

**TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE****19<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>DESTINATION MARKETING AND LIVERPOOL CITY REGION LOCAL VISITOR ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report presents an update on the Liverpool City Region Destination Marketing project. Wirral Council's participation in this project was approved by the Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

The report also presents an update on the Liverpool City Region position in relation to visitor economy strategy development and partnership working.

The activities outlined in this report contribute directly or indirectly to the objectives in the Wirral Plan 2021-2026:

- Sustainable Environment
- Brighter Future
- Inclusive Economy
- Safe and Pleasant Communities
- Active and Healthy Lives

This report does not represent a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is recommended to

- (1) Note progress in respect of the Destination Marketing project.
- (2) Endorse the Council's engagement in the development of the Liverpool City Region Local Visitor Economy Partnership and agree to receive future updates and proposals in respect of this work.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

To seek endorsement from Committee as to Wirral's continued engagement in the Destination Marketing project and Liverpool City Region visitor economy strategy development and partnership working.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

2.1 Other options are:

(a) to withdraw from the Destination Marketing project and future Liverpool City Region developments.

2.2 This option is not considered feasible given the financial and reputational risk.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy Group, of which Wirral is a member, developed an evidence based proposal for funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's (LCRCA) Single Investment Fund to promote tourism across the city region. The proposal was revised in 2021 and £1.5m of funding for a Destination Marketing project to help rebuild the region's visitor economy following the pandemic was approved by the LCRCA in July of that year.

3.2 In November 2021, this Committee delegated acceptance of Wirral's Destination Marketing grant funding allocation to the Director of Regeneration and Place with authority to put in place an associated Grant Funding Agreement. Wirral Council's allocation amounted to c. £350,000 over three financial years commencing in 2021-22. £150,000 of Council match funding was approved for the same duration.

3.3 The delivery plan for Destination Marketing project brought together marketing plans developed for Liverpool, Wirral and Southport as the main destination brands for the Liverpool City Region with a key objective of integrating marketing plans and maximising tourism outcomes across all parts of the city region. Priorities for the Destination Marketing project as set out in the report to Committee in November 2021 included developing new visitor markets (including those emerging as a result of the pandemic), supporting local businesses in the hospitality, retail, attraction and cultural sectors and promoting emerging destinations which are being transformed through regeneration schemes across the city region.

3.4 Once mobilisation issues were addressed at the City Region level, significant and concentrated activity commenced and gained momentum throughout the 2022-23 financial year. A one year review of the project prepared by the Growth Platform programme management team is attached as Appendix 1. This provides an overview of the project workstreams as well as highlighting key outputs and

outcomes. Multiple tourism partners are engaged in the project and working alongside city region local authorities. These include ACC Liverpool, Liverpool One and Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

3.5 A significant piece of work undertaken through the project in the last 12 months is investment in the destination websites for Sefton, Wirral and Liverpool. These are now vastly improved and provide a world class user experience through enhanced navigation, search criteria and dynamic content. The new Visit Wirral website went live in May 2023. Launching a new website can temporarily have a negative impact on overall visitor traffic, so while it is too early to assess how the improved site has impacted on this metric, there are already positive indicators as follows:

- An increase in the amount of content that visitors are reading on the website – pages visited per session have increased by 23% (2.05 pages per visit vs 1.66 pages – 4 May-31 July 2023 vs. same period in 2022)
- More visitors coming to Visit Wirral through social media, from declining to an increase of 106% (1483 vs 719 over the periods stated above).

3.6 As well as being a key partner in city region project activity and website development, a number of dedicated Visit Wirral campaigns and activities utilising Destination Marketing resources have taken place over the course of the last year.

- ‘A Place Made for Discovery’ branding was relaunched in Spring 2023, with a campaign encouraging visitors to discover and rediscover Wirral and a further campaign leading up to The Open and Summer 2023 emphasised outdoor activities.
- A promotional video created to showcase Wirral and encourage repeat visits as part of our presence at The Open
- Influencer partnerships were utilised as part of the Spring and Summer campaigns for the first time including Wirral Olympian Sam Quek, resulting in greater awareness of Wirral’s visitor offer and direct engagement with Visit Wirral website and social media channels.
- 35,000 people were reached through Visit Wirral social channels during The Open.

