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## **VISITSCOTLAND INFORMATION PROVISION – A NEW APPROACH**

**Report by Corporate Transformation & Services Director**

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### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**3 November 2015**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines how VisitScotland is responding to the way visitors are now accessing information and making holiday decisions and how this is impacting on the performance of the manned visitor information service throughout Scotland.**
- 1.2 VisitScotland currently operates and manages five VisitScotland Information Centres (VICs) in the Scottish Borders, providing face to face information services, including an accommodation and ticketing service. The VisitScotland Information Centres are partially funded via an annual Minute of Agreement (MOA) between Scottish Borders Council and VisitScotland.
- 1.3 The report provides information on the performance of the VICs in the Scottish Borders. Visitors are accessing information from a wide range of sources when they are in Scotland. Trends indicate that online usage for visitor information and booking will continue to rise. In line with this trend, Scottish Borders VisitScotland Information Centres have experienced an overall decline in footfall in recent years while there has been a significant rise in website visits and digital referrals to Scottish Borders businesses. Recognising the change in consumer behaviour and demand, VisitScotland is undertaking a national review of information provision and the overall customer experience, looking at the best way to ensure that information is delivered to more people in more places using the channels that visitors use the most.

#### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 I recommend that the Executive Committee:-**
  - (a) Agrees to invite senior managers from VisitScotland to provide a special briefing for all elected members on the new VisitScotland Customer Experience Strategy and its developing approach to information provision in the Scottish Borders and the rest of Scotland; and**
  - (b) Request that a further report on tourism information is brought to the Committee in 2016 once VisitScotland has finalised its review.**

### **3 VISITSCOTLAND INFORMATION CENTRES – BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

- 3.1 VisitScotland currently operates five "VisitScotland Information Centres" (VICs) in the Scottish Borders. The centres are located in Jedburgh, Peebles and Hawick operate all year round, while centres at Melrose and Kelso operate on a seasonal basis. In addition, VisitScotland works in partnership with Scottish Borders Council to deliver an "Information Point in Partnership" in Selkirk at Halliwell's House Museum, and with Eyemouth Museum Trust to deliver an "Information Point in Partnership" in Eyemouth Museum.
- 3.2 Tourism is a key sector of the local economy, contributing £187 million of direct expenditure annually, and supporting approximately 5000 jobs (2014). 1.8 million people visited the Scottish Borders in 2012, spending 3.5 million days in the area. Of these, 1.21 million were day visitors. The 2013-2020 National Tourism Strategy and the Scottish Borders Area Tourism Partnership's new Tourism Strategy and Action Plan aim to grow visitor spend by 20-30% to contribute to sustainable economic growth.
- 3.3 VisitScotland Information Centres play a role in helping to enhance visitors' stays in Scotland, connecting them to memorable experiences, encouraging them to do more, spend more and return again. However, the way in which visitors access information has changed, and VisitScotland has recognised it needs to change the way it provides information to visitors to reflect these changes. Rather than cutting back on information provision, VisitScotland, in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, is aiming to provide more information, to more visitors through even more outlets than at present.

### **4 REVIEW OF OPERATIONS**

- 4.1 Changing patterns of visitor behaviour have led to a decline in footfall at VisitScotland Information Centres across the country. In response to this, VisitScotland is developing a completely new approach to its information provision which looks across all channels – including face-to-face and digital provision, in line with visitor trends and demand.
- 4.2 Visitors are accessing information from a wide range of sources when they are in Scotland. The use of new technology has grown to become one of the most innovative and integral parts of modern consumer behaviour. Trends indicate that online usage for visitor information and booking will continue to rise.
- 4.3 VisitScotland has provided an updated set of visitor figures for the VICs in 2014/15. Overall, Scottish Borders VisitScotland Information Centres have experienced a decline in footfall in 2014-15. The specific results and analysis for the Scottish Borders are set out in Appendix 1, Table 1 and are summarised below:

#### **Jedburgh**

An annual visitor footfall of 30,558, indicating a fully performing centre with good footfall, although there has been a decline in numbers over the past 3 years.

#### **Kelso**

An annual visitor footfall of 15,611, the footfall to this site is very low based on the national picture with little demand for core services.

#### **Melrose**

An annual visitor footfall of 8,117, the footfall to this site is very low based

on the national picture with little demand for core services.

### **Hawick**

An annual visitor footfall of 15,105, the footfall to this site is very low based on the national picture with little demand for core services.

### **Peebles**

An annual visitor footfall of 26,193, indicating a fully performing centre with good footfall, although there has been a decline in recent years.

