Tourism VFM
Task Group Minutes

Notes of the meeting of the Tourism VFM Task Group held on Tuesday 21 February 2012 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Members present:

- Councillor Anderson
- Councillor E Anderton
- Councillor M Anderton
- Councillor Lady Atkins
- Councillor Balmain
- Councillor Brooks
- Councillor Hewitt
- Councillor Martin
- Councillor Perkin
- Councillor Turner
- Councillor Wilson

Officers present:

- Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources
- Michael Ryan, Corporate Director of People and Places
- Ian Munro, Head of Culture, Leisure and Tourism
- Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

TM.01 Election of Chairman

Councillor Lady Atkins was elected as Chairman of the Task Group.

TM.02 Election of Vice Chairman

Councillor M Anderton was elected as Vice Chairman of the Task Group.

TM.03 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Cocker.

TM.04 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.05 Public Involvement

Councillors agreed that meetings of the task group should be held in public.
Michael Ryan, Corporate Director of People and Places, informed the task group that the council's tourism function comprises three main areas:

(i) **Partnership Arrangements**

The council worked with and supported the Wyre Tourism Association (WTA), which included private sector providers of services including accommodation, attractions and places to eat. The WTA was a subscription-based organisation, with members paying different amounts according to the size and nature of their business. The council provided support and administration for the WTA, including the preparation of accounts. The council also played a role in assisting the WTA to develop.

The WTA had links with the Blackpool and Lancashire Tourist Board, and from there into the regional and national tourism networks.

(ii) **Provision of Tourist Information Centres (TICs)**

Fleetwood and Cleveleys have long-standing TIC facilities, while the TIC in Garstang is much newer. Mr Ryan suggested that the task group might wish to consider the TICs as one of its priorities when looking at value for money within the council’s tourist service and whether alternative arrangements such as Tourist Information Points and access to information on the website were appropriate.

(iii) **Tourism Guide**

A Tourism Guide is published every two years in conjunction with the WTA.

Cllr Brooks pointed out that the estimated net cost of the Tourism Service to the council tax payer for 2012/13 was £408,920. This reflected a number of cost centres including:

- Tourism £130,360
- General Promotions £52,280
- WTA £37,560
- TICs £186,020

which, together with notional capital charges of £2,700 totalled £408,920.
Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources, explained the background papers, which had been provided to the task group.

The first document showed the council’s ‘Nearest Neighbour’ authorities, with some basic comparative data, including size and population. The table overleaf indicated how the council’s £147.73 per head of population in 2011/12 was spent, with tourism costing £3.55 per head of population. Sorting the same table in a different way revealed that 70% of the cost was spent on eight services, with Tourism being eleventh on the list.

Comparative costs on tourism per head of population from 2004/05 to 2011/12 were provided. It was also noted that the Nearest Neighbour group has changed to some extent during that period, with some authorities no longer being part of it and others being included.

Graphs showing the council’s spend per head on tourism since 2004/05 compared with the Nearest Neighbours were provided. These indicated that, within our Nearest Neighbour group, Wyre has gradually moved towards the higher end and is now the third highest spender behind Canterbury and Scarborough. In 2004/05 Wyre was eighth highest.

A detailed breakdown of the budgets for 2012/13 (which were subject to consideration by Council on 1 March 2012) was provided. No comparative data was available for 2012/13 yet (inevitably), although comparisons could be made using 2011/12 data.

Finally, an analysis of the costs of each TIC was provided to members. This reflected actual costs for 2011/12 and the number of recorded visitors to each TIC, which enabled a figure for ‘cost per visit’ to be calculated. It was noted that the methods of counting visitors in each TIC were open to a degree of challenge and that the opening times of the three TICs varied.

Ms Davies reminded that members that there were two key elements of Value For Money, namely:

- What does it cost? (evidenced by the data provided), and
- What do we get out of it? What difference does the spending make? What is the impact? What are the outcomes?

Several values had previously been quoted illustrating the estimated value of tourism to Wyre and members asked for such information to be made available to them.

