

Committee: FINANCE AND RESOURCES

Date: 9 May 2007

Report: THE VISITOR – COVER PRICE

Purpose of the report

1. To consider options for generating income from 'The Visitor' newspaper.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework, in particular Best Value Performance Plan objective 46 (b) decide whether to raise revenue from 'The Visitor' newspaper.

Background

3. 'The Visitor' newspaper allows us to deliver key National Park messages alongside providing useful visitor information. It is printed annually (220,000 copies) and is distributed in and around the Yorkshire Dales.
4. The bi-annual residents' newspaper 'Dales' (12,000 copies) is produced under the same contract as 'The Visitor'. The contractor keeps the revenue generated from advertising sales, whilst the Authority contributes approximately £9,700, and the Tourism Partnership £3,500, per annum to produce both newspapers.
5. Currently, North York Moors is the only National Park Authority (NPA) which charges for its visitor publication; its cover price is 50p (where sold), 40,000 copies are printed and around 50% are sold. Research shows that other NPAs are uncomfortable with the idea of charging, as they feel that the benefits of income generation would be outweighed by a potential reduction in readership.
6. Given the current financial climate, it seems appropriate to consider options for generating income from 'The Visitor'. Each option has potential implications.

Option1 - Introduction of a cover price (where sold)

Benefits

- Annual income generation – actual amount will be determined following pilot.

Risks/disadvantages

- Could only be sold in National Park Centres (and possibly Park Information Points). Approximately 100,000 of print run (40%) currently distributed through these channels.
- Many copies would still be given away free at other locations.
- People may be less inclined to pick newspaper up if have to pay for it; this could significantly reduce the readership and new audiences may not be reached.
- Administrative implications for National Park Centre staff (cash collecting, stock counting).
- Advertisers (and future sponsors) might choose not to advertise if print run reduced.

Option 2 – donation box

Benefits

- Easy to administer and could be introduced straightaway.
- Could put box in National Park Centres and PIPs and offer to other outlets.
- Would not exclude people from picking paper up; less likely to reduce print run.

Risks/disadvantages

- Income less predictable, but some people might give more than a standard cover price.
- Still requires stock control to evaluate number taken against donations collected.
- Could conflict with planned removal of other charity boxes from National Park Centres as recommended by auditors – and possibly with Donate to the Dales (although the two could dovetail).

Option 3 – do nothing

Benefits

- We continue to reach large numbers of visitors with high print run.

Risks/disadvantages

- Production costs will continue to rise leaving limited scope for improvement and development unless Authority can increase contribution. Could lead to reduced quality/print run.
- Tourism Partnership might withdraw contribution (currently £3,500).

Option 4 – investigate additional external funding/sponsorship

Benefits

- Could provide significant additional funding for improvements allowing us to maintain or increase current production.

Risks/disadvantages

- Always a risk that funder could withdraw, leaving the Authority having to cover costs or reduce quality/print run.

Conclusion

7. There are a number of options for income generation, not all of which are mutually exclusive. For example it might be possible to implement either option 1, 2 or 3 and

also explore option 4. Sponsorship could be investigated in conjunction with the External Funding Group, if Members are so minded. The option most likely to generate some income but still achieve our statutory purposes (ie promoting understanding) appears to be option 2.

8. Members should note that any decision to put a cover price on 'The Visitor 2008' (option 1) would need to be made now as we are about to tender for a new print contract for both publications. Advertising sales will commence in July and potential advertisers need to know whether they are advertising in a free publication and what the print run will be.

RECOMMENDATION

9. That Members note the various options and approve the introduction of a donation scheme (option 2) on a trial basis. Operational details to be agreed with Chief Executive and Head of Finance and Resources.

Sarah Nicholson
Communications Officer

24 April 2007