- 4.4 In addition to the VIC provision, there are now a number of "Interactive Screens" available for use by visitors. By Spring 2016 these will be available in Tweedbank, Melrose, Hawick, Abbotsford and Stow, complimenting those already installed in Kelso and Galashiels Transport Interchange. It is anticipated that further "Interactive Screens" could also be installed in future in Peebles, Eyemouth, Coldstream, Selkirk and Lauder if funding can be secured. The Information Points in Partnership in Selkirk and Eyemouth will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.

## **5 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 The growth of online channels for visitor information has led VisitScotland to a review how they provide information through all of their channels. Combined with a proposal to review Information Centres on a case-by-case basis in line with visitor demand, their plan includes a commitment to provide high quality information and inspiration to more visitors than ever before, through the channels that they use the most. This will include investment in, and development of, its digital channels to ensure that visitors can find, click on, and spend more in the local economy. They are aiming for closer working with local businesses so that visitors can access great information from local experts.
- 5.2 It is likely that changes will be made to the delivery of visitor information in the Scottish Borders in line with the current national review being undertaken by VisitScotland. In order to provide elected members with a more detailed briefing on that VisitScotland work, it is proposed that a special briefing should be arranged. This would allow senior managers from VisitScotland to provide an outline of the new strategy that is being developed and would also cover the options for future visitor information provision that are currently being considered. It is proposed to hold this special briefing session for all Elected Members in early December 2015.

## **6 IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Financial**

- (a) The VisitScotland Information Centres in the Scottish Borders are funded via an annual "Minute of Agreement" between VisitScotland and Scottish Borders Council. This details the delivery of regional VisitScotland marketing and visitor information expenditure for the Scottish Borders. The 2015/16 Minute of Agreement committed £108,000 from Economic Development budgets towards regional marketing and visitor information activity. This provides an annual commitment of £61,000 towards the Information Centres and £47,000 towards the regional marketing budget.
- (b) A further £13,000 was spent in Kelso and Galashiels Transport Interchange in the previous year to install interactive Visitor Information screens. More screens are planned using Smarter Choices sustainable transport funding in 2015/16 for screens in Tweedbank, Stow, Melrose, Hawick and Abbotsford. There will be additional expenditure required to supply any new information

screens. Any changes to VisitScotland services and delivery systems will be financed by VisitScotland.

**6.2 Risk and Mitigations**

There is also a reputational risk to the Council if the VisitScotland Information centres are not well used, not seen to be embracing new technologies or are not able to properly address users’ requirements. This will be mitigated by undertaking an effective and ongoing annual review process in partnership with VisitScotland.

**6.3 Equalities**

An equalities impact assessment will be carried out on the new touchscreen information provision in areas where they are planned to be installed.

**6.4 Acting Sustainably**

The provision of accessible, high quality tourist information helps to make the visitor experience of the Scottish Borders more memorable. Continuing to support appropriate visitor information in key locations across the Scottish Borders helps to support the tourism sector and the businesses and jobs that rely on it.

**6.5 Carbon Management**

There are no direct implications for the Council’s carbon emissions from this proposal.

**6.6 Rural Proofing**

Rural proofing is not required because this project does not change Council strategy or policy.

**6.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes to be made.

**7 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments incorporated into the report.

**Approved by**

**Rob Dickson** **Signature .....**  
**Corporate Transformation & Services Director**

**Author(s)**

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**Background Papers:** [insert list of background papers used in compiling report]  
**Previous Minute Reference:** Economic Development Group, 13 November 2014

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Bryan McGrath can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at [insert name, address, telephone number, fax, e-mail]

## Appendix 1, Table 1 "Scottish Borders VIC User Numbers"

### Scottish Borders

<b>FOOTFALL</b>					
<b>VIC</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
Jedburgh	30,558	33,646	32,153	32,536	29,373
Hawick	15,105	14,872	15,157	14,201	13,778
Peebles	26,193	26,251	27,385	27,594	36,984
Melrose	8,117	15,312	16,431	14,975	23,498
Kelso	15,611	15,261	14,943	15,968	18,026
<u>Total</u>	95,584	105,342	106,069	105,274	121,659
<b>BOOKING NUMBERS</b>					
<b>VIC</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
Jedburgh	162	131	147	225	270
Hawick	57	47	41	72	64
Peebles	35	141	63	107	169
Melrose	30	88	55	115	192
Kelso	27	14	21	45	43
<u>Total</u>	311	421	327	564	738