

Committee: Finance and Administration

Agenda Item

Date: 31 January 2008

9A

Title: Transfer of Saffron Walden Tourist
Information Centre to Saffron Walden
Town Council

Author: Richard Auty, Head of Community
Engagement

Item for
decision?

01799 510500

Summary

- This report explains the proposals agreed by officers from Uttlesford District Council and Saffron Walden Town Council over the transfer of the Tourist Information Centre. The proposal is that the town council will take over the running of the TIC with its current complement of staff and in its current location. With the committee's approval, officers can begin the work necessary to bring that transfer to fruition and ensure there is no break in service from a public point of view.

Recommendations

- That the committee agrees the grant payable to the town council over a three-year period
- That the committee agrees to withdraw the at risk notices issued to TIC staff following the approval of the transfer at a special meeting of the Town Council on February 6
- That the committee instructs the Head of Community Engagement, Assistant Chief Executive, Acting Chief Finance Officer and Interim Head of HR to undertake a TUPE transfer process with a view to completing the transfer by March 31
- That the committee delegates authority to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Chairman of Finance and Administration Committee to ensure all necessary negotiations, legal obligations and paperwork is completed

Background Papers

None

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Impact

Communication/Consultation	TIC staff are being kept fully apprised of developments. Regular supply of information to local media. Further consultation with affected staff will be necessary as part of TUPE process
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	The proposals will help the council meet the projected £1.8 million deficit in the 08/09 General Fund
Human Rights	None specific
Legal implications	TUPE transfer is a legally binding agreement
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	Transfer of four members of staff (three FTEs) and four paid casuals to the town council. Eight volunteers would also be free to continue their valuable role.

Situation

- 1 A Tourist Information service has existed in Saffron Walden for 30 years. The current location on the Market Square sees 86,000 visitors a year.
- 2 Its functions are many and varied, but key among them are:
 - Supplying local public transport information, and onward travel information for tourists
 - Promotion of the district at exhibitions (organised for individuals and tour organisers)
 - Maintaining stocks of the Visitor Guide at Stansted Airport to encourage tourists to stay longer in the district
 - Supplying information on local events, including the production of the bi-monthly "What's On" publication
 - Acting as the main box office for Saffron Screen and other local events

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- Supporting and boosting the local economy by distributing the annual Uttlesford Visitor Guide to visitors, locals, and other TICs to promote the attractions and activities in the area, and to attract business for local accommodation establishments
 - Local accommodation booking service for Uttlesford, and book-a-bed-ahead (BABA) service for other areas of the UK
 - Advice for locals and tourists on Uttlesford attractions and leisure activities
 - Holiday information on other parts of the UK
 - Education, through the supply of information on the general history of the area, and through liaison with local partners such as the Blue Badge Guides
 - The compilation of a local clubs, organisations and societies list, to promote all leisure/hobby activities in the district, and to provide contacts for local charities/action groups
 - The sale of UDC recyclable kitchen waste and garden refuse sacks
 - The sale of Saffron Walden and Uttlesford books, DVDs and a wide range of souvenirs
 - The distribution of the SW Directory of shops/services
 - The provision of social/welfare information, eg availability of marriage guidance services, job centre locations, hospital transport information
 - The provision of all relevant information to new/prospective residents in Uttlesford
 - Information on activities and services for specific community groups, eg the elderly, children
- 3 In the current financial climate it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain non-statutory services and officers were therefore instructed by the Finance and Administration Committee earlier this month to enter into negotiations with Saffron Walden Town Council over the possibility of transferring the service.
- 4 At the same time, staff at the TIC were informed their posts were “at risk”.
- 5 Discussions with the town council have been extremely positive and have progressed quickly. There is a recognition from both authorities of the important role the TIC plays in the community and beyond, and there has been strong will on both sides to find a solution.
- 6 Therefore it is proposed that the town council will take on the running of the TIC from April 1, with the current level of staffing and in its current location. Should this approach be agreed by this committee, and at a special meeting of the town council on Wednesday, February 6, then subject to the necessary agreements being put in place the service can continue unabated.
- 7 The town council will meet the staffing costs (around £80,000). The district council will pay a grant to the town council over a period of three years towards administration costs:

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- 2008/09 £30,000
 - 2009/10 £20,000
 - 2010/11 £10,000
- 8 The district council will give the current IT equipment (PCs, phones, photocopier etc) to the town council. It will also continue to cover the cost of producing the bi-monthly What's On guide over the three year period (approximately £2,200 a year, which is already budgeted for.)
- 9 The district council's IT department will assist the town council by ensuring current phone and email links are diverted to the new number/address established by the town council.
- 10 The TIC will continue to sell garden waste bags for the district council if required.
- 11 TIC functions such as the Saffron Screen box office, ticket sales for local productions etc will be unchanged.
- 12 If the committee agrees to this proposal and instructs officers to proceed, then the service should be able to continue without any discernable change from a public point of view.
- 13 With the committee's agreement, officers would enter into negotiations for a TUPE transfer of all staff, with protected terms and conditions.
- 14 If the recommendations are not agreed, the district council would have to meet the cost of redundancy (up to £12,000 if no TIC staff are redeployed) plus the balance of the lease and reinstatement costs. There would also be a significant and detrimental impact on the town and district should the service cease to function.
- 15 The Acting Chief Finance Officer advises the district council can meet the three-year grant detailed above through currently available funds. He will be able to provide further information, should it be required, at the meeting.
- 16 **Risk Analysis**

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the TIC is unable to continue operating because the agreement is not approved by the district and/or town councils	2	4	There is willingness on all sides for the transfer to go ahead. The Town Council has said it can meet the costs of running the service and the District Council can meet the cost of the grant