

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Visitor Information Service in Rossendale</b>
<b>TO/ON:</b>	<b>The Cabinet 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006</b>
<b>BY:</b>	<b>Head of Community and Partnerships</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Customer Services</b>
<b>HOLDER</b>	
<b>STATUS:</b>	<b>For Publication</b>

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out options for the future of visitor information in Rossendale as provided by the Council.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation is accepted by Cabinet that being that the Head of Community and Partnerships liaises with the County Library Service to deliver visitor information services through the libraries within Rossendale with additional information being distributed through partners.
- 2.2. That the option to create a post of marketing and business development manager to develop the tourism offer for the Borough be supported.

## **3. REPORT AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 3.1 Rossendale Borough Council has provided a tourist information centre (TIC) on Kay Street in Rawtenstall for approximately 20 years.

The main aim of the TIC is to provide visitor information to people wishing to find out about things to do and places to visit within the Valley.

- 3.2 The Rossendale TIC is currently 'networked' which means that we provide information about other towns and cities as well as booking accommodation for local our residents for when they wish to visit those other towns and cities.
- 3.3 Between October 2004 and November 2005 there were 15, 122 personal calls into the TIC: and 4, 113 post, phone, e-mail & fax enquiries.

However, not all of these visits were for visitor information services and visits include collecting parking discs and to have photocopying done.

A break down of visitors to the TIC on Kay Street in July and August 2005 indicates that the TIC deals with about 600 enquiries per month, however as people often ask about a range of issues exact numbers of people coming over the threshold are difficult to state with any certainty.

Appendix 1 shows the main purpose of people's visits to the TIC.

- 3.4 Draft figures from NWDA indicate that Rossendale had in the region of 2,500 visitors in the year ending August 2005 spending on average just less than £30 per head.

- 3.5 At present the TIC provides the following range of services:

- ◆ Provides information on places to visit in the Valley
- ◆ Provides information on places to visit outside Rossendale
- ◆ Books accommodation within Rossendale
- ◆ Books accommodation outside Rossendale
- ◆ Updates accommodation database
- ◆ Booking tickets for shows and events across the country
- ◆ Sells travel tickets
- ◆ Produces the annual and quarterly visitor guides
- ◆ Advertises Rossendale in various publications regionally and nationally
- ◆ Provides miscellaneous information such as bus times. How to pay your council tax, provides photocopies etc.
- ◆ Sells souvenirs
- ◆ Advises tourism businesses
- ◆ Deals with postal / email enquiries about tourism / Rossendale

The TIC is open Mon – Fri 0930-1700 Sat 1000-1230 all year. There is no opening on Sundays at present.

- 3.6 Currently the County Council have a service level agreement (SLA) with Rossendale BC for us to provide staff within the TIC to provide the County

Information Service. The County have indicated that they would prefer to operate this from within their libraries service and the SLA will end in March 2006. This SLA currently pays for 2 part time staff within the TIC. This leaves us therefore with one full time TIC manager and one casual member of staff.

- 3.7 At the Council meeting in July 2005 the Council agreed the accommodation strategy which indicated that the offices on Kay Street would close.
- 3.8 There had originally been discussions within the developing Customer Services Strategy regarding locating the TIC within the new One Stop Shop(OSS) Initiative. However, regional and national good practice together with advice form the North West Regional Development Agency (NWDA) indicates that this type of co-location is not best practice. This is echoed by the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board.

In addition it has become apparent that the current one stop shop in the Town Hall Annex will not be large enough to provide space for a separate TIC function.

- 3.9 Rossendale BC has commissioned BBS to carry out research for the Tourism Marketing Action Plan. BBS have consulted a wide range of local people from service users to tourism business providers, all of whom felt that the co-location of the TIC into the OSS would be a poor move.
- 3.10 NWDA guidance on visitor information says that there are four key principals to providing an information service these are that
- information should be timely, accurate and relevant,
  - delivered in a clearly passionate way,
  - through high quality facilities
  - informing people about high quality services and attractions.

In addition they recommend that visitor information centres are run on a commercial basis.

- 3.11 At a recent meeting at NWDA regarding the future for visitor information there was a great deal of discussion and agreement about the fact that the needs of visitors for information centres has changed greatly over the past 20 years. There was a general belief that in future there needs to be fewer, more commercial information centres which use better information communication technology.

