

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Economic & Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 26 November 2013**

#### **Town Hall Foyer Lease**

**Report of:** Zena Cooke

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In 2012/13 the Economic Development and Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviewed the visitor information centre as part of this review several recommendations were made to the Cabinet member for Corporate Services on the leasing of the town Hall Foyer to Volunteer Action Maidstone (VAM).

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to note:
- The draft lease for the Town Hall Foyer
  - The success of the volunteer bureau in increasing the number of volunteers registered by VAM.

#### **3. Update**

- 3.1 The Visitor Information Centre Review 2012/13 made a number of recommendations and those relating to the use of the Town Hall Foyer have been incorporated into the lease between the council and Voluntary Action Maidstone.
- 3.2 The following points arising from the recommendations have been included in the lease:
- a methodology for logging visitor numbers and enquiries will be used at the Town Hall that is consistent with that used by the Visitor Information team
- VAM staff and volunteers based at the Town Hall will provide visitor information
- VAM staff and volunteers based at the Town Hall will be supported by the council's customer service advisors to provide visitor information
- 3.3 The primary objective of the lease to VAM is to support the Volunteer Bureau to increase the number of volunteers registered in the borough. This will not only benefit the borough's voluntary

organisations but will also benefit the borough's residents and businesses.

- 3.4 Between April and September 2013, 249 people registered to volunteer at the Volunteer Bureau. The age range of the volunteers was from 15-59, with 65% female and 35% male. Those volunteering included full and part time employed people, those who are retired, in education or training as well as those seeking work.
- 3.5 The reasons given for volunteering included; helping others, gaining work experience, giving something back to the community and trying new things. There were over 20 areas of interest registered by the volunteers ensuring a wide range of voluntary organisations will benefit.
- 3.6 In addition to the core service provided by the Volunteer Bureau, VAM agreed to provide visitor and council information at the town hall. Of the total 1,400 contacts/enquiries for the six month period, 139 related to asking for directions, 55 related to transport, 151 to council services and 295 to visitor information.
- 3.7 The Volunteer Bureau will continue to monitor and review the nature of the enquiries to ensure that the training provided reflects the information they will need to know.

### **3. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

- 3.1 The arrangement with VAM supports the following Council priority:
  - 'For Maidstone to have a growing economy.'
- 3.2 Volunteering is a key component in supporting and promoting employment and the local economy. The presence of VAM in the Town Hall foyer has already increased the number of registered volunteers.