

Report to: Executive Board - Monday 22 July 2002

OXFORD TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

		WARDS AFFECTED
Report of:	<i>Strategic Policy and Research Business Manager</i>	ALL
Report Author:	<i>David Steel ext. 2538 dsteel@oxford.gov.uk</i>	
Lead Member Responsible:	<i>Councillor Maureen Christian</i>	
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility:	<i>Economic and Social Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee</i>	
Key Decision:	<i>No</i>	
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
<p>Two possible options for the future management of the Tourist Information Centre have been identified after an 8 month best value review -- an in-house option based on the existing service and a partnership option with the Southern Tourist Board. A detailed comparison of the two options will be undertaken, and a decision sought from the Executive Board after the summer.</p> <p>Executive Board is requested to approve the development of both in-house and partnership options for the management of the Broad Street TIC.</p>		

Context

Oxford is a major British tourist destination with an estimated four million tourists contributing £227M to the local economy each year. The City has a single Tourist information Centre (TIC) which is currently located at Gloucester Green although there is a move to new premises in Broad Street scheduled for September 2002. The TIC has been managed in-house since its establishment.

The review has been running since November 2001; the review team comprised Councillors from the administration and the opposition, staff from Corporate Strategy and Strategic Policy, a Unison representative, and a staff representative from the Tourist Information Centre. The Tourism Manager attended in an advisory capacity.

Summary of review findings

The TIC is perceived as offering a satisfactory service or better by a large majority of users and local tourist businesses, although specific suggestions for improvements were made.

The number of visitors to the TIC is on the high side compared to the average of other historic cities (City Group 2) at 375,000, although some smaller cities such as Stratford (495,000), Chester (467,000) and Bath (415,000) TICs had a higher footfall in 2000/01.

The total income (£390,000) and particularly the income from excursions and tours (£183,000) are high, but the level of subsidy from the City Council (£202,000 including funding the post of Tourism Manager) is also high although direct comparisons with other cities are not straight forward.

A Business Plan was prepared for the Broad Street move outlining objectives for the new TIC which can be summed up as:

- A significantly improved service to visitors and residents
- Footfall to be increased to 450,000 per year by 2004
- Income to be up by 15% (to £447,500)
- Subsidy required to be lowered by 50% to £110,000 by April 2004
- A way of reducing the risk to the Council of sharp income falls bearing in mind the volatility of the market after terrorist incidents and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

For effective tourism management in Oxford the work of the Tourism Manager and the TIC must be brought together. This development will continue the improved management arrangements being developed to replace the unsatisfactory split between Tourism Manager located in Strategic Policy and Research and the TIC in the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit

The Tourism Manager is currently employed through a contract with the Southern Tourist Board (STB). The STB currently manages more than 20 TICs, is the regional tourism operator and employs many specialist tourism staff.

The review team narrowed down to two options for consideration to run the relocated TIC: an in-house option and a partnership option with the STB. A service specification and costing document will be prepared with the review group to allow a clear comparison to be made between the two alternatives. Once the comparison is complete it will be subject to scrutiny and then brought to the Executive Board for decision.

This report has been seen and approved by Councillor Maureen Christian, Portfolio holder
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Background papers

Notes of Best Value review meetings held on file in Strategic Policy and Research