2.2.1 Wirral Visitor Research Study – 2006 results

In 2006, due to the lack of market intelligence available, the Council commissioned a detailed Wirral Visitor Research Study with European funds. The study evaluated the attendance at a selection of Wirral's key tourism locations and the perception of potential visitors to the peninsula.

The findings identified Wirral's key tourism sectors and businesses; key visitors to target and key assets to promote.

This led to the:

- Creation of the Wirral Tourism Business Network or WTBN.
- Development of the "Wirral Peninsula" brand and guidelines for use.
- Creation and delivery of the "Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral" short break marketing and PR campaign – now known as the "Discover Wirral" national campaign.

2.2.2 Wirral Visitor Research Study – 2011 results

In 2011, the Wirral Visitor Research Study was repeated, to monitor and evaluate performance over the previous five years; of both the industry and of the Council's tourism team's delivery.

The study included interviews with WTBN stakeholders; interviews with existing visitors at 12 Wirral tourism locations; 500 telephone interviews with potential visitors from outside of Wirral; three focus groups of potential visitors in Chester, Manchester and Birmingham, and detailed web research. It concluded:

- 90% of existing visitors would recommend Wirral to others as a place to visit.
- 84% of potential visitors are interested in Wirral's coast, countryside and cuisine.
- There has been a significant increase in the proportion of visitors who are satisfied with their visit to Wirral since 2006, and they believe it is a more attractive place than other locations they have visited (i.e. 95% in 2011).
- The largest visitor target group attracted to the borough was identified as aged 55 plus and ABC1s (i.e. more affluent), travelling to Wirral within a 2 hour drive-time for both short breaks and day visits. However, golf proved to be the exception, having a much wider catchment area, and pulling in national and international visitors.
- More visitors are coming to Wirral for the first time than ever before, and more of those "first-timers" are coming from outside of the North West of England, reflecting the positive impact of Wirral's marketing activity to visitors since 2006.
- Wirral Council's tourism dedicated website (www.visitwirral.com) was seen as an essential tool for the borough's tourism businesses to attract both day and short break visitors, and a number of improvements have been implemented. The website is now responsive on all platforms – smart phones, tablets and PCs - and stakeholder social media and web-links encourage direct bookings and feedback. The site attracted over 1 million views in 2014.
- The Council's tourism marketing campaign, in-house designed literature and press coverage are highly praised for their quality, imagery and effectiveness.
- Wirral's tourism business stakeholders said they value their relationship with the Council and the work of the Council's tourism team.

This last point was mirrored in last year's online WTBN survey, which highlighted that 95% of members feel the Council's tourism team provides a "good" service, with 74% saying the team provided an "excellent" service.

The Council's tourism marketing in 2011 was seen as essential to market the borough to attract new, repeat and potential visitors; however a "one size fits all" approach was to be avoided. There are now a range of resources in place including marketing campaigns, www.visitwirral.com and related social media, literature and press activity to support the sector.

Following the conclusions drawn from 2011, an annual implementation plan has been developed in line with the Council's tourism service budget, and delivery is also supported with WTBN income and grant aid where possible. Examples of external funding includes European Regional Development Funds, secured for the Wirral Visitor Research Study in 2006 and 2011; marketing the 2006 and 2014 Open Championships; supporting the Wirral welcome for the Three Queens in May 2015; and the creation of a number of key events including the Wirral Food and Drink Festival, now known as Wirral Farm Feast, and the Wirral Golf Classic. Both these events are now self-financing through sponsorship and ticket entries.

The intention is for an in-depth visitor research study to be undertaken again in 2016 specifically for Wirral. This will inform the ongoing activities of the Council's tourism team to utilise limited resources efficiently and effectively, and market Wirral as a key day and short break destination in order to support the WTBN vision, membership and tourism sector as a whole. The 2016 research study will be funded through existing Council budgets and WTBN contributions.

2.2.3 Tourism Budget and Team Structure in 2015-16

The Council's tourism team and related budget have like others across our organisation undergone significant changes over the past two years. This has resulted in reductions including the budget for two posts and the financial support to events in Wirral. However, following the restructure of the Neighbourhood and Engagement division to maximise budgets and resources for the benefit of Wirral residents, a new Marketing Economy Officer has been created. This shared role has been identified to generate income and explore areas of additional income across the division.

