

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Background

The Council funds and manages two Tourist Information Centres, located in Tavistock and Okehampton. In 2012/13 the TIC contributed approximately £57,500 to the local economy. That said footfall to the TICs has declined by over 9,000 people over the past 3 years and booking by £13,000 for the same period – this can largely be attributed to the rapid rise in internet use and online bookings.

Savings to date

The TICs have driven out all feasible savings over the last 2 years by changing staff contracts, fine tuning opening hours, reviewing rental agreements and streamlining retail operations. In year savings for 2012/13 equated to £15,000.

Income

The TICs achieved an income of approximately £12,000 in 2012/13 and an ambitious target of £15,000 additional income has been set for 2013/14. Whether the TICs achieve £27,000 income for 2013/14 is debateable; nonetheless a concerted effort will be made to meet this target by increasing advertising opportunities and proactively encouraging visitor donations.

Service Cost

The TICs are never likely to be cost neutral, even if the ambitious income target is achieved for 2013/14 the TICs will still cost the Council £35,000 net to operate - a notable figure for a non statutory service.

TIC Closure

While the Council continues to operate the TICs there is no imperative for the private sector or other body to intervene. If the Council were to close the TICs a vacuum would be created thus allowing another party to step in.

If Members were minded to close the TICs it would be prudent to make the closure date known as soon as possible, thus allowing sufficient lead time for another provider to plan service delivery. Open and timely communication would also protect the Council's reputation and would hopefully allow continued service delivery as a seamless handover could be planned.

To achieve further savings Members might like to consider closing the TICs in year. It is suggested that the TICs could be closed at the end of the main season (end of October). In doing so the Council would save not only on operating costs but on redundancy costs too, which for March 2013 are estimated to be £23,656. Prolonging a decision about TIC closure would mean staff accrue higher redundancy entitlement.

Conclusion

The majority of TICs are not operated by district/borough authorities. The TICs are not a statutory service and the sooner a decision is made about TIC closure the greater the savings to be made.