

REPORT TO: Place Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting: 09 March 2017

REPORT TO: Executive
Date of Meeting: 14 March 2017

REPORT TO: Full Council
Date of Meeting: 25 April 2017

Report of: Tourism & Sport Manager
Title: Development of a New Brand – Visit Exeter

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive and Council in relation to budget

1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 To report on work undertaken to establish a new brand for Exeter - Visit Exeter - to increase the number of people who visit the city for a day visit, overnight leisure break, a business trip and a group visit.
- 1.2 To update on the development of marketing activity under the newly developed brand – Visit Exeter.

2 Recommendations:

- 2.1 That Place Scrutiny support the adoption of the Visit Exeter brand.
- 2.2 That Place Scrutiny support marketing activity, as listed in this report.
- 2.3 Executive to recommend to Council that all projected additional income via Visit Exeter membership sales (estimated £82,500) is ring-fenced for tourism marketing spend.

3 Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 To enable the City Council to proactively promote the city to increase the number of visitors to city, and to increase visitor spend.
- 3.2 To raise the profile of the city within the UK and overseas, as a vibrant, culturally modern visitor destination.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources.

- 4.1 The existing tourism marketing budget of £65,650 will be used to deliver activity within this report. Existing members of staff, 2 FTE's are in addition to this budget.

- 4.2 Additional income will be generated through the development of annual membership and sponsorship packages for businesses to buy into. It is estimated that an additional £82,500 will be generated to support marketing activity within this report. 100% of income achieved will be used for marketing activity and will not channelled towards covering overheads. Only income that is generated will be reinvested back into tourism marketing of the city e.g. If we generate only £50k of membership income, we will only spend that £50k. As this is an annual membership we will know in April what we have to spend for the following year.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 The additional income and proposed ring-fencing is noted. If approved the budgets will be adjusted to reflect the proposal.

6. What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 Section 144 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives Local Authorities power to encourage persons, by advertisement or otherwise, to visit their area for recreation, for health purposes or to hold conferences, trade fairs and exhibitions in their area.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

- 7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Background

- 8.1 Until August 2016, Exeter was marketed under the Heart of Devon Tourism Partnership, an external limited company, with Exeter City Council providing support in the form of an annual grant (£35,000) and staff. The company was set up as an independent partnership of private sector organisations/associations and Exeter City Council, to promote Exeter and the wider sub-region of East Devon, Mid Devon and parts of Teignbridge. However, no financial support was provided from neighbouring Local Authorities, all work was undertaken by staff from Exeter City Council. It was at this time, Exeter City Council withdrew its support to the Heart of Devon Tourism Partnership.
- 8.2 September 2016, the Heart of Devon Tourism Partnership formally merged with Visit South Devon, and Exeter City Council took on the responsibility of promoting the city. The Visit Exeter website www.visitexeter.com was extracted from www.heartofdevon.com where it was previously a sub-website and Exeter City Council took the responsibility of this website and associated social media accounts.
- 8.3 With recent developments in Exeter including the opening of Queen St Dining, the regeneration of the Bus Station site and Exeter hosting major events including Rugby World Cup 2015 and Radio 1's Big Weekend; the City Council is well placed to increase the number of visitors to the city.
- 8.4 The aim of Visit Exeter is to increase the profile of Exeter with the UK and overseas and to increase the number of people visiting the city, by positioning the city as a high quality cultural visitor destination, to rival similar UK competitors.

9 Research to develop a new brand

9.1 September 2016, the City Council commissioned Power Marketing to undertake national research to aid us to develop the Visit Exeter brand, the results of the research can be viewed in **Appendix 1**. In Summary:

- Exeter is mainly viewed as an historic city, which is easy to get around and a good base for exploring the South West. This fits comfortably with their key requirements that respondents look for when considering a short break in the UK
- Exeter scores low on perception as a stylish and vibrant city. However, it would appear that a lack of knowledge (which can be addressed through marketing communications) rather than a perception accounts for low scores
- There is a perception that Exeter is “too far away” for a day trip or a weekend break. This linked to the perceived (and experienced) barriers of congestion and expensive parking add to the view by some that it is “difficult to get to”
- The range of cuisines and restaurants appear to have high awareness (along with the Cathedral, historic buildings and the University) possibly indicative of the new developments at the Guildhall and at Princesshay
- Cultural assets appear to be less well known

9.2 The results of the above research and research undertaken by Visit Devon and Visit England has been used to develop marketing activity to promote Exeter within the South West region, throughout the rest of the UK and overseas to increase both day and overnight visitors to the area with a focus on increasing visitor spend, business and group visits.