NWDA consultants Agylisis have carried out some recent research into visitor information and the future. Some of their findings indicate that:

- UK online bookings have risen substantially since 2000.
- Visitors will in future use Google Earth to access local information
- 79% of all current UK trips are by car. In future most cars will use satellite navigation systems which will include information about where to visit and where to stay

3.12 The NWDA is also keen to see information recipients pay for improved services as well as the beneficiaries of the service – such as tourism businesses.

At present the service that we provide is free at the point of contact and we do not charge any businesses for the information we provide on their behalf.

3.13 It is not clear that Rossendale yet has a large enough presence within the market to sustain an independent commercial visitor information centre. Rossendale Borough Council now has several options available to it regarding the provision of visitor information services in the Borough for the foreseeable future.

### **3.14 Option1**

#### Maintain the existing visitor information service

3.14.1 Whilst Kay Street will close in the near future the Council could look at renting suitable shop front accommodation in a prominent position. This would require fitting out and fully staffing as the SLA with LCC comes to an end in March this would have an additional cost burden to the Council. (For health and safety reasons we do not allow only one staff on the premises at any time). Whilst costs for renting accommodation and refitting have not been established for the purpose of this report the staffing costs alone would be in the region of £50,000.

3.14.2 There are few suitable locations within the Borough for the provision of a TIC with the prime location being Bank Street, our primary shopping location, which would be rented out at a prime cost.

3.14.3 This option does not address any of the issues around modernising the visitor information service we currently provide and would cost the Council more than the existing provision because of rent and the need to pay for additional staffing. Whilst tourism is an economic driver it is not currently one of the Council's key priorities.

### **3.15 Option 2**

Provision of visitor information within Rossendale Museum in Whittaker Park.

- 3.15.1 Whittaker Park is one of our primary parks and is a large attraction for visitors and local residents. In particular Pets Corner and the play provision are key attractions. The park and museum are slightly further away from the town centre than other options may be.
- 3.15.2 The museum is currently managed by the County through an SLA. Despite investment by RBC, Heritage Lottery Fund and the County in the museum visitor numbers have failed to rise. RBC is measured on its visitor numbers to the museum in BVPI 170 a, b and c. The Audit Commission recently commented that they felt that the BVPI targets set for the museum were not challenging enough, although Culture is not a key priority for the Council.
- 3.15.3 There is space within the museum to provide a visitor information service, and indeed at present the staff within the museum do offer some informal information and advice about other places to visit within the Valley and further a field.
- 3.15.4 The Head of Community and Partnerships will need to work closely with the museum Service to establish the best way to deliver the service from within the museum if members would like to pursue this option.
- 3.15.5 An added advantage to this option is that we are having provided for us our visitor information service from within a Rossendale Borough Council asset.
- 3.15.6 The museum is currently open
- Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday  
1 pm to 4.30 pm (April to October)  
1 pm to 4 pm (November to March)

**3.16 Option 3**

Provision of information services through the Libraries.

- 3.16.1 There are three libraries within the borough which may be able to offer a visitor information service.
- 3.16.2 County library services will be taking on the function of the County Information Services when the SLA ends in March and as such bus passes and tickets will be available through these facilities. There is

already free internet availability at the libraries and the County would like to see more integrated information service provision.

3.16.3 Information would be available within the general library layout but not at a specifically dedicated counter marked as 'Tourism'. Telephone and email enquiries would be dealt with within the library. Souvenirs will not be sold from the library.

3.16.4 Rawtenstall library is closer to Rawtenstall Town centre but parking is an issue as is pedestrian access possibly. There is an option to have visitor information provided at each of the libraries.

3.16.5 There would be no staffing or other associated costs to RBC for the provision of the service.

3.16.6 Rawtenstall Library is open:

Monday	9:30 - 19:30
Tuesday	9:30 - 17:00
Wednesday	9:30 - 13:00
Thursday	9:30 - 19:30
Friday	9:30 - 17:00
Saturday	9:30 - 16:00
Sunday	Closed

### 3.17 **Option 4**

#### Private provision of visitor information service.

3.17.1 The recent tourism marketing action plan suggests that it might be possible to find a private sector provider who could deliver visitor information services for Rossendale. The report suggests that this would enable public sector partners to concentrate on their core business and ensure efficient provision of visitor information.

3.17.2 This option would require further feasibility but at present there is no organisation visibly able to provide this service to the Borough. This is in the main due to the lack of destination branding and this option may well be an opportunity in future years.

