

REPORT TO: POLICY COMMITTEE ON WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 2008

SUBJECT: TOURIST INFORMATION: REVIEW OF CENTRES

BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES & DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 Committee is asked to homologate the decision of the Joint Chairs of Policy Committee to approve the proposed merger of the Forres Tourist Information Centre and Falconer Museum, Forres and to note the progress made in respect of integration of Tourist Information Centres at Dufftown and Elgin.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section A(42) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to ensuring that the organisation, administrative and management processes of the Council are designed to make the most effective contribution to achieving the Council's obligations.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- (i) It is recommended that Committee:
- (ii) Agrees to homologate the decision of the Joint Chairs of Policy Committee that the Forres Tourist Information Centre transfers to the Falconer Museum under the management of the Libraries & Museums Services in a partnership agreement with Visit Scotland.
- (iii) Agrees to homologate the decision of the Joint Chairs of Policy Committee to agree, in principle, to the transfer of £11,250 from the relevant Environmental Services budget to the Libraries and Museums budget to enable integrated service delivery at Forres to the agreed level with effect from 21 March 2008.
- (iv) Agrees to homologate the decision, in principle, of the Joint Chairs of Policy Committee to the transfer of the Elgin Tourist Information Centre at 17 High Street, Elgin to Elgin Library in late autumn 2008, with the proposed management arrangements being reported to a future meeting of this Committee.
- (v) Notes that Visit Scotland no longer require the Tourist Information Centre at 116 High Street, Forres, which is leased by the Council and agrees to terminate the lease.
- vi) Notes that because of existing legislation the Dufftown Tourist Information Centre, as a standalone facility, cannot be managed by The Moray Council.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the meeting of The Moray Council held on 30 January 2008 Council agreed to the proposed merger of the Tomintoul Tourist Information Centre and Tomintoul Museum under the management of the Libraries and Museums Services in a partnership agreement with Visit Scotland and that the principle of integration should inform the review of the Tourist Information Centres at Dufftown, Elgin and Forres.
- 3.2 At the Environmental Services Committee of 17 January 2007 (para 12a refers) Members agreed to review the way in which information is provided to visitors in Moray, with a view to improving the visitor experience and to increasing value for money. The review has been informed by the work of the Council's Tourism Steering Group and discussions which have taken place between officers of the Council and representatives of the Aberdeen & Grampian and the Highlands & Islands areas of Visit Scotland. The need to implement key aspects of the review is driven by the imminent start to the 2008 tourist season and the transfer of Moray from the Aberdeen & Grampian area to the Highlands & Islands area of Visit Scotland from 1 April 2008. The review has further benefited from site visits to the various centres.
- 3.3 The Forres Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was previously located within the Falconer Museum, Forres before transferring to separate premises at 116 High Street, Forres in the early 1990s.
- 3.4 The Forres TIC is seasonal and during 2007 opened from Easter to the end of October. It employed 2 full seasonal and 2 casual seasonal staff. The TIC dealt with 11,171 visitors and 227 accommodation bookings amounting to 645 bed nights and is part of the Visit Scotland network.
- 3.5 During the 2007-2008 financial year the cost of operating the Forres TIC was approximately £17,714. This was met from the Council's contribution to Visit Scotland Aberdeen & Grampian and included property rental to the Council of approximately £4,150. The staffing costs of the TIC were £14,494.33. This cost of c.£17,714 does not include any proportionate share of Visit Scotland's overheads of c.£41,000 for all 4 TICs, funded also by The Moray Council.
- 3.6 Discussions and site visits have taken place with Visit Scotland with regard to the transfer of the TIC to the recently refurbished Falconer Museum, Forres with the operation coming under the management of the Libraries and Museums Service, in a partnership agreement with Visit Scotland, similar to that agreed by Council for Tomintoul.
- 3.7 Visit Scotland is of the view that the Falconer Museum offers an excellent location for the TIC provision and that the integration of staff and services will add value to the visitor experience while increasing usage of the museum.

3.8 In discussing future arrangements it has been identified that the opening hours of the museum can be extended in the summer months in the early evenings and by opening on a Sunday afternoon at reduced overall cost. In addition, through integration and revised job descriptions the TIC function will continue to be provided during the period November to Easter at no additional cost. The proposed new arrangements will lead to staff reductions in respect of staff previously employed by Visit Scotland.

