

Title of Report:	Visitor Information Centre provision within the Causeway Coast and Glens area
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	19th November 2019
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating Our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	Development of visitor economy. Continuously examine and introduce ways to provide services in more accessible and efficient ways.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation Destination Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	N/a
Code	N/a
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	n/a	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/a	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	N/a	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/a	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	N/a	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/a	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to provide Elected Members with information on the provision of Visitor Information Centres across the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

2.0 Background

The Destination Management team manage six networked Visitor Information Centres (VIC's) within the Borough: Ballycastle, Bushmills, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Portrush. It also manages one non-networked office, Rathlin Boathouse. In addition to this, it has a service level agreement with the Glens of Antrim Historical Society for the management of Cushendall Local Information Office.

2.1 VIC Status

A VIC can either have 'Destination' status or 'Local' status based on the Tourism Northern Ireland's minimum standards. Destination status refers to a VIC that 'services the international visitor and at least 50% of the total enquires are from the out of state visitor'.

Ballycastle, Bushmills, Coleraine, and Portrush are Destination VIC's.

Local status refers to VIC's that are 'primarily servicing local residents and the domestic market', Limavady and Ballymoney have 'local' status.

All of the VIC's which have year round opening hours provide the VIC remit as well as a front of house provision for other service areas within Council, for example, Roe Valley Arts Centre, Ballymoney Town Hall and Portnagree House in Ballycastle. Coleraine VIC acts as a reception for the Town Hall but does not provide front of house for another Council Service.

Opening times vary between offices, the seasonal offices are Bushmills, Portrush and Rathlin Boathouse and are open from Easter to October.

2.2 Key Roles

The key roles of the VIC is to provide a visitor enquiry service that supports the local tourism economy and its stakeholders. This is done by actively promoting and selling the accommodation, tour and ticket booking service and local craft to visitors. The VIC's are currently working with 66 local crafters and 27 experience providers offering a direct booking service.

The role also requires the visitor information staff to assist the Destination Marketing team in the preparation and updating of the;

- Visitor guide.
- What's On guide.
- Accommodation guide.
- Uploading of events to Discover NI.

In addition to this the visitor information, staff assist the Digital Communication Officer to deliver on our Online Digital Strategy by;

- Responding to assigned inbox messages on Facebook.
- Responding to inbox messages on Twitter.
- Responding to comments on Visit Causeway's Facebook / Twitter / Instagram posts.
- Monitoring and engaging with the #VisitCauseway hashtag on Instagram/Twitter.
- Answering tourism enquiries via email.

- Responding to Tourism Ireland Community Forum posts referencing Causeway Coastal Route.

2.3 Enquires

The total number of enquires via email, telephone, social media, across the counter to the visitor information centres for 2018/19 was 109,406 of which 36% were out of state visitors. The role of the VIC staff when an out of state visitor visits a VIC is vitally important. According to Tourism Northern Ireland's Visitor Attitude Survey 2018, 38% of visitors received information which encouraged them to visit other areas in Northern Ireland (NI) they had not planned to visit, and 18% received information which encouraged them to stay longer in NI, therefore having a positive economic benefit to NI.

Annex A details information on each of the Visitor Centres

Ballycastle Visitor Information Centre

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Destination Centre'.

Two part-time members of staff working various shifts as lone workers to cover six days all year round with seasonal agency staff brought in various hours from Easter to end of September to assist with increase in footfall and longer opening hours.

Cost of service in Ballycastle

£54,279 which is 20% of the overall Visitor Servicing budget

Opening hours**October - May**

Monday – Friday 9.30am – 5.00pm

Saturday 10.00am – 4.00pm

(Closed for lunch)

June & September

Monday – Friday 9.30am – 5.00pm

Saturday 10.00am – 4.00pm

Sunday 12noon – 4.00pm

July & August

Monday – Friday 9.30am – 7.00pm

Saturday 10.00am – 5.00pm

Sunday 1.00pm – 5.00pm

Ballycastle	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	April to End August 2019
Total NI	14,481	12,732	12,267	14,578	10,481
Total Out of State	12,862	14,211	11,379	13,689	10,875
Total Enquiries	27,365	26,943	23,646	28,267	21,356
Acc bookings	47	45	50	57	24
Acc commission	378.4	452.3	425.44	732.87	343.8
Booking fee acc	141	135	138	171	69
Acc booking value	3,784	4,523	4,254.4	7,328.7	2,748
Total value of tickets/ tours sold				4,972.50	5,339
Total value of local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				4,953.17	2,503.68
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					32
Total actual income	8,802	11,871	10,030.59	12,502.14	

Additional duties for Ballycastle VIC staff

Acting as a pick-up point for literature for trade and signposting of trade to relevant team members for business advice.

