



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

TOPIC – CAPITAL FUNDING FOR THE REFURBISHMENT OF WINCHESTER TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Corporate Director (Governance), the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Principal Scrutiny Committee and all Members of the relevant Scrutiny Panel (individual Ward Members are consulted separately where appropriate). In addition, all Members are notified.

Five or more of these consulted Members can require that the matter be referred to Cabinet for determination.

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SUMMARY

- Winchester Tourist Information Centre is one of the leading centres in the South East. With around 220,000 personal customers each year, it is a popular facility and its service standards are highly regarded.
- £50,000 was allocated in the capital programme for 2008/09 (CAB1607, February 2008) for an internal refurbishment of the centre.
- The Cultural Services Business Plan for 2008/2009 – which was seen and approved by all Members as part of the corporate business planning cycle - includes the target to *'refurbish the tourist information centre during the winter of 2009 to enhance customer service and increase opportunities for revenue generation'*.

- Members are therefore asked to approve the release of the capital funding allocation of £50,000, to enable the works to take place during March. This will ensure the centre is fully operational in time for the busy visitor season.
- During the refurbishment, a scaled down tourist information centre (TIC) operation could be accommodated in the Courtyard Café.

Corporate Strategy Reference:

A modern and efficient council: the refurbishment will improve look and feel of the TIC, and enhance customer service and choice. It will also enable the TIC to operate in a more business-like fashion, in terms of income generation to offset running costs at a time when budgets are very constrained.

Economic prosperity: the experience of customers visiting the TIC influences their impression of the Winchester District as a visitor destination, which can in turn trigger additional activity and spending by customers leaving the TIC.

DECISION

To approve the release under Finance Procedure Rule 6.4 of £50,000 from pre-allocated capital funds, to finance the refurbishment of Winchester Tourist Information Centre.

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The need to refurbish Winchester Tourist Information Centre is based on the following four considerations:

- a) income levels have plateau-ed in recent years, and although staff are keen to increase revenue a more sophisticated approach to merchandising is required if this is to be achieved, requiring specialist display and storage units;
- b) the last refurbishment took place over 15 years ago and the wear and tear on the décor is now showing: two recent mystery shopping reports have highlighted the need for further investment in the centre;
- c) fixtures and fittings are starting to deteriorate, with several small accidents to staff which is raising health and safety concerns and is bad for morale;
- d) the layout is not conducive to the best customer service, nor for security of shop stock.

During the recent round of scrutiny panel meetings at which budget options for 2009/10 were presented, Members of the Local Economy panel agreed that the option to remove the TIC closure from the list of options be recommended to

Cabinet. Instead, they proposed that officers seek ways to generate additional income at the TIC on sales and services. Having discussed options for income generation with sector colleagues and Tourism South East, merchandising is considered to be the main area of opportunity for Winchester TIC. The current layout and style of display fittings are barriers to achieving this.

Other TICs which have been refurbished have reported increases in retail performance of up to 20%. The TIC shop currently generates around £20,000 pa profit on the sales of goods and publications. There is good scope to grow this figure, and merchandising advice has already been taken from Hampshire County Council's retail consultant.

Whilst the option exists not to refurbish the TIC, the project has already been deferred for two years and units and carpet are already becoming unserviceable and unsightly.

The risks of not refurbishing include:

- a) diminishing customer spend at the TIC;
- b) low staff morale;
- c) minor staff or customer injuries, and
- d) a poor customer impression of Winchester as a visitor destination.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

n/a

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

n/a

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

£50,000 in total from pre-allocated capital funds, as detailed above.

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision

12/12/08

Councillor Frederick Allgood – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency