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| Meeting: | Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Sub-Committee |
| Date: | 6 July 2006 |
| Subject: | Review of Tourism – Response from Cabinet |
| Responsible Officer: | Paul Najsarek, Director, People Performance and Policy |
| Contact Officer: | Ed Hammond, Scrutiny Officer |
| Portfolio Holder: | Business Development |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Status: | Part I |

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

None.

Reason for report

Members are being provided information on Cabinet's response to the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee's 2005/06 Review of Tourism. As tourism now falls under this sub-committee's terms of reference, the response – and future updates – will be provided to this sub-committee.

Information on the scope of the review are provided in the body of this report, both to provide context to the Cabinet response and to provide members with a case study on how in-depth reviews have previously been conducted at Harrow.

Benefits

Members will be appraised of recommendations made to Cabinet in an area of significance in local economic development. This information will also provide members with useful procedural knowledge on the conduct of a review, which can be considered and discussed at the meeting.

Cost of Proposals

This report is not seeking additional resources.

Risks

Not applicable.

Implications if recommendations rejected

Not applicable.

Section 2: Report

2.1 Introduction

The Review of Tourism was carried out between August 2005 and March 2006 by the Environment and Economy Sub-Committee. Its recommendations were endorsed by Cabinet in April 2006.

Information on Cabinet's response is provided at the end.

2.2 Development of the scope of the review

Discussions with members, at the time of the drafting of the 2005/06 work programme, identified "tourism development" as a topic for the sub-committee to develop as an in-depth review. At the time, it was thought that the review might look at Harrow's tourist attractions and how best use might be made of various sites to maximise the number of tourists visiting the borough.

This was put on the work programme, approved at the March 2005 meeting, but due to resource constraints at the time no work was carried out prior to June 2005. By this time a number of factors had changed. A Tourism Officer had been appointed to develop a Tourism Strategy, which was looking at the mapping-related issues (identifying local sites and so on) that it had initially been thought that the tourism review would consider.

At the June meeting, various members put their names forward to sit on the review group, which according to the principles of political proportionality was constituted of two Labour and two Conservative members.

The issue was re-examined after the June meeting and discussions held between the Chair of the Review Group (Cllr Alan Blann, also Chair of the Sub-Committee), the Tourism Officer and the Scrutiny Officer. The decision was made that a different approach would have to be taken in order to limit any duplication in the work carried out. It was decided that the review would concentrate on issues around partnership working, looking at three key themes: community involvement in tourism, sustainability and infrastructure.

At around this time the process for identifying co-optees was begun. Co-optees are members of the public – generally representatives of voluntary organisations – who assist the review group by attending meetings and providing their expert opinions on the evidence taken by the group.

Three co-optees were chosen, in consultation with the chair and the Tourism Officer – representatives of Harrow Heritage Trust, Harrow Agenda 21 and the manager of the Crescent Hotel.

The Review Group met twice to discuss the scope, which was approved at the second meeting. The scope was then passed to the E&E sub-committee for approval at their meeting in September 2005.

2.3 Evidence gathering

Once agreed, the scope was used to define how evidence was to be gathered. Originally it was planned to arrange visits to six attractions in Harrow which demonstrated the most potential for tourism development. However, it was considered, again, that this might duplicate activities already undertaken by the Tourism Officer (although the Chair of the Review Group attended an open day bus tour, organised by the council, for people in the local service industry around some of these sites). This aspect of the scope was, therefore, changed after the full document had been agreed. As it was only a small aspect of the methodology, however, it was not thought to be a problem.

Public consultation - Public attitudes towards tourism were seen as an important element in the review, and it was thought necessary to conduct surveys both of local people and of hotels, to get a better impression of public responses to tourism and the potential of the local tourism market. The first step was the conduct of a survey of local hotels. This was conducted over late August and September, which was before the scope had been formally agreed.

A series of focus groups were also carried out in December, in which local people (children and adults) were brought together to discuss tourism and its potential benefits to the borough.

2.4 Member-level meetings

The Review Group met three times to discuss evidence between September and December. Meetings were as follows:

- Meeting 1: Evidence received from the London Development Agency on regional plans.
- Meeting 2: Meeting with Tourism Officer to discuss the Tourism Strategy
- Meeting 3: Meeting with Paul Followes (Manager of the Grim's Dyke Hotel) to discuss hotel accreditation, quality standards and other strategic issues.

The group also met to discuss planning issues around the two main evidence-gathering exercises: a day trip to Birmingham, and an evidentiary hearing involving a number of external witnesses.

Visit to Birmingham - This was included within the scope. Birmingham was thought to be a useful "best practice" example for the group's study, as the city had been awarded Beacon Status in 2004 for "promoting sustainable tourism". The visit was planned with the whole review group.

The group spend a day with Marketing Birmingham, the city's "destination management organisation" (DMO). Officers from the DMO and the City Council provided the group with a large amount of information. Members were fully briefed beforehand so that they would be able to get the maximum possible benefit from the visit.

Members were provided with a full précis of the day afterwards, which was discussed at the subsequent meeting.

Evidentiary hearing - Given the cross-cutting nature of the subjects under discussion, it was thought that the best way to gather evidence would be through the use of an "evidentiary hearing" at the end of November. Seven or eight experts from various different fields – the LDA, Visit London, the Tourism Society (a national body), Transport for London, and the council were brought together to discuss a number of issues with members.

The success of the event hinged on members, again, being fully briefed before the meeting. A week before a planning meeting decided in advance on a list of questions, which were then passed to those attending the meeting, ensuring that all participants were fully prepared and able to provide as useful information as possible.

2.5 Drafting of recommendations and final report

Two further meetings were held in December to discuss the recommendations of the review group.

From the minutes of discussions at the various meetings, the Scrutiny Officer drafted a series of sixteen recommendations. These were amended

and supplemented in discussion with members and a final set of recommendations were produced just before Christmas.

The Scrutiny Officer drafted a report in the New Year to sit around these recommendations, to identify the key findings made by the review group and to note instances of “best practice” the review group had encountered (particularly with reference to the visit to Birmingham).

The group met again to discuss the wording of the report, and then finally at the end of January to approve the full report with appendices (which related to the public consultation elements of the review).

Consultation on contents - The report had to pass through a number of steps before it could be formally approved by the cabinet and made publicly available.

The recommendations and draft had been sent to the Tourism Officer, who had made some comments, but she was also sent the final version prior to its despatch.

The completed report was passed to the sub-committee at their meeting in March, and approved (subject to a minor alteration). Before this happened, legal and financial clearance for its contents were sought – as ordinarily occurs for standard committee reports.

Because tourism is a corporate issue, the next step was for it to be sent to the Corporate Management Board (the group made up of the Chief Executive and senior officers). The Chair attended to make a brief presentation and answer questions as appropriate.

Cabinet then received the report on 6 April.

2.6 Response from Cabinet

Cabinet considered the report at their last meeting before the election. They endorsed its recommendations in full, and in fact a number are being acted on already. Of particular importance is the recommendation that the post of Tourism Officer be retained, and that a sufficient marketing budget be made available to support her work. The minuted discussion is as follows:

Minutes:

The Cabinet received a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy on the review of Tourism which was carried out under the auspices of the Environment and Economy Sub-Committee.

A Member, in his capacity as Chair of the Tourism Review Group, commended the report of the Review Group to the Cabinet. He was pleased that funding for the post of the Tourism Officer had already been identified as this was vital to the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Group.

Members of the Cabinet welcomed the report of the Review Group and noted that some of the recommendations would have resource implications. In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Strategic Planning agreed to provide details of the costs associated with providing a Tourist Information Centre.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the proposed recommendations be endorsed.

Reason for Decision: To further enhance Harrow's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

2.7 More recent developments

Tourism's benefits to Harrow – recent information collected on behalf of Harrow Council by the London Development Agency has indicated that tourism generated £92.4 million for Harrow.

Mayor's plan – the Mayor of London has published his most recent tourism strategy, further enhancing the role of tourism in bringing about economic development.

2.8 Consultation

Not applicable.

2.9 Financial Implications

This report is not seeking additional financial resources.

2.10 Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report.

2.11 Equalities Impact

None specific to this report.

2.12 Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

None specific to this report.

Section 3: Supporting Information/Background Documents

None