### **3.18 Option 5**

- 3.18.1 The Tourism Marketing Action Plan suggests that the real tourism need for Rossendale is the development of a tourism champion to co-ordinate the work of all businesses in Rossendale as it affects the Tourism agenda. There is an opportunity to use the money currently spent on the TIC to commission the work of a tourism champion co-ordinate activity, develop local businesses to be responsive to the tourism agenda, co-ordinate a tourism working group across all partners and sectors to drive tourism forward, promote Rossendale on a regional and sub regional level, develop more collaboration between public and private partners and act as an intermediary between public & private sectors
- 3.18.2 This role could service a number of information points across the Borough utilising partners such as the Libraries, museums and other visitor attractions but there would not be a dedicated tourist information centre.

### **3.18 Notes regarding the 5 Options**

- 3.18.1 The current TIC facility is open Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings. None of the options extend this in order to allow for Sunday opening with the exception of the museum. Additional opening hours may be difficult to negotiate with the library service and for each option extends the cost envelope.
- 3.18.2 None of the options except Option 1 allows for the TIC to be 'networked'. as this will require us to book accommodation and meet a range of other service standards which are increasingly stringent and include discrete TIC areas, particular signage etc.
- 3.18.4 Option 5 removes the presence of an actual Tourist Information/ Visitor Information Centre in the Borough but the proposal will utilise partners premises to provide visitor information.
- 3.18.3 All of the options require RBC to retain several 'back office' functions of tourism ad marketing these include:
- update the LOIS Accommodation database
  - produce the annual visitor guide
  - produce the quarterly what's on guides
  - update the tourism web pages
  - be present at events within the borough to promote Rossendale
  - Advising tourism businesses

The Council does not have any other staff dedicated to tourism at present and therefore this work would need to fall to existing staff or be subject to a bid for additional staff from future years budgets.

Option 5 however, would pick up all of the back office functions and negate the need for additional work to be passed onto exiting staff or to bid for additional resources.

The map below shows where services might be provided from with either of the library or museum options.

