

Meeting:	Overview & Scrutiny	Date:	29 October 2018
Subject:	Tourist Information Centre Relocation		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure		
Wards Affected:	ALL		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Exempt TIC Relocation Report		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE with the exception of the appendix which contains exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and therefore the public will be excluded from the discussion of the appendix.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To highlight how public access to visitor information services is changing.
- 1.2 To brief Overview & Scrutiny about the proposed relocation of our Tourist Information Service to one of the Council's other cultural venues.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the information contained in the report and comment on the proposed co-location and venue options.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) has been located at 28 Southgate Street since 1997. During this period it has served as the city's principal source of information for visitors and local residents.
- 3.2 The TIC's current opening hours are Mondays 10am – 5pm and Tuesdays to Saturdays 9.30am – 5pm. It also opens on ad-hoc Sundays throughout the year when big events are happening in the city.
- 3.3 Gloucester's Tourist Information Service (TIS) has a well-established reputation for excellent service delivery. It has won a series of sector-specific awards over the past eight years, culminating in the gold award for 'Best Visitor Information Provider in England' in the 2017 Visit England Excellence Awards.
- 3.4 The Together Gloucester re-design saw the TIS join up with the other cultural venues (Guildhall, Museum of Gloucester, Life Museum and Blackfriars). This

allowed generic working and improved resilience. All of these venues use the same ticketing system.

- 3.5 The TIS's core function is to provide visitor information. It also offers sales services, primarily: an onsite shop stocked with Gloucester-themed gifts; an onsite sales point for travel tickets, as an agent for National Express, Stagecoach, Marchants, and Superbreak; and onsite/ online/ telephone ticket sales for local and national events. For a while it also ran a 'meet-and greet' service for visiting coach parties.
- 3.6 The TIS also supports city events. For example, it sold £61.5k of merchandise during the 2015 Rugby World Cup and £1,000's worth of flags in just one hour during the 2012 Olympics in 2012. It serves as the central box office for the annual Gloucester History Festival and in 2018, the service issued 3709 tickets in person and 4307 online through the Ticket Shop.
- 3.7 Over the past five years there has been a growing trend towards the use of online and digital visitor information services and online ticket sales. This has resulted in a significant drop in footfall at the city's TIC with a knock-on impact on gift shop sales and commissions income. The table below shows the footfall, income and net cost of running the service during this period:

Period	Footfall	Income (£)	Net Cost (£)
April 13 – March 14	128,496	N/A	N/A
April 14 – March 15	110,474	367,000	173,000
April 15 – March 16	104,628	344,000	208,000
April 16 – March 17	92,078	286,000	180,000
April 17 – March 18	85,005	264,000	176,000

NB The net cost figure for 17/18 is not directly comparable to previous years because of changes to structures and financial reporting arrangements following the Together Gloucester restructure. But it is the most accurate comparison available.

- 3.8 The decline in footfall reflects a changing rather than struggling or failing service:
- 3.8.1 The TIS launched the online "Gloucester Ticket Shop" in April 2017 and sold 14,517 e-tickets in the first 18 months, bringing in £103,244 in ticket sales.
- 3.8.2 The City's coach and bus operators are selling tickets directly to customers via their own websites.
- 3.8.3 People can get tourist information and advice from the customer services desk at Gloucester Quays and from leaflet distribution points across the city e.g. Gloucester train station and museums (including our own).
- 3.8.3 People will be able to buy coach and bus tickets and make use of the digital visitor orientation point at the new Gloucester Bus Station. The latter will allow them to access visual and audio information about what's on offer in the city and how to get there.

3.8.4 People will also be able to use the digital way-finding/ information totems that Marketing Gloucester Ltd will be installing across the city as part of the Great Place project.

3.9 The TIS needs to respond to the growing demand for online information and services and take account of the online and onsite tourism provision that's being offered by other providers. And it needs to adapt its onsite offer accordingly. It also needs to perform well commercially to meet income targets set for the service.

3.10 In terms of our onsite service provision, the most viable delivery model is co-location with another of the City Council's cultural venues. This would:

- Allow us to use our Visitor Services staff resources more effectively/ efficiently;
- Create a more knowledgeable and flexible workforce;
- Release staffing resource that can be invested in re-establishing our award winning standards, developing our online TIS offer and generating additional income (e.g. at Blackfriars);
- Make our TIS more accessible to a wider range of customers;
- Reduce spend on zero hours staff;
- Deliver an annual revenue saving of almost £38k (building and operational costs); and
- Increase footfall at/ awareness of the chosen Cultural Services venue, raising the profile of that venue.

3.11 The two feasible options for co-location are the Museum of Gloucester and Gloucester Guildhall:

<p>Museum of Gloucester</p> <p>Joint museum reception/ sales point and TIS in the Museum foyer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits slightly outside the primary shopping area. • Currently considering the future business model for the museum and may not need a staffed reception desk at all times. • Able to offer a daytime service – unlikely we'd be able to fully align the operational hours of the two services; the Museum currently opens 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Saturday and occasional Sundays, and it is closed on Mondays. • Able to offer tourist information and sales (shop and event tickets) to a wider range of customers. • Opportunity to promote Guildhall cinema tickets to visiting families (family films are a Cultural Services' business development area). • Still need to run a box office at the Guildhall. • This venue has a lower footfall and we wouldn't get the same immediate or long term uplift in income generation as we'd see at the Guildhall. • The Museum requires significant development in relation to its collection, displays offer, programme and organisational resilience – moving the TIS into this venue at this stage might restrict future opportunities.
<p>Gloucester Guildhall</p> <p>Joint ticketing and information centre that combines the current TIS function with the box office function.</p>

