



Report of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration and Tourism

Cabinet – 21 November 2019

Scrutiny Inquiry on Tourism Cabinet Member Response and Action Plan

Purpose:	To outline a response to the scrutiny recommendations and to present an action plan for agreement.
Policy Framework:	None
Consultation:	Legal, Finance, Access to Services
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The response as outlined in the report and related action plan be agreed.
Report Author:	Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Catherine Window

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The scrutiny report on Tourism was submitted to Cabinet on the 18 July 2019 after the Scrutiny Working Group completed a detailed inquiry. The scrutiny report is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 1.2 Having considered the contents of the scrutiny report, and specific recommendations made, advice to Cabinet on whether it should agree, or not agree, with each recommendation is detailed in this report.
- 1.3 Cabinet is also asked to consider, for each of the responses, any relevant policy commitments and any other relevant activity.

2.0 Response to Scrutiny Recommendations

Recommendation 1
<p>The Working Group was pleased to see how much hard work is being done by the Authority to promote tourism in the area. We feel that there is a lot more the Authority could do but recognise that this is restricted by the budget that has reduced drastically in recent years.</p>
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments: Destination Management Plan 2017-2020</p>
<p>Action already being undertaken: Over the last 3 years, we have been working towards a 50% reduction in budget. This has resulted in the closure of the Tourist Information Centre (2016) and the refocussing of activity in line with a digital strategy, which will increase more web visits, increase social media followers and engagement and capture additional segmented and profiled email addresses.</p>
<p>New actions following from the recommendation: Having just reviewed the Destination Management Plan (DMP), one of the recommendations is to ensure greater input from those Heads of Service whose service areas play an important role in the management of the destination. These will be invited to future steering group meetings.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Comments: Consider how a Tourism Strategy may also be introduced, working alongside the current DMP.</p>
<p>Recommendation is AGREED</p>

Recommendation 2
<p>We feel it is important to recognise the value of the natural environment to tourism and the economy and recommend that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Work on an off-road cycling network is brought forward and that money is found to fund the production of a cycling map for the area (estimated at £50,000, mostly in legal fees).Consideration is given to making more use of volunteers to help maintain our environmental assets such as footpaths, steps etc. This is a valuable resource for the Authority and can be a great learning and social experience for volunteers.
<p>Relevant Policy Commitments: Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity Council's Section 6 Biodiversity Plan (and associated Corporate</p>

Biodiversity Action Plan)
Green Infrastructure Strategy
Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

The Council has a duty under the Environment (Wales) Act to 'maintain and enhance biodiversity' and to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'. Each Council function/Service Area should now be considering where and how they can achieve this through their service/business plans. The Corporate Biodiversity working group will provide a vehicle for raising awareness and encouraging best practice.

The natural environment plays an important role in tourism and consistently comes up as one of the main reasons why people visit our area. As such, sustainability is one of the four key priorities in the Destination Management Plan and the Tourism Team encourages responsible tourism throughout our marketing activity, e.g. recycling, reducing ecological footprint, sustainable transport, walking/cycling, using local produce, etc.

New actions following from the recommendation:

In response to the specific recommendations:

a) off-road cycling network and map:

We've previously investigated this but Active Travel money cannot be used for non-urban routes.

The possibility of a Gower off-road cycle route is at early stages of consideration. This project would develop and promote a network of bridleways as a way of enjoying the countryside by bike. It would enable visitors to explore large areas of Gower AONB by bicycle and cross much of the landscape including the high points of all the major hills. There would however be some unavoidable short road sections. It is estimated the cost of the initial phases including physical works, legal processes, landowner compensation, etc. would cost £26,000. There is currently no budget available for such works, so grant funding will need to be identified, but it unlikely to cover full costs and future management implications.

b) volunteers to help maintain environmental assets

The Council already uses volunteers, for example the Ramblers, for such purposes. However, active, committed volunteers are only one part of a solution to meeting the demands of the service currently, which also includes equipment, supervision, training and transport costs. Even if the number of volunteers and volunteer days was doubled, the impact on the amount of maintenance needed would be

minimal and so we are not in a position to increase our responsibilities as a result. However, the Service is in the process of appointing a Welsh Government funded, volunteer coordinator, to increase the number of volunteer projects undertaken and we welcome the support to promote this, within the context of the information above.