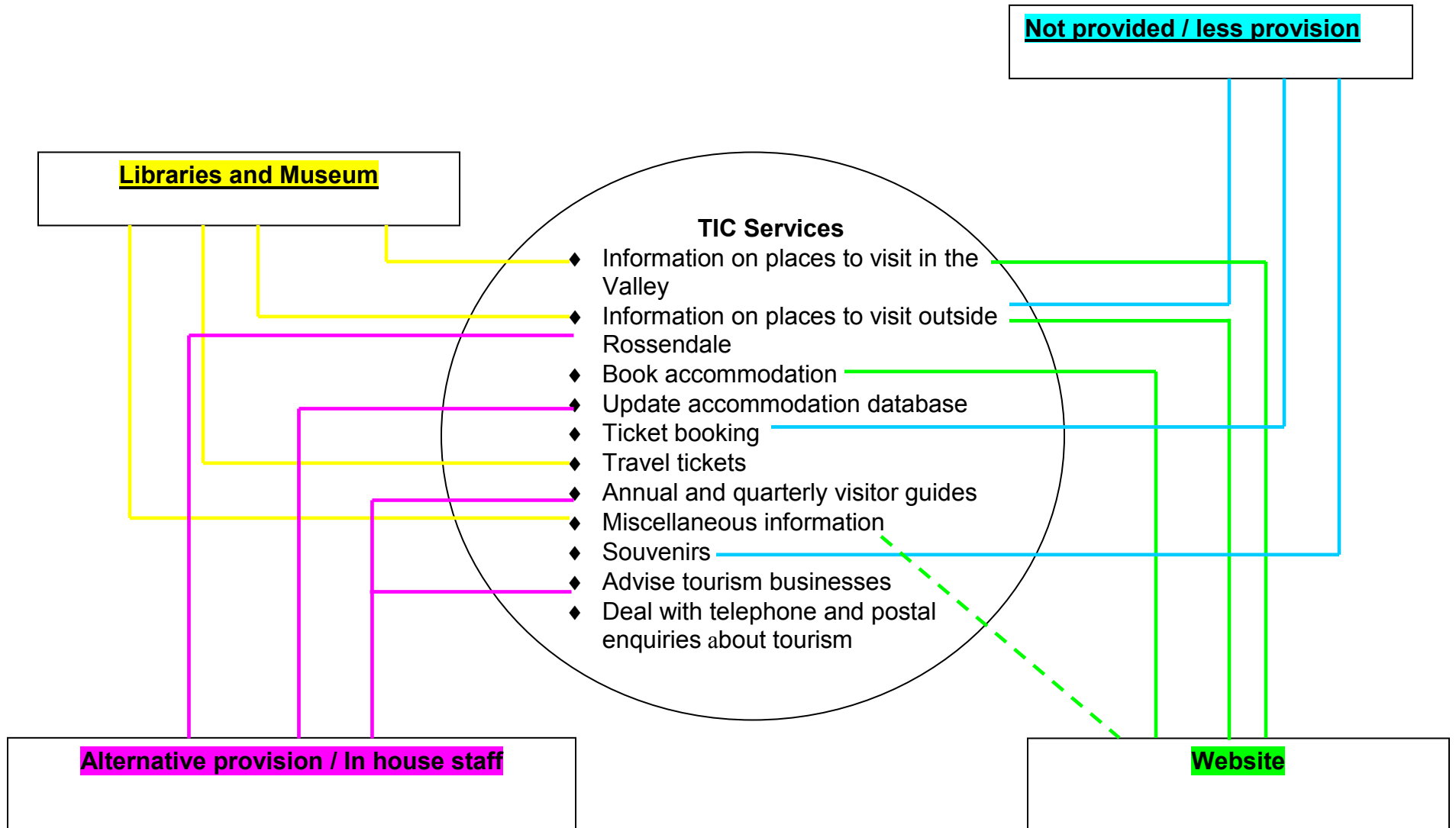
### **3.19 Recommendation**

**It is recommended that option 2 is accepted as the best option for a three year period in the first instance with a review at the end of this period to understand if this is still the correct method of delivery of visitor information in the Borough.**

**That the Head of Community and Partnerships is tasked to enter into detailed negotiations with LCC on the cost implications to the Council of this option.**

**That if no satisfactory service level agreement can be developed between the County and the Borough Council or if the County do not wish to pursue this option then option 5 is taken forward as the best solution for Tourism in the Borough.**





## **CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES**

### **3.1. FINANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

4.1.1. Each of the options carries a different financial cost to the Council. Option 1 is the most expensive to the Council; it requires additional funding to that currently available for the present TIC and therefore substantial budget resources would need to be found. It is estimated that in the first year the cost would be in excess of an additional £50,000 with ongoing annual staffing costs. There is a risk that the new facility will not be able to keep up with the modernisation of visitor information across the country and we may be investing in something now that may become redundant within a few years.

Option 2 will cost the Council approximately £10,000 plus an allowance in the first year for ICT infrastructure. There is a risk that the museum is perceived to be too far away to attract visitors requiring information. However, RBC still owns the facility and we would be having provided within one of our buildings another of our services.

Option 3 will not cost the council any money however, there is a risk that people will not use the library as a visitor information point as there is an expectation of an independent TIC/VIC. There may be a tension between the fit of the VIS and the Libraries Service

Option 4 would be at no cost to the Council but would be entirely independent with the Council having no control over the service and level of service provided. This is a high risk as we may not be able to influence the information given out to visitors. Poor quality service may adversely affect the perception of the Bough and the Council.

Option 5 does not provide us with a visitor information service located in any one centre but offers a member of staff/ contract to deliver a service around developing the tourism offer for the Borough and would rely on information being disseminated by partners throughout the Valley.

### **3.2. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS**

3.2.1. N/A.

### **3.3. HUMAN RESOURCES**

3.3.1. At present there is a TIC manager and two casual members of staff working within the TIC on Kay Street. The two part time members of staff have secured alternative employment within the OSS. Casual staff are

covering the vacant posts. The relocation of the service to either option 2, 3 or 4 will require us to disestablish these posts. Conversely choosing option 1 will require us to employ at least 2 new part time members of staff.

- 3.3.2. Option 5 would require the recruitment of a suitable qualified tourism, business development and marketing person or the letting of such a contract to external consultants.

#### **4. ANY OTHER RELEVANT CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 4.1. N/A

#### **5. RISK**

- 5.1. The community is generally concerned about seeing a continued TIC within the Borough. Closure of the TIC on Kay Street is not seen as a positive move however, the services which are currently provided will continue to be provided even if this is within a different location and context for options 1 to 4.

Option 5 would remove the VIS and provide a co-ordinator to carry out more tourism development etc. This will rely heavily of the ICT solution for visitor information.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE REPORT**

- 6.1. None

#### **7. EQUALITIES ISSUES ARISING FROM THE REPORT**

Please see EIA

#### **8. WARDS AFFECTED**

All

#### **9. CONSULTATIONS**

A range of stakeholders have been consulted as part of the Tourism Marketing Action Plan for the Borough.  
Staff affected and unions have been consulted.  
Economy theme group, Culture theme group and wider LSP partners.  
Lancashire County Council Library and Museum Services have both been consulted.  
Senior Management Team  
Elected members including members of the opposition.

