

CABINET

Additional Sunday opening of Morecambe Visitor Information Centre

Individual Cabinet Member Decision (Councillor Evelyn Archer)

Report of Head of Economic Development and Tourism

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To report on the trial period of additional opening of the Morecambe VIC during spring and autumn Sundays in 2009 and to present options for any additional Sunday opening of Morecambe VIC in the future.				
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	n/a			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That approval is given to opening Morecambe Visitor Information Centre for additional Sundays from Easter to the end of May and thus extending 7 day per week opening to 6 months per year, funded from within existing budgets.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A decision was taken in April 2009 which allowed for additional Sunday opening of Morecambe Visitor Information Centre (VIC) for a trial period during the spring (April and May) and autumn (October and November) of 2009. The trial period was to assess the visitor numbers and costs associated with opening on Sundays outside of the summer half of the year.

The case for additional Sunday opening of Morecambe VIC needed to be assessed following a request made at the Cabinet and MPs liaison meeting on 21st April 2008. Whilst the original request was for the VIC to be opened on Sunday's all-year round, it was recognised that there would be a significant cost in introducing this. Instead, it was decided to conduct a limited trial during the spring and autumn "shoulder" months, so that levels of demand and running costs could be assessed to allow a more informed decision to be taken for future years.

Following the trial period, which ended on the 29th November 2009, an assessment of the additional costs and income has been undertaken.

2.0 Proposal Details

Due to the delayed start of the trial period, Morecambe VIC opened for 4 Sundays in April and May and for 9 in October & November. (There is normally an average of 7 additional Sundays during the spring period). During the trial period, the VIC was open for 4 hours per day in order to keep the running costs to a minimum.

An assessment of the additional Sunday opening has shown that an additional 1396 customers came to the Morecambe VIC and spent an additional £465 (net).

The results for the additional Sundays are summarised as follows:

Trial periods	Total visitors	Net income	Running cost (staff and utilities)	Total deficit
April/May 2009	616 (4 days)	-£179	£389	-£210
October 2009	406 (4 days)	-£147	£389	-£242
November 2009	374 (5 days)	-£139	£487	-£348
Totals	1396 (13 days)	-£465	£1,266	-£801

By comparison the Mondays following the additional Sunday openings in each period were broadly comparable in terms of visitor numbers and income.

Two key conclusions from the pilot are:

- Opening in the spring period appears to have been the most successful, with an average of over 150 visitors per day.
- In contrast, the November figures suggest that there is limited demand at that time of year. This confirms the view that demand during winter months would be too low to justify extending 7 day opening to an all-year basis

3.0 Details of Consultation

The view of the Morecambe VIC staff involved with the trial period was that the additional opening on spring Sundays was worthwhile but that autumn Sundays were quiet days.

The Chairman of the Morecambe Hotels and Tourism Association has commented that any additional opening of the VIC would be beneficial to tourism in the resort.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

With regard to the options below, it should be noted that the trial period used a reduced level of staffing and restricted Sunday opening to just 4 hours, to minimise the cost of the trial. This has been sufficient to evaluate levels of demand for Sunday opening, but is not a sustainable mode of operation for the future as it has depended strongly on the willingness of one member of staff to work these additional hours and has also caused some confusion to the public about VIC opening hours.

The options below therefore all assume that additional Sundays are operated on "normal" Sunday opening hours (10am to 4 pm) and staffing, and this has been taken into account in the costings

Option 1 - Revert to the previous pattern of closing the Morecambe VIC on Sundays during autumn and spring i.e. closing for every Sunday except Bank Holidays between the start of October and the end of May. This would offer a saving of £1,900 from the existing overtime budget that has not been fully utilised in past years and was temporarily kept at the current level pending the outcome of the trial.

Option 2 – Open for the additional spring period only, resulting in the VIC opening on Sundays for a continuous period from April to the end of September. This includes an average of 7 additional Sundays excluding Easter and May bank holidays which the VIC currently opens. The additional cost of £1,200 would be part offset by £300 income. The balance of £900 would need to be met from the overtime budget. This would still leave the potential for a further saving of £1,000 from the overtime budget. This will be monitored and re-assessed during the 2011/12 budget process.

Option 3 - Open for additional Sundays for the spring period, as for option 2, plus October. (The trial period showed that there is limited demand in November). This would give an average of 12 additional Sundays in the spring and autumn. The additional cost of £1,700 would be part offset by £500 income. The balance of £1,200 would need to be met from the overtime budget. This would still leave the potential for a saving of £700 from the overtime budget. This will be monitored and re-assessed during the 2011/12 budget process.

Note: At present there is no business case for 7 day opening all year round and it could not be funded from existing budgets, so this is not presented as an option.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

The preferred option is option 2 as this would allow Morecambe VIC to be open for 7 days per week from Easter to the end of September. These are the 6 busiest months for dealing directly with the public (excluding October half term which will remain closed on Sundays). This option partly meets the request made at the Cabinet and MPs Liaison Group while also keeping the additional cost to approximately £900, which can be met from the existing overtime budget.

6.0 Conclusion

Option 2, opening Morecambe VIC for 7 days per week for the 6 busiest months of the year, will provide an enhanced service that was requested at the Cabinet and MPs liaison meeting in the spring of 2008. There is not a business case for keeping the Morecambe VIC open for more Sundays in the autumn/winter half of the year.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Tourism Strategy for Morecambe, Lancaster and the Lune Valley, 2006 – 2010. Objective 3 is, "To provide high quality visitor services which exceed customer expectations". Opening for additional days will help to meet the target of increasing visitor enquiries by 5% annually.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It should be noted that any reference within this report to the overtime budget relates to a budget that has, in recent years, not been fully utilised. During the 2009/10 budget process, and in conjunction with the original MVIC Sunday opening report (April 2009) the decision was made not to reduce this budget and re-assess pending the outcome of the trial. This ensured some security during the trial period in the event that income was not achieved. There is still potential within all three options to achieve a saving from this budget; this will be monitored and re-assessed as part of the revised 2011/12 budget process.

For the trial period, costs were minimised by restricting opening hours on the additional Sundays to 4 hours each day, requiring only 2 members of staff (one VIC Assistant who worked for 5 hours to cover opening and closing and 1 Casual Assistant who worked for 4). The cost to the service of opening for 13 additional out-of-season Sundays was £800. This cost has been met from the overtime budget.

If additional Sunday opening is to be repeated, it is suggested that the opening hours revert to the same as other Sundays (10 am to 4 pm) to avoid confusion to the public. This would require staffing to increase to one VIC Assistant and 2 Casual Assistants (all for 6 hours) at a cost of £1,100 plus utilities of £100. The 7 additional Sundays would total £1,200 and would be part offset by £300 additional net income, based on an average from the 4 day spring trial.

The net cost of option 2 would therefore be approximately £900 per year which could be met from the existing VIC overtime budget leaving scope for further savings of £1,000.

The table below details the 3 options and the implications of each:

	Additional Income	Additional Expenditure	Overtime budget savings	Total surplus
Option 1	0	£0	-£1,900	-£1,900
Option 2	-£300	£1,200	-£1,900	-£1,000
Option 3	-£500	£1,700	-£1,900	-£700

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

ICMD Report, April 2009

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