

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 22 October 2013
title: UPDATE ON MERGED PLATFORM GALLERY AND VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: COLIN WINTERBOTTOM, LEISURE AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Committee on the performance of the Platform Gallery and Visitor Information Centre since the merger of the services.
- 1.2 To inform the focus areas identified in an Action Plan to help develop and shape operational delivery in line with the original Business Plan.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - Community Objectives – in contributing to make lives safer and healthier.
 - Corporate Priorities – to ensure a well-managed council, providing efficient services through identifying customer need and maximising use of resources.
 - Other Considerations – none identified.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Visitor Information Centre was relocated to the Platform Gallery following refurbishment of the facility March/April 2012. The combined service opening to members of the public on Saturday 5 May 2012.
- 2.2 A Business Plan presented to this Committee provided an outline of how it was proposed to develop the operation, but it was always intended to review specific service delivery over time, once the merger had taken place.
- 2.3 The Plan was based upon more effective use of the staffing resources through a slight reduction in the number required at any one time, and also by multi-skilling through staff gaining understanding and appreciation of both strands of the service offer.
- 2.4 Increased footfall for each individual service was generated by combining the availability of information for both local people and tourists, with the opportunity to explore the visual appeal created by exhibition items, and a comprehensive range of quality art and craftwork predominantly produced locally in Ribble Valley.
- 2.5 The challenge for the combined service was to create a new experience, able to meet the expectations of clients who have been accustomed to an enjoying a quality art/craft venue, whilst accommodating the needs of visitors and residents requiring information, assistance, and guidance, within a restricted space.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Over the first year of the operation, there has been a programme of four exhibitions;

The Open Exhibition, Lancashire Witches, Christmas Exhibition, and 'To The Letter'

There have also been educational workshops and practising artists using the far end of the building.

The visitor information service incorporates the distribution of the Ribble Valley Visitor Guide, comprehensive availability of destination information, and offers a retail element focusing on maps/ books of local interest and souvenirs. It provides support to special events such as the Food Festival, offers accommodation booking service, theatre ticket bookings, and coach trip bookings.

- 3.2 There has been a concerted approach to reduce the amount of stock and lines held on site to simplify stock management and also to prioritise the sale of items that are made in Ribble Valley. The sourcing of locally created ceramics, jewellery, materials, and all forms of craftwork, continues to present a challenge, but this is an important marketing factor running through the Visitor Information and Gallery service offer.
- 3.3 The collection of accurate attendance figures is now possible through the use of an infra-red beam counter located at the front entrance. Previously, attendances were recorded with a manual counter operated by staff at each of the Gallery and V.I.C. receptions, and this was a very crude method of recording visitors. The new equipment was introduced at the beginning of the merged operation. After some teething problems, it is now believed to be working consistently in the recording of people entering the building.

The attendances at the Gallery and V.I.C, when operated separately, were very similar, generating a combined total of approximately 66,000 per year. The visitor figures obtained over recent months would indicate a total of approximately 70,000 for the year, and would suggest a slight increase in visitors. However, the former manual methodology could only ever be viewed as an estimate of the count, so the infra-red based equipment is likely to provide a more accurate reflection of footfall going forward.

- 3.4 Income and expenditure comparisons between the merged facility operation during 2012-13 against the previous stand-alone operations during 2011-12, reveals the following;-

There has been a net overall saving in employee costs of £23,000 and a reduction in repair and maintenance of the building of £6,500.

There has been a reduction in the purchase of stock for re-selling of £3,500, but there has been a corresponding fall in income from items purchased for resale of £2,700.

There was a fall in income from commission sales of £2,800, and this is believed to be attributable to one exhibition especially being more tourist/ visitor theme orientated rather than being sales motivated. It has not been possible, so far, to assess whether there has been an impact on sales created by a change in the first impression and the general feeling obtained on entrance and when moving through the facility now that the Visitor Information requirement has been integrated into the display. There has been a reduction in the space available now that a proportion is allocated to information and display of maps/ and books and this has curtailed the amount of space available for displaying stock for sale. Every effort has been made to maintain an impression of quality and originality, and customer surveys will be continuously undertaken to establish feedback and to identify areas for improvement.

4 ISSUES

- 4.1 To help focus attention on generating visitors, and using the available space to its full potential, certain key areas within the Business Plan are believed to require attention.
- 4.2 Initiatives to increase footfall, the merger of on-site staffing and full involvement in sharing of tasks, new initiatives aimed at marketing and promoting the facility and new ideas to improve and develop the visitor experience in meeting a wider appeal, are covered in the action plan attached to this report. Whilst the responsibility for its implementation lies with Gallery and V.I.C. staff the Arts Development Officer will continue to contribute towards the use and programming of educational and arts/crafts workshops. Additional and complementary development opportunities for the Gallery/V.I.C are to be referenced in an Arts Development Action Plan.
- 4.3 Actions within the Plan have been identified, largely through the manager, supervisors, and staff on site reflecting on the operation with a more concentrated approach on certain areas without incurring additional resources.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications

- **Resources** – The implementation of the Action Plan will be within the budget available and is expected to improve upon income and expenditure targets. There will be an additional minimal cost to cover Sunday opening though it is anticipated that this will not affect the overall budget for 2014-15.
- **Technical, Environmental, Legal** – The attempts to improve the stock management system are dependent upon the capacity of the current till technology and the extent to which existing computer software can be modified to provide a less time consuming administrative system.
- **Political** – None identified
- **Reputation, Equality & Diversity** – The Platform Gallery/V.I.C. can be the first experience that visitors have of the Borough, and it presents a great opportunity to create a first rate impression on tourists.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

Endorses the implementation of an Action Plan to enhance the service provided at the Platform Gallery and Visitor Information Centre.