**10. Background documents:**

Tourism Marketing Action Plan

Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board – “Great Days Out” and  
“Destination Management Plan”.

Minutes of LSP Economy Theme Group, LSP Culture Theme Group

For further information on the details of this report, please contact:

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## Appendix 1

### What People Visit Kay Street TIC for and where these services may be delivered from.

Parking Disk	One Stop Shop, Shops, Libraries
Photocopying	Library, Local Shops
RLT Reception	Provided by RLT if required
Leisure Pass	One Stop Shop, RLT provide
Bus passes/ tickets	Libraries
Other Tickets (e.g. Thorpe Park/ Alton Towers)	On line at library + museum if chosen as option
Purchases of books and souvenirs	Not provided or museum if chosen as option
Travel Info	Libraries, One Stop Shop, Bus Station
Rossendale Tourism	Libraries, other partners such as RLT premises, ELR + museum if chosen as option
NW Tourism	Libraries, other partners such as RLT premises, ELR + museum if chosen as option
National Tourism	Libraries, other partners such as RLT premises, ELR + museum if chosen as option
Other RBC services	One Stop Shop
Other LCC services	Libraries
Phone Calls	No provision for specific tourism phone number unless museum option is chosen.

## Appendix 2

### Matrix of Services and Options Incl. Opening Times

<b>Option</b>	<b>Museum</b>	<b>Library</b>	<b>Current</b>
<b>Opening Hours</b>	Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 13.00 – 16.30(April - October) 13.00 – 16.00 (Nov - March)	Mon 9:30 - 19:30 Tues 9:30 - 17:00 Wed 9:30 - 13:00 Thurs 9:30 - 19:30 Fri 9:30 - 17:00 Sat 9:30 - 16:00 Sun Closed	Mon - Fri 9.30 - 17.00 Sat 10.00 – 12.30
<b>Telephone</b>	Shared with museum	Shared with library services	Dedicated phone answering
<b>Emails / Letters</b>	Dedicated email and letter answering	Shared email and letter answering but may be negotiated	Dedicated email and letter answering
<b>Souvenirs</b>	Some sales – no income to RBC	No sales	Souvenirs sold some income to RBC
<b>Information on places to visit in the Valley</b>	Leaflets, internet and in person	Leaflets and limited in person	Leaflets and in person
<b>Information on places to visit outside Rossendale</b>	Leaflets, internet and in person	Leaflets and limited in person	Leaflets and in person
<b>Miscellaneous information</b>	One stop shop	One stop shop	Currently provided
<b>Sells travel tickets</b>	No will be available at library	Yes	Currently provided
<b>Booking tickets for shows and events</b>	Not planned	No	Available for some shows and events locally and nationally
<b>Booking accommodation</b>	Through internet access at museum	Through internet access at library	Booking service provided
<b>Cost</b>	<b>11,800</b> <b>Will require negotiation with LCC</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>58,780</b>

### Appendix 3

#### List of services provided by TIC and possible issues of future locations for services.

Service currently provided at TIC	Possible future location	Implications	Issues
National brochure stock.	Personal internet access by customers. Museum Library Other partner businesses	2,600 main area brochures were picked up from April to end of July this year.	<b>May be reduced availability of national stock</b>
National leaflets stock.	Personal internet access by customers. Museum Library Other partner businesses	Currently we stock 200 main leaflets and 100 less-frequently asked-for leaflets.	<b>May be reduced availability of national stock</b>
Transport timetables.	Library. Websites. Bus station Other visitor attractions	TIC staff also have knowledge of timetables and give a personal and phone service interpreting them.	
Books and maps.	Book shop Museum Library Other tourism attractions		
Souvenirs.	Museums. Other tourism attractions		
Transport ticket sales.	Library.	750 sold in last 12 months	
Local accommodation advice.	Library via internet. Museum via internet. Websites generally.	Actual booking will need to be done by customer rather than staff	Few bookings taken at the TIC, but one B&B has stated that 80% of bookings are as a result of referral by the TIC. Accommodation providers receive this service free of charge at present not in line with emergent VIS thinking

