

**Maidstone Borough Council**

**Regeneration & Economic Development**

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Thursday 6 December 2012**

**Visitor Information Centre Review**

**Interview with Malcolm Greer Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development & Mr Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Regeneration & Cultural Services**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the Regeneration & Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on 23 May 2012 the committee considered its work programme for the 2012 municipal year and agreed that its initial review would be on the Visitor Information Centre. The original scope is included for reference at Appendix A.
- 1.2 The Visitor Information Centre was previously located at the Town hall and was moved to the Museum as it was included in the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the East Wing Extension.
- 1.3 The Committee has already interviewed the Laura Dickson, Tourism Manager, Simon Lace, Museums Manager, Cllr Eric Hotson, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Neil Harris Democratic Services Manager. They have also been to see the new arrangement for providing visitor information at the Museum and visited Bexley and Rochester Visitor Centre's to look at different delivery models.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 Members are recommended to interview Cllr Malcolm Greer and Mr Brian Morgan with regard to the Visitor Information Service that is currently provided through the Museum reception/shop.
- 2.2 Cllr Greer and Mr Morgan have been asked to discuss the current service provided, the direction for the future of this service provision, and any ideas or plans on how the current arrangements services could be improved.

**3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Committee created a work programme for the municipal year 2012. At its first meeting held on 28 May 2012 Members resolved that:
  - a) The Committee's first review topic for the year would be Events & Tourism at the Visitor Information Centre and the second topic agreed for review was Empty Properties subject to consideration by the

Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, the Planning Process will be held as a reserve item.

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

4.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priority:

- For Maidstone to have a growing economy

4.2 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's priorities. Actions to deliver these key objectives may therefore include work that the Committee will consider over the next year.

<p><b>Name of Review: Visitor Information Centre</b></p>
<p><b>What are the objectives and desired outcomes of the review</b>  The Regeneration &amp; Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee have decided to look at events and tourism at the Visitor Information Centre as a review topic for 2012-2013. They wish to investigate the current priorities arrangement for providing visitors with help and information with a view to making recommendations to improve the service and take a view on how this service is being delivered elsewhere in Kent.</p> <p><b>Primary Objective</b>  To establish if there is an economically viable and/or beneficial scenario to return the visitor information centre or part of the visitor information centre to the town hall.</p>
<p><b>What equality issues will need to be considered as part of the review – giving consideration to the 9 protected characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration will need to be made as to whether there are any issues affecting a protected characteristic when identifying recommendations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Which witnesses are required?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development</b></li> <li>• <b>Simon Lace &amp; Laura Dickson</b> – to provide an overview of how the current arrangement work and clarification of the issue around the HLD grant and to understand how the VIC benefits the museum.</li> <li>• <b>Cllr Gordon Newton</b></li> <li>• <b>Representative from Visit England</b></li> <li>• <b>Carl Magjity – Medway Council</b></li> <li>• <b>Website Master – three sites</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Other ways to seek evidence? E.g. site visits, involving members of the public, consultation. *</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mystery Shopping of current service</li> <li>• Survey other local authorities VIC arrangements</li> <li>• Survey of frontline staff (past and present) dealing with VIC enquires</li> <li>• Best Practice from CFPS and Visitor Information Provider of the Year</li> <li>• Survey of visitors to Maidstone town centre – do they know where the ViC is?</li> <li>• Possible site visits to Bexley &amp; Rochester if required (Guilford).</li> </ul>
<p><b>What information/training is needed?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VIC Budget</li> <li>• Minutes from OSC BVR 13 December 2005</li> <li>• VIC Briefing Note – OSC Customer &amp; External Services 28 February 2006</li> <li>• OSC Tourism Review 2001</li> <li>• Minimum staffing requirements for Town Hall and Museum reception /VIC desk</li> <li>• Detail of the numbers of Town hall tours and participants for last three years to gage footfall</li> <li>• Position Paper from Chief Executive</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suggested time for review and report completion date</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 31 July – Scope to Committee</li> <li>• 17 August deadline for circulating information</li> <li>• w/c 20 August – informal evidence gathering meeting</li> </ul>

- w/c 3 September – site visits if required & 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting report drafting
- October – Site Visits
- November – full report to committee for consideration

**How does the review link to council priorities?**

- For Maidstone to have a growing economy

**How does this item deliver CfPS effective scrutiny principles?**

*(delete all that do not apply)*

- 1 Provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers
- 2 Enables the voice and concerns of the public
- 3 Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role
- 4 Drives improvement in public services

**Any co-optees or expert witnesses?**