Cabinet Member Comments: Welcome the suggestions and enthusiasm for a sustainable solution to developing the network but funding will need to be identified first.

Recommendation is **Partly Agreed** to investigate grant funding for the network and increase the recruitment of volunteers.

Recommendation 3

The Working Group would like to see an improvement in signage especially in Gower. Many signs are missing or in need of repair. The Authority has a statutory duty to signpost footpaths and bridle paths and we would like people to be made aware that if the Department is informed of any signage issues for these areas they will rectify them.

Relevant Policy Commitments:
Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

Regarding different signage:

Highways signage – a comprehensive audit was conducted a few years ago in partnership with Highways. Findings were forwarded to maintenance team for repairs / replacement. Some improvements still outstanding due to lack of budget to address all issues.

Footpaths/bridleways signage – it is a statutory duty of the Council's Countryside Access Team to rectify any signage issues with footpaths and bridleways. However signage is only appropriate where the footpath or bridleway is fully accessible, i.e. maintained in a good condition. Due to reduced maintenance budget and grant availability the number of footpaths and bridleways the Council is able to maintain in a good condition is decreasing every year.

Waymarks Fingerposts – an audit was conducted 2 years ago at various Council-run beaches and a rolling programme is in place to repair/replace the wooden fingerposts on the seafront as and when budget becomes available. Langland Bay was completed this year and Caswell is to follow.

Statutory Signage – e.g. dog ban, water quality, bye-laws, restrictions, planning notices, etc.

Promotional / Interpretation Signage – e.g. Blue Flags, Lobster Campaign, Smoke-free Beaches, safety messages, etc.

Signage ‘clutter’ is a recurring issue across the destination, however it becomes more evident in the traditional hotspots such as Port Eynon for example, where a lot of different signs have been erected over the years but not removed (where relevant) or maintained (where needed). This is mainly due to the fact that signage, (as outlined above) has varying functions across different services and each with reduced or zero resources to apply a coordinated approach to ongoing maintenance or replacement.

New actions following from the recommendation:

Await the findings of the 2019 visitor and trade surveys to see if there are issues with highways signage.

Highways signage: consider another strategic audit for 2020 if resources could be ring-fenced for any identified improvements and repairs.

Consider a site-specific, co-ordinated approach to signage between the various Council teams and allocate responsibility/pool resources for on-going maintenance.

Cabinet Member Comments:

Consider funding application and opportunity for policy commitments to resource signage improvement.

Recommendation is **AGREED subject to budget constraints**

Recommendation 4

We are concerned about funding post Brexit and recommend that a piece of work is undertaken to identify future grant funding possibilities.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Explore innovative funding and investment strategies and borrow prudently to support the City Deal, only when it is right to do so.

Implement a joined up approach to all public expenditure and the use of buildings and resources to ensure we can continue to do more with less and can seek the wider and more imaginative community use of public assets, such as Council-owned buildings.

Continue to explore collaborative and innovative ways in which local

services can be financed and delivered most efficiently, and how the value of council assets can be maximised.

Action already being undertaken:

The Economic Development and External Funding Team subscribes to an online grants database and continually monitors available grant and loan funding opportunities.

There is a need for continued engagement with Welsh Government to influence the shape of tourism funding post Brexit, and to explore partnership funding models where other organisations may be in a better position to bid for funding but with the backing and support of the Council. There is some success already with this approach, e.g. Hafod Copperworks' Musgrave Engine House project working with Swansea University and Friends of Hafod-Morfa Copperworks. External funding from EU sources has been decreasing as a percentage of overall external funding secured in recent years.

New actions following from the recommendation:

In any new DMP action plan, ED&EFT to review actions and identify potential funding streams.

