



## **TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, 17 November 2021**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>GRANT FUNDING FOR DESTINATION MARKETING</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

In 2019, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy Group developed a proposal for funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's (LCRA) Single Investment Fund, to promote tourism across the city region. The proposal was revised in 2021 and was approved by the LCRCA in July 2021.

This report sets out the activity that will be progressed through the Destination Marketing project and requests the Committee to delegate acceptance of the grant funding, allocated to Wirral Council, to the Director of Regeneration and Place in line with the priorities and projects outlined in this report.

The grant will be spent on improvements to the [visitwirral.com](http://visitwirral.com) website and on advertising campaigns, to increase visits to Wirral. Following the Covid pandemic, it is part of a series of measures to support the recovery of businesses in the visitor economy sector.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

It is a key decision.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee to:

1. Note that the funding is subject to receiving and entering into a formal Grant Funding Agreement, which details the terms and conditions of the award.
2. Authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to approve the Grant Funding Agreement, thereby accepting the funds.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The Destination Marketing programme is significantly aligned with the priorities within the Inclusive Economy part of the Wirral 2025 Plan: to promote Wirral regionally, nationally and internationally as a world-class visitor destination which is rich in assets and experiences. The programme will provide a valuable source of funding for delivery.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The Council could not accept the funding. This is not considered to be an appropriate option given that Council budget reductions have led to reduced a resource for tourism and destination marketing. Plans for expenditure in this area have been built around the Combined Authority funding, a project which has been devised in conjunction with Liverpool City Region (LCR) since before the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 On 23 July the Combined Authority approved £1.5m of funding to help rebuild the city region's visitor economy through Destination Marketing campaigns and online activity. This results from a bid submitted by the Growth Platform supported by the Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy group, of which Wirral is a member.
- 3.2 The City Region's visitor economy is normally worth £4.9billion a year and supports 59,000 jobs. However due to Covid-19 the sector brought in just £2.1bn in 2020.
- 3.3 The Destination Marketing project is based on marketing plans developed for Liverpool, Wirral and Southport as the main destination brands for the Liverpool City Region. It will lead to integrated marketing plans for Liverpool coupled with the area's wider tourism assets including its coast and countryside, spreading the benefits across all parts of the city region.
- 3.4 The funding will also enable improvements to the City Region's destination websites, including visitwirral.com, through investment in new operating systems to make them more effective and create a better experience for website visitors. This part of the project will be one of the first to be actioned.
- 3.5 Target audiences for the campaigns are within a 2-3 hour travel time, primarily staycationers from London, the South East, the Midlands, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Marketing for Wirral and Southport will focus on markets within a 90-minute travel time. There will be a drive to increase international visitors when Covid restrictions are fully lifted.
- 3.6 The main priorities of the Destination Marketing project are to:
- develop new visitor markets that have emerged as a result of the pandemic
  - boost the mid-week market and increase demand out of the core holiday season

- support local businesses in the hospitality, retail, attraction and cultural sectors
- establish a new sustainable funding model to support future marketing campaigns
- support emerging destinations which are being transformed through regeneration schemes across LCR

3.7 The project is focused on Destination Marketing to leisure and business markets, delivering the priorities of the City Region's destination marketing strategies which will include:

- Four thematic seasonal leisure campaigns per year
- Dedicated activity targeting the domestic travel trade market
- Enhancing the profile of the City Region to business markets as they recover
- Investment in content generation to support this marketing and to strengthen the profile of the City Region's offer across its key digital platforms (VisitLiverpool, VisitWirral, VisitSouthport) and its dedicated social media channels.
- Emphasis on 'safe destination' accreditation schemes, such as VisitBritain's 'We're Good To Go/Safe Travels' stamp in marketing materials to help restore consumer confidence.
- Digital Development – Improving the region's family of destination websites through investment in a new integrated operating platform and Customer Relationship Management System (CRM).
- Destination Welcome in partnership with Merseyrail and Merseytravel, LJLA, the mainline rail stations and operators, Lime Street, Mersey Ferry terminals and the cruise terminal
- Improving the City Region's coach welcome and information for group travellers, including the introduction of a coach drivers' passport scheme for Liverpool and expanding the current 'Liverpool for Groups' trade guide to cover product across the wider City Region.
- Liverpool City Region Welcome training programme, which is aimed at enhancing destination awareness among front line staff
- Primary visitor destination research across each district of the Liverpool City Region, data collection (accommodation, retail, attraction, transport sectors etc.) and investment in segmentation modelling for domestic and overseas visitor markets.