COLIN WINTERBOTTOM
LEISURE AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Community Services Committee 22.10.13/ Colin Winterbottom /IW

GALLERY and V.I.C. Actions

Report Author: Colin Winterbottom

Report Type: Action Report

Parent code: Increase Footfall and Usage of the facility				
Action Code	Action Title	Responsibility	Objectives/ Outcomes	Resources
1.1	<p>Planned exhibition programme, which comprises 4 per year and includes a special Christmas retail orientated range of products. The themes for 2014-15 are;</p> <p>April to July – Travelling Exhibition –Beauty is the first test. Use of Maths in craftwork and design.</p> <p>July to October – Still to be finalised</p> <p>October to January- Christmas Exhibition</p>	Gallery/ V.I.C Supervisors	<p>To have both Part-time supervisors in a position of organising, coordinating and implementing exhibition changeovers.</p> <p>To deliver the exhibitions within budget allocation.</p> <p>To stimulate additional reason for walking through the exhibition area of the facility.</p>	Delivered within budget provision
1.2	<p>Increased usage of the workshop/ education space and greater uptake by artists/ craft lettings.</p>	Gallery/ V.I.C Supervisors Arts Development Officer	<p>Organisation of a programme of arts and crafts workshops.</p> <p>Increased take-up in hiring the educational room and income to increase. Increase in use of the space available and income generation target set for 2014-15.</p>	Advertising/ publicity materials

1.3	Introduction of Sunday opening during the Summer holiday period in addition to the normal run up to Christmas.	All Staff (Including Casual attendants)	To operate planned opening on Sundays during the Summer and Christmas period. Income to match expenditure.	Additional staffing costs for Summer holiday period. Advertising
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Parent Code & Title: **Merger of On-site Staff and the undertaking of operational duties**

Action Code	Action Title	Responsibility	Objectives/ Outcomes	Resources
2.1	Involvement in the stock control system for all items of bought or sale and return stock.	Supervisors / Attendants	Implementation of an efficient and accurate stock control system. Identification of profit margins Identification of best and worst selling stock lines.	Internal support from Finance/ I.T. Purchase of a new till if required.
2.2	Undertaking specific administration relating to visitor orientated bookings	Supervisors	All staff to consistently deal with procedures for dealing with Visitor related bookings.	Internal training
2.3	Joint involvement in the collection of statistics/ data/ relating to usage and daily/ weekly income.	Supervisors	Accurate collection of visitor figures, income analysis and provision of information.	Cost of improved till if required.
2.4	The ordering and replenishing of merchandise across both V.I.C. and Gallery functions. Information materials, brochures and leaflets to be available on request to support the tourism offer.	Supervisors	Sufficient information and stock available to meet visitor needs and satisfaction level identified from customer survey.	None identified- Staff awareness

2.5	Clear understanding and unified approach towards undertaking of duties by all staff.	Supervisors	Production of daily and weekly jobs check sheets to ensure completion. Clarification of roles in planning and undertaking of exhibitions.	None identified- staff awareness
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Parent Code & Title: Marketing and Promotion of the facility

Action Code	Action Title	Responsibility	Objectives/ Outcomes	Resources
3.1	Production of quality promotional material for the facility and exhibition and workshop programmes. Targeted distribution	Supervisors	Increased awareness of facility identified from internal marketing/ user survey	Budget provision- Promotional
3.2	Showcase displays of stock items to maximise appeal of certain merchandise, which are popular sellers and offering reduced price stock from time to time.	Supervisors	Maximise sales and clear items which are not moving.	Presentation materials/ storage
3.3	On-site advertising to increase awareness and impact upon 'passing by' members of the public. To utilise the window areas through advertising on window blinds. Effective use of lighting to highlight facility advertising at nights.	Supervisors	Improved visitor feedback from internal marketing/ user survey.	Equipment budget provision
3.4	Assess the feasibility of a joint promotional campaign with other leisure and potentially private sector business in Clitheroe in a scheme which offers price incentives between sites.	Community Leisure Manager/ Supervisors	Inclusion within the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade joint initiative. Campaign implemented with risk factors considered.	Annual Membership of Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and promotion methods identified.

Parent Code & Title: Development of the Visitor Experience

Action Code	Action Title	Responsibility	Objectives/ Outcomes	Resources
4.1	The seamless provision of information to anyone requiring information or in respect to shop, exhibition items or workshops.	Supervisors	Staff competence at all levels through in- house transference of skills training and individually identified training support. Customer satisfaction survey levels maintained/ increased.	In-house and external training costs
4.2	Creation of a child/ family orientated area; which enhances the visit through interactive experiences.	Supervisors	Designated interactive area established and promoted. Increased visits from children and positive experiences identified from customer survey.	Materials from equipment budget.