Members enquired as to the cost of the Visit Wyre and Arts Team. Mr Ryan advised that there had been a significant reduction in costs following restructures and that there were now only 2.5 posts within that team.
Cllr Brooks pointed out that despite efficiency savings, the projection for 2012/13 showed an increase in costs of £64,976 for the tourism service when compared to the 2010/11 actuals. Ms Davies agreed to provide members with details of the 2010/11 actuals and the 2012/13 estimates in order that members could better understand the reasons for that.

Members raised a number of other questions

- What is the effect of the differences in opening times of the three TICs?
- Is there coordination in the way in which the TICs source their items for sale?
- Do we have information on where tourists get their information from?
- Do we know the extent of the impact of advertising on tourism?
- Do we know how many of the website ‘hits’ transfer into business?
- Is there any evidence that identifies why people decide to come to Wyre?
- What is the impact of Lancashire County Council’s ‘Promote Lancashire’ campaign on Wyre?
- Do TICs help bring money into Wyre or are they simply being used to promote other areas?
- Who are our tourists? Are they internal or external?

One of the members of the Blackpool and Lancashire Tourist Board (BLTB), Tim Dixon, represents Wyre’s views on the Board. The BLTB had identified three priorities for 2012/13 including the Preston Guild and the Open Golf Championship.

Members commented that Scorton was an excellent example of how a village was able to attract tourists, and representatives from the village were proposed as being useful potential witnesses to the task group. Mr Ryan agreed to help identify suitable individuals.

Cllr Brooks suggested that examples in other authorities where TICs were sponsored by private organisations should be explored in order for the task group to be able to consider other ways in which they might be run in Wyre. Comparative data reflecting expenditure on TICs would be sought from the Finance Team in order to pursue this.

The Chairman thanked Philippa Davies, Michael Ryan and Ian Munro for their introductory comments and their offers of further support and advice to the task group as the review progressed.

**TM.08 Scoping Document**

Councillors considered the draft Scoping Document. A number of amendments and additions were agreed:

Revised purpose: To undertake a review of tourism promotion in Wyre.
Additional objectives:
  o To understand the place of tourism in Wyre within a countywide and regional context
  o To understand who Wyre’s tourists are and whether a potential source of tourists is being missed
  o To explore any alternative means of funding TICs

Additional potential witnesses:
  o Hoteliers (both members of WTA and non-members)
  o Freeport
  o Caravan Sites
  o Tourists

Additional documents to be considered:
  o Humberts report on the economic impact of tourism
  o Externally validated customer satisfaction report

The intended outcomes were changed:
  o A raised profile of tourism in Wyre
  o Better value for money

It was acknowledged that externally accredited customer satisfaction surveys had been carried out, and members asked to have access to that information.

**TM.09 Next Steps**

A number of other questions were raised at this point.

The task group would like more information about the role of the Visit Wyre and Arts Team, including a detailed breakdown of costs.

Members asked for information about Tourist Information Points in Wyre – how many were there and what were their locations?

Councillors asked for information about the original thinking behind the introduction of TICs, and suggested that the original reasons for their introduction might no longer be valid.

Members wondered what neighbouring authorities were doing with tourism (Fylde and Lancaster in particular).

Members questioned why some councils appear to spend nothing on tourism – e.g. Adur and Shepway.
The following were agreed to be the priorities for invitations to future meetings of the task group:

1. Wyre Tourism Association  
2. Lancashire County Council representative  
3. Blackpool and Lancashire Tourist Board representative  
4. Wyre tourism officers

Visits to each of the three TICs would also be arranged.

**TM.10 Date and time of next meeting**

To be advised.

It was agreed that future meetings would commence at 6pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays being the most convenient days.

It was proposed that the visits to the TICs would be arranged on a Friday afternoon in March in order to maximise councillor attendance, although it has since been confirmed that due to the seasonal opening of the Centres in Fleetwood and Cleveleys, this might not be possible to arrange until April.