9.3 The results of the Visit Exeter research have been shared with Exeter BID, the Exeter Cultural Partnership and the Exeter business community so that they can use the results to help inform their marketing activity and to improve their product offering to attract more visitors, especially overnight stays.

9.4 BelieveIn, who are based in Exeter, were appointed to develop the Visit Exeter brand using the results of the research developed through Power Marketing and research through Visit Devon and Visit England, which can be viewed in **Appendix 2**. Two focus groups were held autumn 2016 with businesses located in Exeter to gather independent views on how the city should be promoted and their perceptions of the city.

9.5 BelieveIn also developed the Exeter BID brand, due to this, it was sensible to use the same company to develop the Visit Exeter brand due to the extent of work already undertaken to develop the Exeter BID brand.

10 Launching the Brand

10.1 Local launch

The launch of the Visit Exeter brand will take place at RAMM, an inspirational space and a showcase for the city, during English Tourism Week: 25 March – 2 April 2017. The event will bring together a range of businesses from across the city and

surrounding areas, to raise the awareness of the new brand. The event invite list will be limited (due to space) and will include:

- Key business professionals from across the Exeter area
- Local and regional press
- Tourism industry leaders
- Bloggers
- Governing bodies to include Visit England

- 10.2 A few weeks prior to the local launch at the RAMM, the Tourism team in conjunction with the Communications department will create engaging content surrounding the launch to build a buzz and a conversation. This will involve sending out press releases and sharing content across www.visitexeter.com and social media. The use of local business network and channels to help spread the message will be critical for the success of the launch and to raise the profile of Visit Exeter. Channels include:

- Database of businesses across the Exeter area
- Exeter Chamber of Commerce & Trade
- Exeter BID
- Visit Devon

10.3 **National Launch**

Following on from the launch in Exeter, we are in the process of planning a national launch, which will include a targeted national marketing campaign which will include an event in London. This event will engage with a wide audience and seek to establish Exeter as a city weekend break and business tourism destination, within 3 hours of London.

- 10.4 The local and national launch events are all about raising the awareness of the brand and Exeter as a culturally vibrant, modern city break destination, and bringing together the tourism business community and stakeholders – something that has not taken place in Exeter for many years.

11 **Membership and Marketing**

- 11.1 A membership package has been developed for Exeter businesses buy into to join Visit Exeter, they would benefit from a range of online and offline marketing opportunities, business support activities and training opportunities. Going forward the focus of the tourism team will be focused on promoting Exeter and supporting city businesses.

- 11.2 Commencing February 2017, Exeter businesses will be invited to join Visit Exeter with a choice Bronze, Silver and Gold membership packages available. The more a business pays the benefits they receive in return, as shown in **Appendix 3**. The pricing for packages has been set, following extensive industry research, making Visit Exeter membership an affordable option for businesses of all sizes. The selling of membership will administered by the Tourism Promotion Officer prior to the local launch, and as an incentive will be offered 14 months membership for the price of 12, with memberships due for renewal in April 2018.

11.3 **Visit Exeter Marketing Activity**

With a new brand and with an exciting new identity, Exeter has a lot to shout about. The new brand provides a unique opportunity to really put Exeter on the map and showcase a destination that offers so much diversity. The plan will be to launch both

a local and national campaign, however the aim of running a more localised campaign first means that we are able to get the people of Exeter engaged and contributing to the promotion of Exeter.

11.4 **Enabling the local community**

Exeter has a community spirit and there is a unique opportunity to get the people of the city to support Visit Exeter. Part of the launch will be to encourage residents and businesses to participate and spread the word about our great city.

A Competition - Why We Love Exeter

As part of the local enabling campaign we want to get people talking about all of the crazy and quirky reasons they love Exeter. I #LoveExeter because..... The competition will run across social media channels and will ask local people to complete the above sentence, with the winner being selected prior to the local launch with an invitation to the launch held at RAMM.

User Generated Content

The new website will include a section designed for user generated content so that the people of Exeter can suggest things to do and places to see linked to the above experiences. Visitors will then be able to see some of the great things on offer and places to visit, but will be able to see local guides written by local people where they can uncover some real hidden gems.