3.9 In effect the proposed opening hours for 2008 are:

March 21 - July 5	Monday to Saturday	10am to 5pm
July 7 - August 31	Monday to Saturday	10am to 6pm
	Sunday	1pm to 4pm
September 1 - October 31	Monday to Saturday	10am to 5pm
November 1 - Easter 2009	Museum winter opening hours (currently under review)	

3.10 The necessary funding element required to be transferred from the existing budget for the TIC in Forres is identified as:

Salary costs	£9,500
Office costs	1,200
Travel costs	300
Property costs (increased lighting etc)	<u>250</u>
	<u>£11,250</u>

This does not take into account potential income from bookings and a reduced level of retail activity. This shows an apparent reduction in costs of c.£6,464 but of course the Council would lose some rental income from the existing TIC premises at 116 High Street, Forres.

3.11 In regard to the Elgin Tourist Information premises at 17 High Street, Elgin, Visit Scotland are firmly of the view that these are no longer appropriate and have identified an area within the ground floor of Elgin Library as offering a far more appropriate alternative for visitors. Given that the Elgin TIC is the busiest in Moray and is open all year Visit Scotland and Council officers are of the view that any transfer should not take place until late October-November 2008 and that the management arrangements will require further exploration and discussion.

3.12 In regard to Dufftown, because of existing legislation that precludes the Council from directly managing a "standalone" TIC, Visit Scotland will continue to directly manage this facility. In discussion with the Highlands and Islands area of Visit Scotland there has been a clear recognition by their officers that they would want to work closely with the community of Dufftown to explore past concerns around quality schemes and the TIC's role. It is anticipated that these discussions will commence at the earliest opportunity from 1 April.

- 3.13 Under para 2.13 of the Financial Regulations it requires Policy Committee to approve transfer of a budget to another department.

4. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan**

The proposals meet the Environmental Programme of the Corporate Development Plan which supports the development of tourism.

The proposed arrangements support the Building Stronger Communities and Working for Increased Prosperity themes within Community Planning.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

The proposals reflect the Council's statutory obligations in relation to the provision of tourist information services.

(c) **Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)**

Financial - The resource required from the existing tourism budget to ensure an integrated TIC/museum experience at the Falconer Museum, is £11,250 at 2008/08 costs. This can be met from the existing tourism budget for Forres which is c.£17,714.

Cessation of occupancy of 116 High Street, Forres, by Visit Scotland would mean a loss in rental income to the Council of £4,150 in a full year. However termination of the lease may allow the Council to identify these premises as surplus to requirements.

External Funding - This specific proposal to integrate provision at the Falconer Museum is not eligible for European Funding.

Risk Implications - Without integration of provision the opportunity to strengthen the visitors' experience, extend the hours of museum and TIC availability and provide a greater focus for the promotion of Moray, at reduced cost, will be lost.

Staffing Implications - The existing post of Museums Custodian will be redesignated to Visitor Advisor in order to reflect more accurately the responsibilities of the post. There will be no immediate change to salary grade as a result of these proposals.

Any increase in the staffing establishment required to fulfil these proposals will be met from the budget transfer detailed at Para. 3.10 above.

Whilst there are no existing staff covered by TUPE arrangements it has been agreed with Visit Scotland that any new posts, arising within the Museums Service from these proposals, will in the first instance be ringfenced to Visit Scotland's staff.

The relevant staff and trade unions will be consulted fully on these proposals.

Property - The current TIC premises at 116 High Street are leased by Visit Scotland from The Moray Council on a 21 year lease which expires in 2015. The current rent is £4,150 per annum. Visit Scotland no longer require the premises and it is open to the Council to agree to terminate the lease by mutual consent. The premises may be declared surplus to requirements and disposed of to generate a Capital receipt to the Council.

(d) Consultations

The Chief Legal Officer has been consulted and confirms that the proposals meet statutory obligations.

The Principal Personnel Adviser has been consulted and confirms the staffing implications within this report.

The Head of Financial Services confirms the financial information within this report.

Visit Scotland, Aberdeen and Grampian has been consulted in respect of the proposals and identifies these as appropriate. Visit Scotland (Highlands & Islands) to which the Moray area will transfer from 1 April 2008 welcomes the proposals as the most appropriate for the 3 centres concerned.

The Head of Estates Services has been consulted in respect of the property implications and his comments are contained within the property section of this report.

The members of the Educational Services Senior Management Team have been consulted and support the recommendations within the report.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The proposed merger of the Tourist Information Centre and the Falconer Museum at Forres creates opportunities for a more efficient integration of services, in partnership with Visit Scotland.

5.2 The review of Tourist Information Centres at Dufftown and Elgin has identified the significant potential benefits of transferring the Elgin Tourist Information Centre to Elgin Library in late autumn 2008, with management arrangements yet to be determined and has identified that due to statutory requirements the Dufftown Tourist Information Centre requires to remain under the management of Visit Scotland.

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Background Papers: Report to Council 30 January 2008
Ref: DMD/JR/Reports/