The Council's tourism team staffing structure and key responsibilities in 2015-16 are as follows:

- 1 x Visitor Economy Manager:
To plan, lead and manage the delivery of the annual tourism implementation plan and team to achieve Wirral's tourism vision by 2025; and support the delivery of the division's annual business plan.
- 2 x Visitor Economy Officers:
To undertake research and deliver informed marketing that achieves the maximum benefit for Wirral's tourism businesses and visitors.
- 1 x Marketing Economy Officer:
To deliver marketing that generates income through the promotion of Wirral's group, wedding, function and roadside advertising opportunities.

The Council's budget to support Wirral's tourism sector in 2015-16 is;

- £177,500: 4.25 x staff salaries including the Head of Service (i.e.25%).

- £73,000: tourism marketing.

In addition, £35,000 is forecasted as the income generated through WTBN membership fees, advertising and sponsorship to support delivery (e.g. Tourism Awards, literature and website).

This budget will support a sector currently valued at £355 million, which has increased by 41% over the past six years, adding an additional £103 million into the local economy during the same period.

2.3 Where Do We Want To Be?

2.3.1 Strategic Fit and Vision

The activities and measurable outputs of the Council's tourism team directly link to the following national, regional and local strategic views i.e.

- VisitBritain's vision - to inspire the world to explore Britain.
- VisitEngland's vision - to maximize the positive contribution the tourism sector has on the economy, employment and quality of life in England.
- Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership visitor economy vision - to increase spend and jobs so that by 2020 annual spend of £4.2 billion is achieved supporting the creation of 13,000 new jobs.
- Wirral Council's vision.
- Wirral's tourism vision recently developed in partnership with the WTBN;

To increase Wirral's visitor economy to £550million by 2025; by encouraging more visitors to come and discover our hidden peninsula, full of award winning surprises.

2.3.2 Wirral Tourism Vision - Strategic Objectives

The vision will be achieved by continuing to deliver and monitor the annual Council-led tourism team implementation plan that supports the following key objectives as agreed with the WTBN:

- Position Wirral as a hidden gem full of award winning surprises where visitors can expect quality, exclusivity, escapism and an enviable backdrop.
- Have a clear focus on those living within a two hour drive time (i.e. older, more discerning tourists seeking high quality experiences; large, multi-generational families and groups for short breaks; and organisers of weddings, functions and conferences who are looking for something unusual in a stunning location).

- Communicate the value, benefits and strength of the Wirral visitor economy to residents, businesses and within Wirral Council.
- Increase the membership and promotion of the WTBN including more engagement with local businesses and those in Liverpool and Cheshire (e.g. via the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and Marketing Cheshire).

2.4 How Do We Get There?

2.4.1 Implementation

The following highlights the planned activities to be delivered by the Council's tourism team in 2015-16 and beyond, to achieve both the Wirral tourism vision highlighted above, and drive and increase aspiration and grow jobs within the sector and the borough:

- Manage and administer the WTBN including its six sub-sector partnerships, developed to inform activity as well as generate additional business; and now being used as a model of excellence by both Marketing Cheshire and Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LCR LEP).
- Prepare and deliver the "Wonders of Wirral" regional, day visitor marketing campaign including bespoke booklet (spring 2016).
- Create and deliver the "Discover Wirral" national, short break marketing campaign (summer 2016).
- Manage and maintain www.visitwirral.com and related social media for the WTBN, and evaluate WTBN member referrals from partner websites including www.visitliverpool.com, as part of the ongoing engagement with the LCR LEP.
- Develop bespoke tourism literature for Wirral; distribute the same and create downloadable versions (e.g. Wirral Visitor Guide 2016-17, Wonders of Wirral brochure 2016-17 focusing specifically on the borough's quality attractions; a new Wirral Celebrates guide 2016-17 to promote the borough's wedding and function offer including those belonging to the Council, and a new Wirral for Groups guide 2017-18).
- Attract national press journalists to generate positive PR about Wirral's award winning tourism offer (i.e. valued at over £300,000 in 2014 excluding the media coverage generated for The Open Championship in 2014).
- Plan and deliver the Wirral Tourism Awards 2016 to showcase the borough's quality offer and staff.

- Host familiarisation visits in Wirral for Blue Badge Guides (i.e. the President of the Merseyside Blue Badge Guides sits on the WTBN steering group), corporate businesses, stakeholders and partners.
- Attend targeted trade fairs in partnership with the WTBN, and the LCR LEP and Marketing Cheshire where appropriate, to maximise budgets.
- Co-ordinate and administer film requests and generate related income where possible.
- Represent Wirral Council and the borough's tourism sector on a number of business groups and panels including England's Golf Coast, Gateway to Cheshire Partnership, the LCR LEP local authority tourism managers group and Mersey Rural Leader (MRL) group.