11.5 **National marketing of Exeter**

With research still highlighting that public perceptions lean towards Exeter as a city for history and heritage there is a need for showcasing the diversity of Exeter as a city break destination and to highlight some of the many dimensions people are missing out on. Taking into account the results of the research to develop the Visit Exeter brand we have looked across the spectrum at all that Exeter has to offer and also at what people look for in a destination and come up with a clear but simple campaign focus. This will form the basis of a regional and national marketing campaign, as shown below:

8 Experiences - 1 Destination

To allow for more specific demographic targeting and also to attract the broadest possible interest we are focusing on eight key channels.

1. Culture - Focused on theatre, events, music and art

2. Heritage - Focused on traditional Exeter and historic places & visitor attractions

3. Nightlife - Showcasing Exeter by night, the clubs the bars, the restaurants and live music scene

4. Food and Drink - The local producers of food and drink are globally renowned; let's make this a focus and a reason to visit Exeter

5. Activity - The amazing outdoor spaces, the sport and the fantastic range of activities you can enjoy in and surrounding Exeter

6. Business - Business tourism is a major sector for Exeter, let's celebrate this and encourage additional business events to be held in the city

7. Shopping - Shopping provides a huge draw to the city with the ever growing list of big high street names and independent retailers

8. Relaxation - As well as a place with so much going on, Exeter also provides the perfect place to kick back and relax whether it's at the spa or in the amazing outdoor spaces

12 Website/Digital Tender

- 12.1 The coming year represents a pivotal year for online tourism promotion of Exeter. The current Visit Exeter website uses the Heart of Devon template which was created in 2011, and therefore is beginning to show its age in terms of design and functionality.
- 12.2 However, Exeter's decision to separate from the Heart of Devon Tourism Partnership provides a real opportunity for a new tourism website for the city to showcase its own brand identity. The brand will reflect the strengths of the city's product – a rich heritage and culture, high quality local food and drink, a vibrant calendar of events, and a strong connection to the surrounding Devon countryside and coast.
- 12.3 As such, the decision has been taken to redevelop www.visitexeter.com to a visually-stronger, more intuitive design that performs better in search engines and is mobile-responsive.
- 12.4 There is also the requirement to ensure the website moves forward with a sustainable commercial model for the city. With this in mind, the site needs to continue to grow as an effective income stream, and a rebuild provides the ideal opportunity to develop a more commercial model – linking to membership in section 11 of this report.
- 12.5 In securing individual elements of the planned activities, the Council's financial procedures for procurement through competitive quotes have been followed. The Website & Digital tender was secured through a competitive process, with the new website due to be launched March 2017.

13 Monitoring

- 13.1 All marketing activity undertaken will be monitored and will deliver value for money and a tangible objective, a set of KPI's will be develop to monitor the effectiveness of marketing activity. In the case of awareness marketing we will ensure it is complementary to a specific campaign so trends can be analysed and measured.

14 Exeter Visitor Strategy

- 14.1 The previous Tourism/Visitor Strategy for Exeter covered the period 2012 – 2016 and highlighted five key priority areas for development. These priorities will now be reviewed and time spent developing a new strategy for the city. A draft strategy will be brought to Place Scrutiny later this year.
- 14.2 Initial concepts being worked on align with the City Council's vision to be an Active City in exploring healthy/active tourism to complement current priorities.
- 14.3 Within the new Visitor Strategy we will look to develop overseas marketing campaigns to promote the City to the international market, starting with European destinations. This work will be will in partnership with Visit Devon, Visit England and Exeter BID.

15. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

15.1 Visit Exeter has been set-up to support the council's priorities and purposes:

Priorities:

To grow Exeter's cultural and visitor economy which maximises economic benefit for the benefit of businesses and the residents of Exeter.

Implement/develop on and offline marketing strategies to promote the city to domestic and international markets, leisure and business to make Exeter a leading destination within the UK.

Purposes:

Help me grow a successful business

Provide me with great things to see and do

16 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

16.1 Risks to the City Council are limited as Visit Exeter will remain within the City Council's management. No external appointed board will be set up; a steering group will be established. Therefore all financial implications remain in the council's control.

17 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

17.1 The objectives of Visit Exeter are designed to promote equality and diversity and our new Visitor Strategy will promote activities which encourage healthier life styles and well-being.

18 Other Options

18.1 There are no other options being considered in planning and implementing the delivery of Visit Exeter.

Catherine Hill
Tourism & Sport Manager

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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