Complete Business Plans for Tourism NI for Ballycastle and Bushmills Visitor Information Centre

Assist Limavady Visitor Information colleagues with data gathering for the 'What's On' guide and the uploading of events to 'Discover Northern Ireland' in winter months.

TNI Mystery Shopper Reports

Twice in 2018 – 100%

Once in 2017 – 95%

Trip Advisor Account established July 2017 – 59 reviews to date

Certificate of Excellence awarded by Trip Advisor early 2019.

49 Excellent review, 6 very Good

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summer 2019 – 69 completed

85% completed by visitors from outside Northern Ireland

90% were on holiday or visiting friends and relatives

90% stated face to face as their 1st and 2nd preference way to get visitor information

44% stated brochures/ maps / leaflets as their 1st and 2nd preference to get visitor information

83% stated their visit to the centre encouraged them to visit somewhere they hadn't thought of

69% said the visit to the centre encouraged them to spend more money in the destination

100% stated that the approachability/ friendliness of staff was excellent or very good

100% rated the knowledge / competence of the staff as excellent, very good or good

Ballymoney Visitor Information Centre

Based in Ballymoney Town Hall

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Local Centre'

Cost of service in Ballymoney

£42,670 16% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Currently two part-time permanent members of staff cover the six days of opening with agency staff used to cover two hours over lunch.

Savings since 2015 – Lunch cover was a four hour shift, now reduced to a two hour shift. Unable to close building for lunch due to VIC carrying out Town Hall reception duties aswell as a 'welcome' service for visitors to Ballymoney Museum. Role also involves administration associated with Cash Ticket sales for Arts evening courses.

Enquiry figures last year showed that 78% of enquires in off season (October until March) were related to Town Hall reception whilst in high season this fell to 38% of all enquiries.

Opening hours

Monday – Thursday and Saturday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Fri 9.00am – 4.30pm

Ballymoney	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	April to End August 2019
Total NI	6,365	5,773	9,175	11,876	7,855
Total Out of State	2,335	1,931	2,904	2,459	1,690
Total Enquiries	11,231	8,252	12,941	14,362	9,844
Acc bookings	10	7	13	6	0
Acc commission	0	61	115.3	31	0
Booking fee acc	18	24	42	9	0
Total acc booking value	0	610	1,153	310	0
Total avauue of tickets/ tours sold				6,062.00	7,262
Total value of local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				2,264.89	899.31
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					32
Actual Income	5,793.29	4,227.10	4,825.88	4,750.00	

Additional duties for Ballymoney VIC staff

Acting as a pick-up point for literature for trade and signposting of trade to relevant team members for business advice.

TNI Mystery Shopper Reports

One in 2018 – 100%

One in 2017 – 95%

Established June 2018 - 9 reviews to date of which 8 were excellent and 1 was average.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summer 2019 – 45 completed

82% were completed by non-Northern Ireland residents

53% stated they were here on holiday

20% stated they were here on business

69% stated face to face contact was their 1st or 2nd preference for receiving visitor information in a destination

93% stated the visit to the centre encouraged them to visit somewhere they hadn't planned to.

63% stated the visit to the centre encouraged them to spend more money in the destination

100% rated the approachability and friendliness of staff as excellent

100% rated the knowledge and competence of staff as excellent or very good

Bushmills Visitor Information Centre (Seasonal Opening)

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Destination Centre'

Three part-time members of staff with additional agency employed for July and August to help with increase in footfall and slightly longer opening hours. Staff in this centre are responsible for all cleaning in the centre.

Cost of service in Bushmills

£33,410 13% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Opening hours

March 17th and every weekend until Easter when open full time

April, May & June 10.00am to 5.00pm (closed for lunch)

July & August 10.00am – 6.00pm

September 10.00am – 5.00pm

October weekends only (closed for lunch)

Bushmills Seasonal	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	April to End August 2019
Total NI	3,064	3,248	2,433	3,944	3,015
Total Out of State	8,893	8,685	6,282	9,725	7,569
Total Enquiries	11,957	11,933	8,715	13,669	10,584
Acc bookings	26	16	11	3	1
Acc commission	275.49	185.3	72.19	36	25
Booking fee acc	78	60	33	9	6
Acc booking value	2,754.9	1,853	721.9	360	250
Total value of tickets/ tours sold				9,450.00	8,529
Total value of local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				2,043.48	838.47
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					27
Actual income	2,862.31	3,772.75	6,185.41	4,276.90	

Bushmills acts as a pick up point for trade to collect literature.