- Sits on one of the gate streets, in a central location, on a natural route from the city's transport hub.
- Close to the city's transport hub.
- Can offer longer, more accessible opening hours to a wider range of people at this venue (we are proposing these should be: 9am until 9pm on event nights and until 7pm on all other nights as business grows).
- Able to provide onsite parking (multi storey).
- Able to provide a consistent box office service (not currently the case).
- Aligned with ambition in the Guildhall Development Plan - to create a central events hub for the city, combining expert advice on event management, support to develop technical capacity, equipment hire and a ticketing service for events held in the city.
- This venue has a higher footfall and presents more opportunities for income generation – achieved through upselling the GH café and GH events.
- Supports the Food & Drink development plan.

3.12 With regard to the possible impact of choice of location, it is worth noting that Cheltenham saw a decline in TIC usage after its TIC was relocated from the main high street to The Wilson, which is off the main thoroughfare.

3.13 Cultural Services staff advise relocating the TIS to Gloucester Guildhall.

3.14 Our proposed relocation plans include provision for new signage and effective marketing, and investment in staff training to enable a smooth transition regardless of the chosen location.

3.15 In terms of the TIC retail offer:

- The gift shop is not part of the core TIS service but can enhance the visitor experience as well as help meet budgets;
- Should the proposed relocation go ahead, there is a clear case for moving the stock at the current TIC to the retail area in the Museum of Gloucester and providing a single "Gloucester Gifts" shop at this venue. The Museum has plenty of shelf space (not available at the Guildhall) and we are already increasing the range of locally produced goods on sale at this location. We also plan to add bespoke souvenirs and gifts that interpret the Museum collection.
- If the TIC is relocated to the Guildhall we would provide an onsite display that showcases stock from the "Gloucester Gifts" shop and a linked sales offer comprising the most popular of these items.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

4.1 Relocating the TIS to another of the Council's Cultural Services venue allows for better use of resources. We plan to recruit and train volunteers and create a number of Friends Groups to support the growth and sustainability of our Cultural venues. And we are already attracting volunteers as part of the 'Engage in Gloucester Volunteer Makers' which was launched on 2 September 2018.

4.2 Creating a central ticketing and information centre will release capacity of staff to develop self-service options, set up Friends Groups and grow volunteer support for the City's cultural venues.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 Option 1 – Continue to operate at Southgate Street. The authority cannot continue to justify delivering the existing service model in the face of significant change.
- 5.2 Option 2 – Relocate to another sole use location. This will not address the issue of reducing the overall Cultural Services expenditure and does not free up resource.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 N/A – this is a consultation paper.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 Public consultation is likely to show a continuing demand for a face to face service. Overview and Scrutiny will be the sounding board to discuss the various options presented.
- 7.2 We would need to install clear signage at any alternative venue and ensure visitor orientation to the site.
- 7.3 Future work also includes the introduction of a self-service kiosk within the box office area which coincides with the procurement of a new till system by summer 2019.
- 7.4 A Guildhall Development Plan and Museum Development Plan are both currently in production.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The cost of moving the TIC will be met from the capital budget allocation in the City Centre Investment Fund (CCIF). The current available budget is £119,109.
- 8.2 There is a sound argument for using the CCIF funding to support a bid for significant additional funding from the Cultural Development Fund to support development of the Guildhall. This option would not be available if the Museum of Gloucester was the Council's chosen relocation site for the TIC.
- 8.3 It is estimated that revenue savings of £37,900 per annum will result from the transfer.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 As the area in the Guildhall intended to be occupied by the TIC is already within the Council's ownership and occupation there are no legal implications in respect of that aspect of the change of location of the service.

Once the service has relocated, consideration will have to be given to terminating the Council's occupation of the premises at 28 Southgate Street.

(One Legal has been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 The Guildhall box office area is set back from the main entrance on a mezzanine floor and accessible via a lift and stairs. The lift can accommodate mobility scooters and wheelchair users. Asset Management has inspected the lift and confirmed it is in full working order
- 10.2 Access is important and a move to the Guildhall provides the following benefits:
- Longer opening hours for TIC;
 - Consistent opening hours for box office function;
 - An adjoining car park with lift access into the Guildhall - there are plans to convert a number of car parking bays into disabled and child-friendly spaces.
- 10.3 There are also access benefits by relocating to the Museum:
- Ground level access from pavement to reception.
 - The Museum is located between a number of city centre car parks, with Hampden Way car park just a 2 minute walk away.
 - Toilets are located on the ground floor in the reception area.
- 10.4 Christian Drewitt who works in partnership with Marketing Gloucester has visited a number of city centre locations to audit accessibility. Both the Guildhall and Museum were awarded a 5 star for their accessibility. The following links provide further insight:
- www.accessglos.co.uk/gloucester-guildhall
 - www.accessglos.co.uk/museum-of-gloucester-3

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 11.1 Access with ease would form part of any relocation plans.
- 11.2 The PIA Screening Stage will be addressed after decisions on the proposed relocation and choice of venue have been made.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 12.1 Not applicable.

Sustainability

- 12.2 Not applicable.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 There are no staffing implications due to the current generic working that is already well established.

Background Documents: None