Continue engagement with Welsh Government to influence shape of tourism funding post Brexit.

Explore potential partnership funding models for future projects.

Cabinet Member Comments:

The City Deal and regeneration of Hafod Copperworks remain a key priority for the Council in improving economic wellbeing and tourism in the area.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 5

We feel that the Authority should look at good practice from other areas regarding the marketing of accommodation in Swansea.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

The accommodation sector is part of a destination's overall tourism offer and is intrinsically linked to other elements such as activities,

attractions, food & drinks and major events.

Our marketing campaigns focus on promoting the destination as a whole rather than just the accommodation sector.

However, we do have a comprehensive 'Where To Stay' section on the official tourism website with 56 listed private sector accommodation providers (e.g. hotels, B&Bs, hostels, caravan and camping sites, etc.). These are businesses/organisations who buy into a yearly marketing package with the Council, i.e. Visit Swansea Bay Marketing Partners.

Our current requirement is that all accommodation operators on the tourism website must be inspected and graded/listed with either VisitWales or The AA.

Although this provides reassurance to visitors and a level of protection for the Council in case of a complaint, this also restricts the number of businesses that can be recruited as Marketing Partners. It also doesn't reflect the way visitors now search for accommodation i.e. they search for brands, recommendations and increasingly, through the sharing economy.

Some operators, whether graded or not, choose to promote their property through other, unregulated sharing economy networks such as Airbnb or local private websites (e.g. gower.com).

We already undertake regular benchmarking exercises to assess how other comparable destinations market themselves and also exchange good practice e.g. through BRADA (British Resorts and Destinations Association) of which we are members.

A few years ago, we also worked with Visit Wales in appointing a consultancy to undertake an Accommodation Demand Study. This work has informed some of the most recent hotel developments in the City Centre.

STEAM figures and occupancy figures are also a good benchmark to determine how Swansea compares to the Welsh average and other destinations. Swansea occupancy figures for serviced accommodation, for example, are consistently higher than the Wales average and the STEAM figures demonstrate continuous growth.

Regular visitor surveys give us an insight into who our visitors are, where they come from, where they stay, how they booked their holiday, how much they spent, whether they are satisfied with their visit and likely to visit again and/or recommend us to others. We are able to use this intelligence to target our marketing activity more effectively.

We are also planning a tourism trade survey for this Autumn to benchmark destination performance against the 2012 findings. Questions revolve mainly around destination management issues.

New actions following from the recommendation:

Research the arrangements that other LAs in Wales have with their businesses who want to promote their services with them.

Review our current requirement to only accept graded properties on our tourism website and consider a policy statement for this.

Report the findings of the visitor and trade surveys to relevant Cabinet Members and the DMP Steering Group.

Cabinet Member Comments:

We welcome a review of the current approach across Wales and to receiving a report as to how changes would impact upon the destination marketing plans in the future.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Authority explores introducing an information and availability phone line for holiday accommodation in the area. If this includes a booking system, and commission is charged, it could pay for itself.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

In 2016, due to financial cuts, the Council made the decision to close the Tourist Information Centre; a trend reflected across Wales and England over recent years. The TIC acted as a one-stop shop for visitors seeking information about the area and offered an accommodation booking service in return for a small fee. However, demand for this service reduced as online bookings increased. Local accommodation providers were also reluctant to pay a nominal commission / booking fee to the TIC.

The general shift towards the Internet paved the way for the digital transformation of our services and substantial investment in www.visitswanseabay.com. We refocussed our marketing a number of years ago when we ceased the production of a printed holiday guide and its 'mailed' distribution via a distribution agency. Our digital strategy now strongly focuses on increasing web visits and social media followers, stimulating online engagement as well as capturing

segmented and profiled email addresses for use in future marketing activity.

Today, businesses are far more digitally advanced than ever before and most offer online booking facilities on their website or via third party sites.

Via Visitswanseabay.com, we also offer Partners the chance to upload their 'Late Availability' on the tourism website to fulfil any last-minute vacancies.