<b>Service currently provided at TIC</b>	<b>Possible future location</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Issues</b>
Theatre and theme park ticket agency	Library Travel agents Websites		Minimal income into the Borough Council
Rossendale tourism advice: <i>Face-to-face.</i>	Library/Museum	Limited staff knowledge and to signpost	<b>Staff can be trained and learn</b>
<i>Phone.</i>	Library but not dedicated number – Museum dedicated number.	Limited knowledge of staff.	<b>Staff can be trained and learn</b>
<i>e-mail and by post.</i>	Library – post and email requests – service not available Museum service available	Lack of knowledge.  Lack of knowledge	<b>Staff can be trained and learn</b>
<i>Group advice (schools projects etc).</i>	Library. Museum.		
Poster advertising for community	Library Museum Local businesses		
Small office services (copying/fax)	Library Museum Other service providers incl. businesses		
Producing Visitor Guide (including pages on website)	Community & Partnerships Team/Communications Team.	Lack of knowledge of current tourism 'product'. Lack of regular contact with local providers.	
Producing What's On Guide including contacting event organisers.	Community & Partnerships Team/Communications Team.	Lack of knowledge of current 'product'. Lack of regular contact.	
Booking advertising	Community & Partnerships Team		



<b>Service currently provided at TIC</b>	<b>Possible future location</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Issues</b>
Distribution of printed material incl. in bulk to accommodation, ELR and other outlets.	Community & Partnerships Team		
Mail outs in response to enquiries	Communication / Community and Partnerships Team/ Museum		<b>4,065 in 2004 may be burden on existing resources</b>
Regional meetings	Community & Partnerships Team		
Tourism Working Group etc	Community & Partnerships Team		
Updating RBC and Lancs Tourism websites (including contacting partners for update information)	Community & Partnerships Team		

## Equality Impact Assessment Form

A copy of this form is available on the Intranet.

### Screening

Name of strategy, project or policy:

Options for the future of visitor information in Rossendale as provided by the Council.

Officer completing assessment:

Miladur Rahman
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Telephone:

01706 244614
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1. What is the main purpose of the strategy, project or policy?

Report is to set out options for the future of visitor information in Rossendale as provided by the Council.
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2. List the main activities of the project, policy (for strategies list the main policy areas)

The report highlights a list of options for the re-location of the TIC from Kay Street Rawtenstall.
Options are
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Maintain existing visitor information service</li><li>- Provision of visitor information within Rossendale Museum in Whittaker Park.</li><li>- Provision of information services through the Libraries.</li><li>- Private provision of Visitor Information Service</li></ul>

3. Who will be the main beneficiaries of the strategy, project or policy?

Residents, Visitors, Tourist

4. Use the table below to tick:

- (a) Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality groups i.e. it could disadvantage them.
- (b) Where you think that the strategy, project, policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality, equal opportunities or improving relations within equality target groups.

		<b>Positive Impact</b> – it could benefit	<b>Negative Impact</b> – it could disadvantage	<b>Reason</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Women	✓		Could help to Improve visitor information for women
	Men	✓		See above
<b>Race</b>	Asian or Asian British people	✓		See above
	Black or black British people	✓		See above
	People of mixed race	✓		See above
	Irish people	✓		See above
	White people	✓		
	Chinese people and other minority ethnic communities not listed above	✓		See above
<b>Disability</b>	Physical/learning/mental health	✓		See above
<b>Sexuality</b>	Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals	✓		See above
<b>Gender Identity</b>	Transgender people	✓		See above

<b>Age</b>	Older people (60+)	✓		See above
	Younger people (17-25), and children	✓		See above
<b>Belief</b>	Faith groups *	✓		See above
<b>Equal opportunities and/or improved relations eg Rural</b>		✓		

**Notes:**

\* Faith groups cover a wide range of groupings, the most common of which are Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus. Consider faith categories individually and collectively when considering positive and negative impacts.

5 If you have indicated there is a negative impact on any group, is that impact:

Legal?  NO

(i.e. it is not discriminatory under anti-discriminatory legislation)

Intended? YES  NO

Level of impact HIGH  LOW

If the negative impact is possibly discriminatory and not intended and/or of high impact you must complete section two of this form. If not, complete the rest of section one below and consider if completing section two would be helpful in making a thorough assessment.

6 a) Could you minimise or remove any negative impact that is of low significance?

Explain how:


--

a) Could you improve the strategy, project or policy's positive impact?

Explain how:

--

*You may wish to use the action sheet at the end of Section two.*

7 If there is no evidence that the strategy, policy or project promotes equality, equal opportunities or improved relations – could it be adapted so that it does?

How?


Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send one copy to the Head of Human Resources.

Signed: .....Miladur Rahman.....

Date: ..... 06 December 05.....