3.7 Prior to these 2023 activities, the independent STEAM and hotel occupancy data now available for 2022 shows positive signs of recovery in Wirral’s tourism sector post-COVID. In 2022, compared to 2021:

- Visitors increased by 34.8% (7.48million in 2022, 5.55million in 2021)
- Economic impact increased by 41% (£442.49million in 2022, £313.72million in 2021)
- Full-time equivalent (FTE) employment increased by 30.5% (4650 FTE in 2022, 3562 in 2021)
- Hotel occupancy increased by 25% (78.5% in 2022, 62.8% in 2021)

More analysis will be undertaken as to the impact of the campaign work outlined in 3.6 but it is anticipated that the Destination Marketing project will further drive this

positive trajectory especially given the particular opportunities for promoting Wirral to visitors which will arise from the Borough of Culture programme.

- 3.8 Significant developments are now also underway to embed and continue the collaborative work which underpins the Destination Marketing project at the City Region level. Following approval of an application to government by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to be one of the first Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) in the country, work has been undertaken to design governance arrangements for the Liverpool City Region LVEP and start to develop an LVEP Growth Plan.
- 3.9 The role of the LVEP will be to provide region wide strategic management and additionality and coherence to destination marketing activities. The overarching purpose of the Liverpool City Region LVEP will be to provide additionality and coherence to destination marketing activities with the following objectives:
- Strengthening public-private sector partnership arrangements to provide leadership and management of the LCR as a destination.
  - Promoting the city region at national and international levels, raising visibility, attraction and driving tourism growth.
  - Maximising the contribution of the Visitor Economy to wider placemaking, levelling up and economic growth.
  - Helping shape and deliver national strategy and activities through enhanced strategic relationships with Visit England, DCMS and wider government.
- 3.10 The Combined Authority will be the accountable body for the LVEP and robust governance arrangements will be established through the creation of an LVEP Board. Work is underway to recruit a high-profile independent Chair and, following appointment of the Chair, recruitment will commence for the wider Board with membership reflective of the functions and expertise required for the LVEP, ensuring appropriate representation from the regional visitor economy sector including the boroughs which operate Destination Management Organisation (DMO) functions, including Wirral.
- 3.11 The work to establish the LVEP is being undertaken in a phased way from now until April 2024 when the partnership is expected to be operational. The initial phase is focused on supporting the establishment of the LVEP Board, including induction of the Chair and Board members, followed by work to develop a funding model and ways of working. Wirral is proactively contributing to this work through representation on an officer working group.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 It has previously been noted by the Committee that, in setting the budget for 2021/22, £620k budget was permanently removed as a saving in respect of the Culture and Visitor Economy function. This did not impact on the monies available for the Destination Marketing project.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications pertaining to this report. A further report will be brought to Committee in respect of any governance implications pertaining to the formal establishment of the Liverpool City Region Local Visitor Economy Partnership and associated arrangements.

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

- 6.1 This work is being delivered within existing resources. Resource implications and options for Wirral pertaining to the formal establishment of the Liverpool City Region Local Visitor Economy Partnership and associated arrangements will be explored and reported to Committee in due course.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 A number of key mitigations are in place to ensure successful delivery of the Destination Marketing project, including a robust programme and risk management approach supported by the Combined Authority.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Extensive consultation is being undertaken to develop the Liverpool City Region Local Visitor Economy Partnership.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Destination Marketing campaign activities are delivered with due regard to equality and diversity considerations.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Sustainable tourism is a key consideration for the Liverpool City Region Destination Marketing Board and a dedicated workstream and network has been established to support this.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Community wealth building is a key consideration in respect of ensuring that local visitor economy businesses have the opportunity to grow and thrive as part of the city region offer.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1 – Destination Marketing One Year Review**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**[Report to TCC&L November 2021 – Destination Marketing \(see below\)](#)**

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee has responsibility for matters:-

(f) concerning tourism, the arts, culture and heritage, including provision of theatre, entertainments, conferences and events

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Tourism, Communities, Leisure and Culture Committee</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> November 2021</b>
<b>Destination Marketing (Minute Ref 46)</b>	