New actions following from the recommendation:

None - this is a strategy most LAs are following across Wales, as is Visit Wales. We will continue to promote all aspects of the destination online and keep abreast of the latest digital developments.

Cabinet Member Comments:

The ongoing transformation and development of the service is in response to customer behaviour and industry trends. Retaining adequate level of resources is the current priority in order to ensure the sustainability of the service and, consequently, the sector.

Recommendation is **NOT AGREED**

Recommendation 7

We would like to see the Authority make use of the membership of national organisations to market eco-tourism in the area such as National Trust, RSPB etc.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Corporate Priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's Natural Resources and Biodiversity

Council's Section 6 Biodiversity Plan (and associated Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan)

Green Infrastructure Strategy

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

Eco-tourism is not a market we are in a position to currently proactively promote as outlined above. Resources are stretched and our focus is on driving commercial partnerships. However, it forms part of our marketing campaigns in the sense that we always encourage our visitors to follow responsible tourism principles and to respect the natural environment - appealing to those that favour active, outdoors

pursuits.

We are witnessing businesses becoming increasingly environmentally conscious and aware, and we signpost operators to organisations such as WRAP, Green Key, BayTrans, Swansea Bay Good Food Circle (local produce) etc. in order to reduce their ecological footprint.

New actions following from the recommendation:

Continue to develop our own visitor databases to target throughout the year, as we don't have access to membership databases, such as NT, due to GDPR reasons.

Consider potential advertising with these membership organisations in the future, should the right opportunities arise.

Invite these organisations to future destination management stakeholder events to further promote their services and their role in eco-tourism.

Cabinet Member Comments:

We remain committed to embedding sustainability and protection of the environment in all our priorities and service plans and will continue to do so as much as possible.

Recommendation is **NOT AGREED**

Recommendation 8

We feel that there needs to be a 'whole council' approach to supporting big events in Swansea. Departments such as Refuse and Street Cleansing need to work with the Tourism team to ensure events run smoothly and everything is cleaned up afterwards.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

Events are a key driver of Tourism. The Special Events Team currently works closely with several other Council departments / teams in order to deliver safe and enjoyable events across the City and County. These include Council organised events and those run by the private sector.

For example:

Highways – road closures, traffic plans, event parking, enforcement, Park & Ride

Parks & Cleansing – event site preparation & reparation; litter collection, recycling

Public Health – food safety, event licensing

Legal – events contracts and indemnities

Communications – corporate press and social media support

Health & Safety – emergency management and contingency planning

Cultural Services Marketing & Tourism team undertake the event marketing activity to residents and visitors.

New actions following from the recommendation:

That the Special Events Team within Cultural Services acts as the first and single point of contact for events and event organisers in relation to the delivery of events and event management enquiries. The delivery of events in public spaces is a cross cutting activity involving all relevant departments as part of our ongoing ability to deliver on the Council's priority of transforming our economy and infrastructure, inclusion and wellbeing factors.

Endeavouring to ensure that associated new developments or major events take into account sustainable development principles where possible and, where feasible, mitigating actions are developed regarding sustainability.

Cabinet Member Comments:

A systematic approach for the whole council, for internal and externally provided events is the preferred operating model.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 9

We would like the Authority to consider ring-fencing a percentage of receipts from car parks to maintain the local destination, including maintaining and cleaning public facilities, etc.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

The Council adopts an approach where all income is taken into

account when setting directorate and service budgets and as such is built into the medium term financial plan.

Any ring-fencing of income from car parks would have to take place as part of a budget proposal and offset by a compensatory additional budget allocation into the car parks budget.

Alternatively Council could decide as part of the budget process to allocate additional finding to any priority area as part of its annual budget setting process

New actions following from the recommendation:

A coordinated approach to events and resource setting as above, will assist in ensuring a sustainable provision. We will continue to monitor the situation, opportunities and risks, via the Destination Management Plan delivery and sub groups and service planning procedures.

