

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	6 February 2019
Subject:	Tourist Information Centre Relocation		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure		
Wards Affected:	ALL		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
Contact Officer:	Lucy Chilton, Visitor Experience Manager		
	Email: lucy.chilton@gloucester.gov.uk	Tel: 396570	
Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To highlight how public access to visitor information services is changing and to meet the challenges of those changes by relocating the City's "walk-in" Visitor Information Service to Gloucester Guildhall and the Museum of Gloucester.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that Gloucester's Tourist Information Service relocates to Gloucester Guildhall and the Museum of Gloucester at the earliest practical opportunity.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) has been located at 28 Southgate Street since 1997. During that period the TIC has served as the principal source of information services in the city 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 greater generic working and increased 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 which include an onsite shop stocked with Gloucester-themed gifts; an onsite sales point for travel tickets (acting as an agent for National Express, Stagecoach, Marchants, and Superbreak); and onsite/online/telephone ticket sales for local and national events.
- 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 worth of flags in just one hour during the Olympics in 2012. It serves as the central box office for the annual Gloucester History Festival and in 2018 the TIC issued 3,709 tickets in person and 4,307 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

*N.B – the net cost in 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 service rather than one that is struggling or failing:
- 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 are 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 colocation with another of the City Council's cultural venues. This would:
- Allow us to use our Visitor Experience staff resources more effectively and 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 full-year revenue saving of almost £38k (building and operational costs); and
 - Increase footfall at, and awareness of, the host Cultural Services venue, raising the profile of that venue with TIC users.
- 3.11 Options were presented to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 October 2018 and the Committee asked the Cabinet to consider a dual venue relocation option for the TIC. The two new host sites would be the Museum of Gloucester and Gloucester Guildhall. Since the O&S Committee meeting officers have been considering the feasibility of dual site provision and this option is the one recommended in this report.
- 3.12 The Museum of Gloucester offers the potential for a joint museum reception/sales point and TIS in the Museum foyer. The facility would only open during existing Museum opening hours and might be impacted by future museum development plans. Whilst the Museum sits on the edge of the primary shopping area a co-located TIC would make the City's tourist and visitor information and sales services (shop and event tickets) visible to museum visitors. The Museum's family audience would also offer an opportunity to promote family friendly events such as the Guildhall cinema to visiting families (family films are a Cultural Services' business development area).
- 3.13 Gloucester Guildhall also offers the potential for a joint ticketing and information centre that combines the current TIS function with the Guildhall box office function. The Guildhall sits on one of the gate streets, in a central location, on a natural route from and close to the city's transport hub. The Guildhall offers longer, more accessible opening hours and visibility to a wider range of people. There is adjacent multi-storey car parking and greater potential for raising awareness of the other facilities within the Guildhall, especially the bar/café.
- 3.14 To make the proposals work it will be necessary to plan for new signage at both locations. The Guildhall Development Plan includes plans to significantly improve the street-level presence of the Guildhall entrance. A marketing and promotions programme and investment in staff training will also be necessary; both are part of our relocation plans.

3.15 Whilst gift shop sales are not part of the core TIS service they can enhance the visitor experience and help meet budgets. The main gift shop will be located at the Museum of Gloucester and a smaller range of goods will be displayed and available for sale at the Guildhall. Both venues will promote the facilities available at the other.

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.

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 and the expired lease gives the Council no security of tenure.

5.2 Option 2 – Invest in another sole use location. This would simply relocate the issues arising from the existing sole use location in Southgate Street and is likely to be a more expensive option.

5.3 Option 3 – Relocate only to the Museum of Gloucester. This option has been discounted because it fails to deliver the opportunities offered by a TIS/Ticket Office service at the Guildhall and limits the opening and operating hours.

5.4 Option 4 – Relocate only to the Guildhall. This option has been discounted because of the concerns raised about street-level access and visibility.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 There is a clear need to adapt to the changing nature of how customers access information services and ticket sales.

6.2 Relocating TIC services to co-locate with existing cultural services provides an opportunity to reduce operational costs and consolidate existing teams and staff resources.

6.3 There is a real opportunity to create a central ticket hub, increasing income and creating a hive of activity around the Guildhall.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

7.1 If the proposals within this report are agreed, then the Visitor Experience Manager will liaise with Asset Management to work up a detailed relocation plan.

7.2 £120,000 is available from the City Centre Investment fund to meet the costs of the relocation. Whilst the Council's recent Cultural Development Fund bid was unsuccessful it has established a constructive relationship with other stakeholders in and around Kings Quarter and there is potential for funding from the Future High

Streets Fund. It would make sense for the Guildhall element of these proposals to be planned to coincide with these emerging opportunities.

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 It is estimated that revenue savings of £37,900 per annum will result from the closure of the Southgate Street TIC and its relocation to the Guildhall and the Museum of Gloucester.

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

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 As the new venues are 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. The relocation plan will need to consider the implications and provide a practical timetable for terminating the Council's occupation of the premises at 28 Southgate Street, any HR issues and the results of consultation.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation 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. The Guildhall operates longer opening hours and there is an adjoining car park with lift access into the Guildhall

10.2 There are also access benefits by relocating to the Museum. These include ground level access from pavement to reception; proximity to a number of city centre car parks and toilets located on the ground floor in the reception area.

10.3 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 5 stars for their accessibility.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

11.1 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