TNI Mystery Shoppers results

2018 – 100%

2017 – 95%

Annex A

Trip Advisor established June 2018

34 reviews placed – 27 Excellent, 6 Very Good and 1 Average

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summer 2019 – 85 completed

91% described purpose of visit Holiday

77% placed face to face contact as their preferred way to receive Visitor Information in destination

47% listed Brochures/ Leaflets / Maps as their second preferred method

80% stated their visit to the Centre encouraged them to visit somewhere they hadn't planned to

68% stated the visit encouraged them to spend more money in the area

100% rated the approachability / friendliness of staff as excellent or very good

99% rated the knowledge/ competence of staff as excellent or very good

Coleraine Visitor Information Centre

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Destination Centre'

Two members of staff working various hours over 6 days a week, lone working the majority of the working week. When needed agency brought in to cover annual leave and training cover.

Savings – previously three part-time members of staff with two members of staff on duty at some point each day and additional seasonal agency staff brought in for high-season.

Cost of service in Coleraine

£41,473 16% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Opening hours

Open all year Monday – Saturday 9.00am – 5.00pm (Lunch closure)

Coleraine	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	April to End August 2019
Total NI	14,783	10,390	10,373	8,928	6,580
Total Out of State	5,127	4,101	3,631	2,988	1,989
Total Enquiries	20,240	14,574	14,017	11,920	8,574
Acc bookings	62	52	54	97	59
Acc commission	1,238.5	1,584.95	1,294.55	4,714.8	2,181.70
Booking fee acc	180	167	159	285	204.00
Acc booking value	12,385	15,849.5	12,945.5	47,148.00	43,181.29
Total value of tickets/ tours sold				927.50	1,033
Total value of local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				1,816.92	930.4
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					32
Actual income	7,580.25	5,137.21	4,968.82	7,273.73	

Additional duties for Coleraine VIC staff

Visitor engagement role for 'Visit Causeway' online engagement strategy – Instagram engagement and provide cover when needed by Limavady for Facebook and Twitter.

Responsible for Tourism Ireland Community Forum replies

Acting as a pick-up point for literature for trade and signposting of trade to relevant team members for business advice.

Advertised as main booking line telephone number for accommodation booking service for the area.

Collation of all data in winter months for digital accommodation directory for the Borough.

TNI Mystery Shopper Results

Two visits in 2018 – 100% at both

One visit in 2019 – 100%

Trip Advisor established November 2011

31 reviews to date, 15 Excellent, 10 very good and four average.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summer 2019 – 53 completed

89% stated they were on Holiday

85% stated that their visit encouraged to the Centre encouraged them to visit somewhere they hadn't thought of.

60% said their visit to the centre encouraged them to spend more money in the Borough

100% rated the approachability / friendliness of staff as excellent or very good

100% rated the knowledge and competence of staff as excellent or very good

Cushendall Local Information Office

Serviced through a service level agreement with Council to provide a local information service.

Cost of service in Cushendall

£19,697 7% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Opening hours

March & November 10am to 1pm Monday to Friday

June & September Monday to Saturday 10am to 2pm

April to June & September

Monday – Saturday 10am – 5pm

July & August

Monday – Saturday 10am – 5pm

Sunday 12noon - 4pm

Closed late November to End February

Cushendall LIO	2015	2016	2017	2018/19	Jan to August 2019 only
Total NI				2,468	227
Total Out of state				3,850	4,116
Total enquiries	8,523	9,057	6,943	6,318	4,343
Acc bookings				1	
Acc commission				28	
Booking fee acc				3	
Total acc booking value				280	

Limavady Visitor Information

Based within Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Local Centre'

Cost of service in Limavady

£30,653 12% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Dual role with budget split 50% to Visitor Servicing and 50% to Arts

Two part-time members of staff working various shifts all year round with casual staff used for annual leave and training cover when required.

Savings - In 2015 – one full time 37 hour a week contract and two part-time 18.5 hours a week contracts. Now two 27 hour a week contracts with occasional extra hours worked to cater for the needs of the Arts centre eg evening performance/ events.

