

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 10

meeting date: 12 January 2016
title: SUNDAY OPENING AT THE PLATFORM GALLERY AND VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: COLIN WINTERBOTTOM
COMMUNITY LEISURE AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform about the effect of the Sunday Opening on the operation that was trialled this year at the Platform Gallery and Visitor Information Centre (V.I.C.)
- 1.2 To request that a decision is made as to whether Sunday Opening should continue in 2016-17 and if there should be any changes to how it is implemented next year.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - **Community Objectives** – To encourage economic development throughout the Borough with a specific focus on Tourism.
 - **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 combined Gallery and Information Centre is normally open every week from Monday to Friday (10am to 5.00pm) and Saturdays (10am to 4.30pm). During December, the facility has also opened on Sundays (11am to 4.00pm) in the run up to Christmas, as this is traditionally a busy period and customer sales have supported Sunday opening over previous years.
- 2.2 It was decided by Community Services Committee that the facility should open for a continuous period of Sundays spanning the Summer period to determine if there is a need for visitor information and any interest in the Gallery exhibition/ shop service.
- 2.3 There has been a general increase in customer visitors/ enquiries from the commencement of the merger of operations almost three years ago as evidenced by the weekly counts of people entering the facility, or requiring information by telephone or e-mail.
- 2.4 Saturdays are usually busier than weekdays in terms of visitors and income from sales, and the majority of town shops are open for business and the level of demand for Sunday opening other than at Christmas has not been explored up to this point. Sunday opening between 11.00am-4.00pm was trialled between 3rd May and 30th August 2015 and two members of staff were available on each occasion.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The number of visitors and requests for information at reception that have been recorded over the 8 month period from March to the end of October this year is 28,441 which amounts to an average of 3,555 per month or approximately 119 per day.
- 3.2 The number of visitors recorded over the 18 occasions that the Gallery/V.I.C. opened to members of the public was 1,578 or an average of 87 per Sunday.
- 3.3 The working arrangement involved all permanent staff sharing Sunday working on a contracted rota basis and this meant that each of the 5 staff contributed towards the additional opening times. The involvement of all the permanent staff and adequate availability of casual staffing enabled the Sunday opening to operate smoothly.
- 3.4 Feedback received from staff indicated that the majority of visitors sought information rather than purchases or to spend time at the facility and this is supported by the modest level of sales that were generated, compared with Saturdays.
- 3.5 Some of the comments obtained from visitors included;
 - There was not much else open in town and were asking about things to do.
 - Many were staying at the local caravan parks.
 - Most of the visitors came between the hours of 12 noon and 3pm, or earlier when there were specific activities being organised.

Quite a few international visitors came (as on Saturdays throughout the summer) from Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark.

- 3.6 On the two Sundays that the facility has been opened in December so far there have been 196 visitors and gross sales of £1025.24, and it is anticipated that the final weekend before Christmas will be the busiest of the year for the Gallery/V.I.C.
- 3.7 The effect that Sunday opening has had in terms of assisting visitors with their visit to the area is difficult to quantify as the benefit relates to the visitors' experience and what they may contribute towards the visitor economy. It is proposed that future evaluation should attempt to assess satisfaction levels, and the places people visited. There is potential to link up visitor destinations within an incentive based package which would help track visitor movements across the area.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications;-

Resources – The staffing cost implications of opening on Sundays on 18 occasions over the 5 month period incurred expenditure of £2120.50. There is also heating and lighting expenditure and promotional costs, including the production of banners and advertising, which should be taken into account.

The income generation in terms of gross sales totalled £2054.87. The net income to the Authority on Commission Sales was £522.41 (£902.21 being the artist share); income from bought stock sales was £201.66; income from Books/Maps (non VAT)

Sales was £242.28 giving a total net income of £966.35. So there was an overall net deficit against staffing expenditure.

There is provision within the facility budget for 2016-17 to repeat Sunday opening based upon the same arrangement as this year.

Technical, Environmental, Legal – None identified

Political – None identified

Reputation- Additional opening may enhance the Council's reputation by assisting visitors, especially those who are not familiar with the area.

Equality and Diversity- Service provision is available to everyone

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

Agrees to continue Sunday opening for 2016-17 over the same period, and evaluates its effectiveness on completion of a second year.

COLIN WINTERBOTTOM
COMMUNITY LEISURE AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information, please contact Colin Winterbottom 01200 414588

Community Services Committee 12.1.16 Colin Winterbottom /IW