3.8 In total, the project will last for three years and has been developed following audience research and segmentation analysis (Experian's Mosaic tool) that has resulted in marketing strategies for Liverpool, Wirral, Halton and Sefton.

3.9 The campaigns will be steered and underpinned by a Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy Recovery Strategy, which will be presented to local authority Chief Executives in November.

3.10 The detail of the grant allocation is being finalised and the funding agreement will follow in December. Following this, activity related to the programme is due to start as soon as possible in December 2021, with a full programme of marketing activities planned to begin in 2022, aimed at encouraging tourists to visit Wirral from Spring.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 £1.5m was allocated by the Combined Authority, to be funnelled through local authorities in the Liverpool City Region, with a further £1.7m to be provided by private sector and local authorities' match funding. Wirral Council will receive c. £350,000 to be spread over three years, and has approved £150,000 of match funding for the same duration, starting in the current financial year. Activity against this budget will cease in December 2024.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The funding will be subject to receiving and entering into a formal Grant Funding Agreement. The Council will be obliged to comply with the detailed terms and conditions of the award.
- 5.2 Legal advice will be sought where relevant, in relation to any proposed partnership arrangements, arising from the activity plan.
- 5.3 The delivery of this work stream will be overseen by the Wirral Visitor Economy Board.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The delivery of the campaign and redesign of the website will require support from the Corporate Communications and IT teams. It is assumed that staffing and other costs connected with the delivery of the strategy will be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 There is a risk that the reduction in funding for the visitor economy team will result in there being insufficient staff resource to deliver the website redesign and an aligned promotional programme on Visit Wirral channels, including social media, as well as the Destination Marketing campaigns. This is being addressed by close alignment of the work with the activity being progressed by both Corporate Communications and Regeneration teams as part of the wider regeneration programme.
- 7.2 There is a risk that consultation with local businesses on promotional content and messages will not be carried out effectively. This will be addressed through ensuring that the Wirral Visitor Economy Network is able to be utilised for this activity.
- 7.3 There is a risk, due to the budget reductions, that additional activity with attractions, tourism businesses, conference providers and the accommodation and hospitality sector to support the Destination Marketing project and maximise outcomes for the borough will not be fully progressed. Co-ordination of activity across the council departments as well as with the wider LCRCA visitor economy team will ensure that these opportunities are addressed.
- 7.4 There is a risk that uncertainty linked to Covid-19, in relation to tourism activity, may limit the achievement of expected outcomes.

7.5 The LCRCA has set out a timeframe for delivery which includes certain milestones with the end date for spend being December 2024. To mitigate any risk of not delivering and spending within this timescale the Committee is asked within this report to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to sign-off the Grant Funding Agreement with the LCRCA so that activity can progress as quickly as possible.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Consultation on the content of the campaigns will be via the Wirral Visitor Economy Network, coordinated by the Wirral Chamber of Commerce who are the council's contracted partner for liaison with tourism businesses.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Council has an obligation under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality duty (Sect 149 2011) to show due regard to the duty and show due regard to mitigate any negative impacts that may affect people with protected characteristics under the Act.

9.2 Whilst there are no direct equality implications arising from this report, the associated actions arising from the delivery may need to assess any equality issues and mitigate any negative impact that may emerge.

9.3 The new visitwirral.com will follow best practice guidelines to ensure it is as accessible as possible. All marketing and engagement activities will follow the Council's accessibility and inclusivity style guides as well as the engagement toolkit.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The Wirral Visitor Economy Board will be cognisant of the need for all delivery to take account of the Council's declaration of a Climate emergency, and all aspects of the campaign and its delivery will take account of the declaration.

10.2 All work related to the redesign of the website and the Destination Marketing campaign will take a digital-first approach, minimising the need for the production and distribution of print advertising wherever possible.

10.3 Visit Wirral promotes the use of public transport and the team works closely with Merseytravel and other public transport providers to promote greener travel options.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 By supporting local visitor economy businesses (hospitality, accommodation, retain, visitor attractions and cultural organisations), the funding will support community wealth building.

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**APPENDICES**

None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Destination Marketing Plan

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>