Opening Hours

9.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Saturday

Limavady	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	April to End August 2019
Total NI	9,697	11,300	8,362	12,822	15,879
Total Out of State	866	802	551	892	607
Total Enquiries	10,563	12,102	8,919	13,750	16,799
Acc bookings	1	4	4	3	3
Acc commission	8	45.2	87.7	114.8	23.9
Booking fee acc	6	7	21	21	9
Acc booking value	80	452	877	1,148	239
Total Value of tickets/ tours sold				6,861.00	4,699
Total value of local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				5,946.85	1,550
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					33
Actual income	3,058.22	3,923.61	2,628.69	3,836.44	

Additional duties for Limavady VIC staff

Visitor engagement role for 'Visit Causeway' online engagement strategy - Facebook and Twitter and as cover for Instagram when needed.

Collation of Weekly 'What's On' listing for the Borough for dissemination through all the Visitor Information Centres, to trade and press. Editing of same to specification of Daily Mirror for free weekly listing.

Liaising with all trade signed up as directly bookable through centres to ensure tour listings are kept up-to-date and accurate.

Gathering and collating of all data required for the yearly 'What's On' publication and uploading of same to relevant websites with updates made throughout the year as applicable.

Acting as a pick-up point for literature for trade and signposting of trade to relevant team members for business advice.

Arts centre specific duties

Sale of tickets for arts centre events, Sale of Art Work, Social Media, website, enquiries and marketing including relevant databases.

TNI Mystery Shopper results

Once 2017 – 90%

Once 2018 – 100%

Trip Advisor established January 2012

24 reviews placed, 16 excellent, 7 very good and 1 average

Customer Satisfaction Surveys Summer 2019 – 24 completed

86% were encouraged to visit somewhere they hadn't thought of.

54% said their visit to the centre encouraged them to stay longer in the Borough.

69% said the visit encouraged them to spend more money in the Borough

100% rated the approachability/ friendliness of staff as excellent or very good

Portrush Visitor Information Centre (Seasonal Opening)

A Networked Visitor Information Centre graded as a 'Destination Centre'

Cost of service in Portrush

£20,948 8% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Two agency members of staff working various shifts seasonally.

Savings since 2015, more lone working

Opening hours

March 17th Weekends only

From Easter to end of September Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm

Sunday 11am to 4pm

Portrush (seasonal)	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	End August 2019
Total NI	5,976	4,935	4,760	2,844	3,178
Total Out of State	3,346	4,009	4,284	3,874	3,250
Total Enquiries	9,367	8,944	9,054	6,718	6,430
Acc bookings	20	11	0	1	0
Acc commission	342	228.6	0	11	0
Booking fee acc	75	48	0	3	0
Total acc booking value	3,420	2,286	0	110	0
Total value of tickets/tours sold				535.00	732
Local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				451.35	449.7
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					17
Actual Income	1,450	1,222.85	798	1,294.72	

Portrush acts as a pick up point for trade to collect literature.

TNI Mystery Shopper Results

Once 2017 95%

Once 2018 95%

Annex A

Customer Satisfaction Survey Summer 2019 – 72 completed

88% completed by non-Northern Ireland visitors

61% stated face to face was their preferred way of getting visitor information with 26% placing it as their second preference for getting visitor information

96% said their visit to the Information Centre encouraged them to visit somewhere they hadn't thought of.

100% rated the approachability and friendliness of staff as Excellent

89% said the staff provided a sense of pride in their local area

97% rated the knowledge and competence of staff as excellent, with the remaining 3% rating it as very good.

Rathlin Boathouse Visitors Centre (Seasonal Opening)

Rathlin Boathouse Visitor Centre - Museum and local information Point

Non- networked facility

Meet and Greet service at Harbour weekends and every day when possible July and August.

Cost of service on Rathlin Island

£23,190 8% of the overall visitor servicing budget

Opening hours

Monday to Sunday

April, May, June, September 10am to 4.30pm

July & August 10am to 5pm

Rathlin Boathouse	2015	2016	2017	2018/19	End of August
Total NI		8,195	9,467	12,040	9,086
Total out of state		4,356	3,593	6,513	12,697
Total enquiries	9,208	12,551	13,060	18,553	21,783
Acc bookings					
Acc commission					
Booking fee acc					
Total value of tickets/ tours sold				129.00	
Local craft/ artisan food sold borough rate payers				2,668.45	2,313.35
Local crafters/ artisan showcased					14
Actual total income	3,204.05	2,754.05	4,793.35	4,198.62	

Rathlin Boathouse acts as a pick up point for trade to collect literature.

Trip Advisor account established May 2018 with 29 reviews placed

25 Excellent, 3 Good, 1 Average

Survey specific to Boathouse – 40 completed in 2019

100% rated the exhibition and staff excellent or very good