The initial MRL funding programme allocated over £1 million of grant aid to Wirral, creating 75 new jobs within 12 rural tourism businesses. An additional £1.5 million was invested by the Wirral businesses themselves. The Visitor Economy manager is currently working with the MRL manager on the new rural programme for 2015-2020 to deliver the maximum benefit for the borough.

In addition, regarding the promotion of Wirral to Cruise Liner passengers, the Council's tourism team:

- Supported colleagues across the Council, as part of the Wirral welcome for the Three Queens on the 25th May, in celebration of Cunard's 175th anniversary. This included a bespoke page on www.visitwirral.com, highlighting all relevant travel, safety and visitor information, as well as securing a 45sqm screen in New Brighton with European funds, to promote Wirral's tourism offer and highlight "live" coverage of the arrival of the prestigious vessels.
- Provides regular supplies of information about the borough's increasing visitor offer to the Cruise & Operations manager (who is funded by Liverpool City Council) including suggested Wirral tourism itineraries. The manager has attended a number of the WTBN meetings and is fully aware of the most up-to-date information. Examples of WTBN members that have benefitted include Port Sunlight and Royal Liverpool Golf Club. The aim is to target both passengers who are sold excursions by the cruise operators and provide options for independent cruise passengers looking for private excursions.

2.4.2 Outputs

The anticipated tourism growth in 2015-16, resulting from the contribution being made by the activity undertaken by the Council's tourism team for the tourism sector, is 5%.

This equates to an additional £17.5 million being attracted to Wirral's local economy in 2015-16.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 Any relevant risks, related to the Council's tourism team delivery are highlighted within the Neighbourhoods and Engagement directorate plan for 2015-16, and subject to robust monitoring.
- 3.2 Examples of how the tourism team are reducing potential risks include expanding the WTBN through direct approaches to potential members, including those within the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, and an "Open Day" to highlight the benefits of WTBN membership. In addition, to reduce the risk of sector underdevelopment the tourism team continues to work with local businesses to help them secure funding (e.g. LCR LEP and MRL programme 2015-2020).

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Corporate Plan for 2015-16 is the Council's key policy document, and drives the development of the Council's directorate plans, and therefore no other options were considered.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation is planned in 2016 with both existing and potential visitors to Wirral through face-to-face and telephone interviews; focus groups, and with WTBN stakeholders and partners, using existing budgets and WTBN contributions. In the interim, regular meetings with the WTBN will continue throughout the year and an annual WTBN online survey is planned in September 2015.
- 5.2 The content of the Corporate Plan for 2015-2016 was also subject to extensive consultation with residents, partners, staff and stakeholders throughout 2014. The directorate plans translate the Corporate Plan priorities and activities into directorate projects and performance measures.

6.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

- 6.1 There are no outstanding actions.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 7.1 The Corporate Plan makes reference to working closely with voluntary, community and faith groups for the benefit of all Wirral residents and communities; and this partnership ethos of approach will continue to be a key priority for the Council.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 8.1 The activities undertaken by the Council's tourism team in 2015-16 will be delivered through existing resources and income generated via the WTBN and wider tourism sector.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

Yes – an equalities impact assessment has been completed for the Council's Corporate Plan:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversitycohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/chief-executives>

Equalities implications relating to the actions set out in the Neighbourhoods and Engagement directorate plan will be addressed as appropriate and subject to individual equality impact assessments.

11.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no carbon reduction or environmental implications as a result of this report.

12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no planning or community safety implications as a result of this report.

13.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 Committee Members are requested to note and support the contents of this report, which has been written to highlight the research, engagement and marketing being undertaken by the Council, to support Wirral's tourism businesses and help grow the borough's visitor economy.

14.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 To ensure that Committee Members are provided with detailed Wirral tourism market intelligence, to evaluate the current performance of the Council's tourism team and sector as a whole, as detailed in the Neighbourhoods and Engagement directorate plan for 2015-16.

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APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS/REFERENCE MATERIAL

Information has been provided by the 2011 Wirral Visitor Research Survey, VisitBritain, VisitEngland and the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Corporate Plan for 2015-16 – Council	December 2014
Neighbourhoods and Engagement – Directorate Plan 2015-16	March 2015