

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	11 January 2023
Subject:	Tourist Information Provision		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure		
Wards Affected:	All wards		
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 detail the current offer of Gloucester's tourist information provision and what the future of the provision may look like.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that the City Council supports the provision of all visitor information points across the city including visitor attractions, accommodation providers, transport hubs and digital information instead of one single Tourist Information Centre.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was in Southgate Street in a sole use building from 1997 until March 2019 where it was agreed by Cabinet and following the suggestion from Overview and Scrutiny that the TIC service could be delivered from the Museum of Gloucester. The TIC relocated by April 2019 and was based on the ground floor of the Museum.
- 3.2 The office in Southgate Street was a prime location on the main walking route from the city centre to the Docks. At the height of its success, it won several regional and national awards for its delivery of the visitor experience. At the same time, digital was becoming more prevalent and how visitors access information was beginning to change. An indication of visitor number changes can be seen below:

Period	Footfall
April 13-March 14	128,496
April 14-March 15	110,474
April 15-March 16	104,628
April 16-March 17	92,078
April 17-March 18	85,005

- 3.3 April 2019 through to March 2020 saw an increase in footfall at the Museum from 40,000 to 80,000 – this is likely to be attributed to the drop in entrance charges at the Museum rather than the TIC relocation.
- 3.4 In March 2020, the government mandated the closure of Museums due to Covid-19. The Museum reopened in September 2020, closing in November 2020, reopening in December 2020 before closing again late that month. The Museum shop and TIC finally reopened mid-April 2021 and the full Museum in May 2021.
- 3.5 During the pandemic, the physical TIC provision was inaccessible and nationally, digital engagement increased. Tourists and residents had little choice but to utilise digital technology to gain information. Pre-planning and booking of spaces/tickets became essential and event organisers had to utilise technology to manage social distancing. When the Museum finally reopened, there was less reliance on a face-to-face service with a noticeable reduction in the numbers of people requiring tourist information.
- 3.6 The Visit Gloucester team continued to engage with the public throughout the pandemic and again, digital information became the way forward. The Visit Gloucester website since being redeveloped in March 2020 has seen user figures skyrocket, up 40% on this time last year (318,000 vs 226,000 which was a record-breaking year for website figures). This growth has been realised through Visit Gloucester's engaging content and successful city-wide marketing campaigns.
- 3.7 The Tourist Information service within the Museum of Gloucester has naturally become a visitor information point – a place for visitors and locals to pick up maps and leaflets. All other parts of the original service have reduced in demand and, the Museum is no different to any other visitor attraction within the city who offers information through leaflet racks.
- 3.8 There is a local distribution company who stocks up leaflets on a regular basis on behalf of event organisers and visitor attractions. They manage many leaflet racks including the bus and train station and at all visitor attractions, cultural venues, and hotels in Gloucester. The Museum of Gloucester currently has a leaflet rack of this kind.
- 3.9 The official Tourist Information service as we have always known has naturally faded away and nationally, regionally, and more locally has continued to see Tourist Information Centres closing but with a wider push on ensuring that digital information is available and visitor information points have a leaflet rack and a supply of city maps.
- 3.10 The majority of visitors to the city use the successful Visit Gloucester website to plan their visits and itineraries produced and promoted with partners including hotels and visitor attractions. In many other cities across the country including larger cities such as Bristol and places that have large numbers of tourists such as Bath have closed their TICs owing to changing behaviours and needs of tourists and visitors.
- 3.11 Free city centre BT Wi-Fi is also readily available meaning that visitors can access digital information whilst on the go. There are many areas in the city that offer

free Wi-Fi, and the city is well-served with mobile networks allowing multiple ways to access digital information via a variety of devices.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

4.1 The main purpose of a TIC is to provide information in a seamless way to tourists and visitors to the city. This is done most effectively using the Visit Gloucester website, the leaflet racks and by the venue staff at attractions and hotels. In terms of providing best value to Gloucester residents, this combined with the ongoing use of digital channels provides best value to the city.

5.0 Environmental Implications

5.1 Leaflets will be stocked up by a local distribution company rather than having excess supplies behind the scenes, often leading to increased recycling.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Reverting to a sole-use Tourist Information Centre will have overheads more than £100k if based on the previous model and the City Council is not able to fund a service of this kind when there is a focus on making efficiencies. With a successful digital offer, the city does not require a stand-alone service.

6.2 The Museum of Gloucester could continue to promote itself as housing the city's Tourist Information Centre but as highlighted in 3.9, the current service has naturally reduced and is now like all other visitor attractions that has maps and leaflets on offer.

6.3 The Museum of Gloucester could fully withdraw from any Tourist Information provision however this is discounted as all visitor attractions and key locations want to provide visitor information to enhance the visitor experience.

6.4 An independent tourist office was due to open on Westgate but owing to lack of resources this has not ever opened. The city council is unable to subsidise an independent TIC.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 The Museum of Gloucester is already providing visitor information to the same level as other visitor attractions and key locations.

7.2 This report is simply about a change of words – no longer offering a City Council run Tourist Information Centre but supporting the increased use of visitor information points across the city and supporting digital information.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

8.1 The Museum of Gloucester will still be a venue to support any face-to-face activity that is managed by the Visit Gloucester team, just like any other visitor attraction in the city.

8.2 The Visit Gloucester team will need to list all visitor information points in the city so it is clear where visitors can access information.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Digital offering is inclusive of existing service provisions, there are no additional costs to the proposals.

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

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 There are no significant implications identified within this report. However, legal advice will be sought where required in the implementation of the Recommendations.

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

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 There are no risks in relation to this change, the Museum of Gloucester will continue to have a leaflet rack and visitor maps just like all visitor attractions in the city.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

- 12.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact; therefore, a full PIA was not required.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

- 13.1 There are no community safety implications. As an accessible and free visitor attraction, anyone is invited into the Museum to access leaflets.

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

- 14.1 There are no staffing implications to the contents of this report. Staff currently provide a dual Museum and information service, and staff will continue to assist anyone visiting the city should they have any questions – just like any other visitor attraction in the city would.

Background Documents: None