

# **Provision of Local Information Centres in Area West (Executive Decision)**

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## **Purpose of the Report**

For members to consider the future arrangements for supporting the provision of local and tourist information in the 3 market towns.

## **Public Interest**

Local Information Centres provide a wealth of useful information to both residents and visitors. SSSC provides an annual grant towards their running costs to ensure the continuation of the service.

## **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

1. Agree, in principle, supporting Ilminster and Crewkerne Local Information Centres at the current SLA arrangement for 2017/18;
2. Bring Chard TIC in line by reducing the SLA sum to £500 per year;
3. Agree to carry forward the balance of £2500 from the 2016/2017 Service Level Agreement with Chard Town Council, to be paid subject to the following conditions:
  - The new website promotes Chard's events, activities, leisure facilities, tourist attractions in and around the town and visitor related businesses
  - The work is completed by September 2017

## **Background**

In March 2010, the grants for all the Local and Tourist Information Centres, not operated by SSSC, were moved from the SSSC Tourism budget to Area Committees. At that time Chard was the only town with a designated Tourist Information Centre registered with Enjoy England, which meant it had a dedicated paid member of staff working solely on tourism. The other towns have Local information Centres, which are predominantly staffed by volunteers and generally have shorter opening hours.

As Chard Town Council is registered as a Tourist Information Centre, as opposed to a Local Information Centre, their grant was £5,000 per year, whereas all the Local Information Centres in South Somerset received £500 per year. Each year since, the same level of funding has been awarded to each of the centres in Area West.

## **Provision of services**

Each town has a slightly different arrangement for delivering local and tourist information.

**Chard TIC** is located inside the Guild Hall and is run by Chard Town Council. The service is no longer staffed by a dedicated Tourism Officer instead it is staffed by a few volunteers and the staff at the main Guild Hall reception desk. The facility provides:

- A number of leaflet racks and posters providing information about activities, services and events happening in and around the town
- Reception staff can also use the Internet to answer enquiries

**Crewkerne's LIC** is located in the large foyer area of Crewkerne Town Hall alongside the SSDC Community Office. The facility provides:

- A number of leaflet racks providing a wealth of information about the town & surrounding area, South Somerset and nearby attractions further afield in Somerset, Dorset and Devon
- Desk and computer with internet access regularly staffed by volunteers
- Crewkerne LIC website – [www.aboutcrewkerne.co.uk](http://www.aboutcrewkerne.co.uk)
- Facebook page with over 1000 followers
- Twitter account with 430 followers

**Iminster LIC** is run by Iminster Tourism, a small constituted community organisation. The facility is located just inside the door of the Iminster Arts Centre and includes:

- Some leaflet racks and a small table for leaflets
- A part-time volunteer located at the main Arts Centre reception desk to answer queries in the morning during the main tourist season
- Iminster LIC works in partnership with Iminster Forum to deliver a number of projects that enhance the service, this includes the [www.visitilminster.co.uk](http://www.visitilminster.co.uk) a Visit Iminster brochure and numerous local walks leaflets

## Service Level Agreements

Each facility has had a Service Level Agreement with Area West Development since 2010. As part of that Service Level Agreement the numbers of enquiries dealt with by the office are recorded over the year. The table below provides detail on the number of enquiries each office dealt with from April 2015 to end of March 2016:

	<b>Chard</b>	<b>Crewkerne</b>	<b>Iminster</b>
Opening times	9:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Thursday, 9:00am to 4:30pm Friday, 9:00am to 1:00pm Saturday	9:00am to 3:30pm Monday to Friday. Closed 1:00pm on Thursday. 10:00am to 12noon 3 <sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month	10:00am to 1:00pm Monday to Saturday from 1 <sup>st</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> October
Number of visitors through the door	3186	4389	Estimated 5000
Number of tourism enquiries in person	3186	4389	Estimated 2500
By email	Not applicable	417	Not applicable
By telephone	267	84	Estimated 100
By letter	2	16	10
Total enquiries	3455	4906	Estimated 7600

As Chard no longer employs a dedicated Tourism Officer and the number of enquiries received are less than Crewkerne, it is recommended that future annual awards to Chard are reduced and brought in line with the other LIC services across South Somerset.

As Chard is the only town in Area West without a dedicated website promoting the town to visitors and residents, it was agreed that as part of the Service Level Agreement for 2016/17 Chard Town Council should spend 50% of their £5,000 allocation on a new website. That website would give residents and visitors information about the town and the surrounding area, including its attractions, local events and activities and relevant visitor businesses. Work is currently underway to progress this work and it should be complete later in the year.

### **Financial Implications**

The £2,500 already allocated through the Service Level Agreement will be carried forward to the 2017/18 grants budget.

Members confirm in principle that they wish to support all 3 LICs with an SLA and payment of £500 towards running costs for 2017/18.

### **Council Plan Implications**

Working in partnership with the 3 tourism services helps SSDC address the Economy focus of the SSDC Council Plan:

- Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people to South Somerset

Also helps address the Health and Communities focus of the plan by promoting local facilities, which:

- Help people live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport and healthy lifestyle facilities and activities

### **Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications**

All 3 Local Centres provide information on public transport, which enables people to reduce their carbon footprint.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

Each centre is committed.

### **Background Papers**

None

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