Tourism VFM
Task Group Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Tourism VFM Task Group held on Tuesday 13 March 2012 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Members present:

Councillor Anderson  Councillor Lady Atkins
Councillor E Anderton  Councillor Hewitt
Councillor M Anderton  Councillor Perkin

Officers present:

Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development Officer
Gary Bullen, Manager Garstang Tourist Information Centre
Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

Others present:

County Councillor Jim Lawrenson, Lead Member for Tourism

TM.11 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Balmain, Brooks, Cocker, Martin, Turner and Wilson.

TM.12 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Hewitt declared a personal interest in the work of the task group, having formerly been employed by the Council in the Tourism Service.

TM.13 Lancashire County Council

County Councillor Jim Lawrenson explained that, having been Lead Member for Tourism since 2009, he was responsible for the strategic aspects of Lancashire County Council’s work on tourism. The demise of the Regional Development Agency had had a negative impact upon the region, but the main issue that CC Lawrenson was grappling with was how
to bring all the different authorities in Lancashire together to deliver a coherent policy in tourism. With this in mind a Visitor Economy Improvement Forum had been established, which included representatives from all the Lancashire local authorities. The Leisure and Culture Portfolio Holder was Wyre’s representative. The Forum sought to encourage authorities to work more closely together and across boundaries.

CC Lawrenson informed councillors about ‘Marketing Lancashire’, an initiative that sought to involve the private sector in marketing Lancashire as a tourist destination. The intention was to market a smaller number of attractions nationally. The initiative would also join up the provision of information about different attractions, so that more visitors might be attracted to the county e.g. a football club’s website might also include information about what is on at local theatres, amongst other things, to make a trip to a football match more attractive to a wider audience.

(See http://www.visitlancashire.com/destination-guide)

CC Lawrenson emphasized the economies of scale that would result from all Lancashire authorities working closely together on the promotion of tourism. He also suggested that the names of Districts (e.g Wyre, Ribble Valley) were less meaningful for visitors who did not know the area. They would be more attracted by references to towns such Garstang and Clitheroe, for example.

CC Lawrenson addressed a number of questions posed in advance by councillors, as well as answering others that arose in discussion. The questions posed in advance were as follows:

1. How much does the County put into Wyre Tourism Association?

Last year the figure was £1,000, which was match-funded. That money came previously from the Regional Development Agency (RDA), a source that was now no longer available. There was no direct funding from Lancashire County Council, following the demise of the RDA.

2. How are we prioritising Wyre, as opposed to the rest of Lancashire, as a tourism destination?

By promoting Lancashire, Wyre would benefit. The County Council promoted Wyre as much as anywhere else. CC Lawrenson suggested that the task group might consider looking at the way in which Cleveleys and Poulton had been promoted.

3. How can promotion be more proactive?

Already covered.
4 Does LCC have data on where tourists come from?

CC Lawrenson agreed to provide a written answer to this question.

5 What is the overall county strategy for tourism?

The project started with a conference for about eighty private sector representatives. All councils and councillors in the county were then involved with emphasis on working across boundaries and working together. The work was extended to embrace football clubs at all levels and arts organisations and would include others in the future, including cricket clubs.

6 How do the districts fit into that strategy?

Already covered.

7 To what extent does the county promote the district within the Lancashire destination?

CC Lawrenson said that the County’s strategy would ensure that visitor destinations within districts would be promoted much more effectively than they had been hitherto.

The Chairman thanked CC Lawrenson for his attendance at the task group meeting and for his valuable contribution to the task group’s work.

**TM.14 Tourist Information Centres**

Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development Officer, and Gary Bullen, Manager of Garstang Tourist Information Centre, attended for this item.

Ms Holt provided members with a pack of information in response to requests for information that had been made by the task group previously.

Ms Holt explained that there were three Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in Wyre:

- Garstang – open throughout the year
- Fleetwood – open every day April to October and weekends from November to March.
- Cleveleys – open Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April to October

The TICs were not just for tourists as they also offered residents information about bus times, car parking permits, attractions for families and community information.

TICs were becoming increasingly business-orientated, with creative ideas being developed to increase the range of services for which a charge would be made. TICs also had a retail side, offering items for sale as well as tickets for local attractions.
Mr Bullen explained his responsibilities at the Garstang TIC which had now become a multi-function centre that was viewed by residents as a community hub for council services in Garstang. There was a very active Community Desk that provided advice on events such as the Garstang Walking Festival and Britain in Bloom. The TIC supported, amongst other, a Victorian Festival, an Arts Festival and a Town Crier Event. The TIC had become very much part of the local community, as well as being a link to other TICs with whom Garstang exchanged brochures on a reciprocal basis.

Ms Holt and Mr Bullen addressed two questions posed in advance by councillors, as well as answering others that arose in discussion. The questions posed in advance were as follows:

1 Has there been an increase in footfall since moving to the new Centre (in Garstang)?

The new building, which was in a more prominent location, had shown an increase in footfall over the past two years. The TIC had previously had an average of 18,000 visitors per annum but in the first year of operation in the new premises that figure rose to 30,000 and in year 2 was 27,000.

It was intended that the ‘Garstang model’, with the TIC as a community hub, be extended to other the TICs in Wyre and that process had already started.

Ms Holt confirmed that there had been an increase in budget for the new TIC from approximately £5,000 to £7,000.

Footfall figures for Cleveleys and Fleetwood were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cleveleys</th>
<th>Fleetwood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>14,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2,762</td>
<td>15,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was suggested that the reduction of 13.7% in the figure for Cleveleys was accounted for by the long-term closure of the tram tracks. The increase in numbers at Fleetwood was as a result of the TIC having been open for an increased number of days, although that figure would also have been reduced to some extent by the tram track closure.

Ms Holt emphasized that both Cleveleys and Fleetwood continued to be viable TICs; they were undergoing a process of evolution and showed progress year on year. The location of the Fleetwood TIC was ideal; the Cleveleys TIC was not in an idea position but to move it to somewhere else would prove too expensive.
2 How would you improve the financial situation if given a free hand at Garstang (or, indeed, either of Wyre’s other two TICs)?

A number of ways of improving the financial situation had been identified, including:

- Improving the retail offer
- Increasing the proportion of the Garstang shop allocated to retail sales (it was currently split 50/50)
- Increasing the number of events starting or finishing at the TIC, similar to the way in which the Garstang Walking Festival was organised
- Running a programme of Healthy Walks starting or finishing at the TIC
- Working more closely with Booths
- Working more closely with local partners
- Encouraging local companies to make more use of the Community Desk
- Developing an on-line shop

The Chairman thanked Ms Holt and Mr Bullen for their helpful contributions to the work of the task group.

**TM.15 Next Steps**

(i) Meetings to be arranged with members of the Wyre Tourism Association, either in a task group meeting at the Civic Centre or at their places of work

(ii) Invite the Leisure and Culture Portfolio Holder to a meeting of the task group

(iii) The visits to the three TICs will take place on the afternoon of Thursday 19 April 2012, with transport leaving the Civic Centre at 12:45pm.

**TM.16 Date and time of next meeting**

To be advised.