Cabinet Member Comments:

We will continue to consider the best opportunities for income, support mechanisms and sustainability of our services but recognise they are already interdependent and connected in terms of provision, cost and reliance on income. We cannot agree this at present as it would affect the ability of one part of the Directorate to function, in favour of another, so further work would be required on this as part of budget setting and analysis of impact.

Recommendation is **NOT AGREED**

Recommendation 10

We would like marketing videos to show more of what people can do and see if they visit Swansea, such as walking/cycling in Gower and promotion of cultural tourism. We would also like to see more use of 'viral' types of advertising that have proved effective in the past and we would like to see more use of sites with large footfall throughout Swansea to promote/advertise tourism in the area, such as the Market and Quadrant Bus Station.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

Our marketing activity targets potential visitors from outside Wales, therefore it is not always visible to Swansea residents. We already have a range of promotional videos produced to market the destination, which can be viewed on our YouTube channel at:

www.youtube.com/user/visitswanseabayTV

Our videos are produced in a number of formats so that they can become viral, shared by our partners and are often produced in such a way that they can have a number of different uses.

These videos are promoted online via the tourism website, social media and email marketing to our targeted audiences. This is one of many channels we use to promote the 130 private sector Partners, who have signed up to yearly marketing packages with us.

Our digital content focusses on the main reasons why people visit Swansea Bay, which are the key findings of our visitor survey, i.e. beaches, natural landscape and our coastline.

New actions following from the recommendation:

New videos are already planned for 2020 'Year of the Great Outdoors' however, a strong commitment to continue with this strategy for 2021 and beyond will be vital as Tourism is the only section within the Council, which proactively place-markets the destination.

Cabinet Member Comments:

The digital transformation of the team is reaping benefits and the increasing number of users of these platforms, justifies recent, albeit tough decisions we have had to make. It is critical that the digital content is continually refreshed to continue to be able to target the relevant markets.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 11

Members of the Working Group are happy to promote tourism in Swansea through social media, by posting videos and tweeting links etc. We suggest all councillors are contacted, to ask if they will do the same.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Destination Management Plan 2017-2020

Action already being undertaken:

We have existing channels that both businesses and consumers follow to receive information, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, e-newsletters, etc.

We post regular updates and generate a high level of engagement with

our audiences.

New actions following from the recommendation:

To identify and share with all members the digital channels they can follow and sign up to, so they can assist in the promotion of the destination.

Cabinet Member Comments:

I welcome this opportunity for members to share the good work of the team amongst their own networks and help to extend the reach of the campaigns.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

Recommendation 12

We feel that scrutiny needs to look at this topic in more detail than can be done in a one-off working group. We will therefore recommend to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that Tourism is considered as a future scrutiny inquiry topic.

Relevant Policy Commitments:

Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Destination Management Plan 2017-2020
Welsh Government 'Partnership for Growth': Strategy for Tourism 2013-2020

Action already being undertaken:

We have presented to scrutiny inquiries in 2014 and 2019 and welcome any further opportunities to raise the profile of Tourism and its importance to the local economy, Council priorities, Welsh Government priorities and the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

New actions following from the recommendation:

Whilst we would be happy to be part of a future topic, the real challenge lies in ensuring that a tourism strategy for the destination is developed and integrated alongside other council strategies and policies. An ideal starting point for this, at a time when the national strategy is being reviewed, is to present the work of the tourism team to the Policy Development Committee (PDC).

Cabinet Member Comments:

Tourism is a vital part of our employment and resident offer, as well as a generator of income and investment from visitors and businesses.

We are committed to ensuring it continues to thrive and the work of the council in promoting this is recognised and supported accordingly, with local, regional and national stakeholder partnerships in place.

Recommendation is AGREED

2.1 An action plan for the agreed recommendations is attached as **Appendix B**.

3. Equality and Engagement Implications

3.1 A full EIA report will be produced following the review of the current DMP

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications with this report

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no specific financial implications for this report

Background Papers:

Destination Management Plan 2017-20 available at www.swansea.gov.uk/dmp

Appendices

Appendix A – Original Scrutiny Report

Appendix B – Proposed Cabinet Action Plan