

Area East: Local Information Centres 2016/17 Report

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on the progress and operations of the Area East Local Information Centres in Bruton, Wincanton & Castle Cary and set out the arrangements for agreeing Area East financial support.

Public Interest

The Area East Committee gives funding support to the three town councils to assist with the running costs of local information centres (LICs) in Bruton, Wincanton & Castle Cary. This report gives details of how each LIC is doing from the monitoring information supplied under the service agreement.

Recommendation

To note and comment on the progress made towards establishing strong, locally run Local Information Centres and to acknowledge the future LIC service review.

Background

A review of SSDC satellite offices was completed in spring 2010 and an improvement plan put in place with a programme of improvements for the area and community offices across the district. Part of these proposals was to recognise that Local Information Centres should be under Town Council control to enable increased hours of operation supported by local resident volunteers and backed by an annual District Council service level agreement of £500 per LIC.

In February 2012, as part of efficiency savings the District Executive ceased staffing small part time community offices and in April 2012 sole responsibility for running the Local Information Centre in Bruton and Castle Cary transferred to the Town Councils. This gave the Town Council's the opportunity to manage the Local Information Centres based on the need of their town and its visitors. It also enabled Area Support staff to concentrate on delivering a comprehensive SSDC advice service from the Wincanton office to those who need it. The Area Support staff provided training for the Local Information Centre volunteers and a referral/sign posting system for District Council enquiries is in place and no issues have arisen following the transfer.

As part of the continuing support for the Local Information Centre provision a Service Level Agreement has been signed with each Town Council with regard to the management of the Local Information Centre. As previously agreed by Area East Committee £500 per annum is awarded to the Town Council to assist with the cost of running their LICs and improving the service.

Bruton, Castle Cary & Wincanton LICs are located alongside and run by the Town Councils/ volunteers for the benefit of the local community and visitors to the town and the surrounding villages. The service agreement with SSDC gives a framework for achieving consistency & funding stability. SSDC will support the LIC to provide services to the local community and to visitors to the district. As the LIC is overseen/ staffed by Town Council employees/ volunteers and local residents can access SSDC services in the town, it is not necessary for SSDC to run surgery sessions at the Town Hall/offices & referrals can be made as necessary.

The agreement sets out the links between the town LIC and SSDC, the services and activities being provided by the centre and the support it can expect from the district council. It also outlines a framework for monitoring its success, as well as giving funding conditions.

The agreement assumes no significant changes in the level or scope of core activity over the life of the funding. It is subject to regular review

Aims of LICs

- To provide information on local services, amenities and activities to the community and visitors to the town.
- To promote the heritage and culture of the town and the surrounding area.
- To support the local economy by promoting businesses, venues and attractions in the area.
- To provide a reliable, efficient and professional service.

Monitoring and Evaluation

There is an annual meeting between the LIC and a representative from SSDC to monitor the level of service, activities provided and financial position. At this review, the following information is considered:

- Annual accounts.
- Budget for the coming year.
- Development plans.
- Details of any other funding.
- Referrals made to SSDC

Report for 2015/16

The Town Councils LICs have been very busy this year developing and operating their individual services. The LICs have seen increased tourism to the area, in turn increasing demand on volunteer time as well as a greater range of information needed from enquiries.

Objectives	Recorded information 2015 – 2016	Bruton	Castle Cary	Wincanton	Total numbers 2015-16
Provide a central point of contact for the community and visitors	Overall number of enquiries to LIC	1809	6292	1673	9774
	enquiries in person	1809	5843	1215	8867
	by telephone/ e- mail/post	0	449	458	907
Encourage & support a team of well-informed volunteers to run LIC	Number of volunteers	6	10	0	16
Referrals made to SSDC (inc in total)		52	25	417	494

The overall figures are down from last year and there seem to be more enquiries trending towards phone and e-mail this year. Castle Cary are still exceeding expectations and must be highlighted for the service they are providing.

Please note:

The opening hours for each office are determined locally and vary, which is reflected in the number of visitors. Wincanton LIC is run mainly by the Deputy Town Clerk and a paid employee. Bruton LIC does *not* have a separate phone line/computer from the Town Council

In addition to supplying statistics the LICs have given the following reports:

Wincanton report:

- Updated meetings with SSDC Tourism team
- New residents to the town are happy with the welcome guide that has been produced.

Castle Cary report:

- Continue to run our Community and Tourist Information Desk entirely on volunteers.
- Open summer 9.30 am to 2pm Monday to Thursday, Friday 9.30am to 4pm, Saturday 9.30am to 12.30 am
- We attend leaflet distribution session annually plus other volunteer' training and events set up by SSDC Tourism team where possible
- We organise ordering of leaflets, tourism materials including train and bus timetables, local information, etc
- We use the internet increasingly for information searching, and now have a laptop solely for our use which is great.
- We manage the Saturday morning coffee morning bookings, banner bookings
- We help advertise and promote local events, including the Big Christmas
- We have regular Volunteers' group meetings

Bruton report:

In addition to the statistical information Bruton LIC has worked with the Town Council and Bruton Community Partnership to establish:

- Town and Community Web site
- Review of local information and marketing information.

Future funding arrangements

The annual payment of £500 to each LIC transferred from a central tourism budget to the areas in 2010 and has been awarded against performance set out in individual Service Level Agreements. Each town council has taken a different approach to delivering LIC services and as a result inconsistencies have developed. Whilst it is important that LICs are designed to reflect the distinctive local environment and meet the needs of the customer, it is felt that the allocation as it stands does not recognise the different level of service provided or encourage new approaches to service delivery.

A District wide review of Local Information Centre is underway with Officers meeting to discuss options and ideas. The findings of this review will be presented to the committee in July 2017. The town councils have been told that the funding arrangements will be reviewed and are likely to change from 2017/18. As part of the review Officers will consult with members about the approach to funding before working on detailed proposals which will include assessing the impact of changes.

Financial Implications

A total of £1,500, £500 per LIC is paid to the Town Councils from Area East: Members Discretionary Budget.

Council Plan Implications

- Environment
- Health & Communities

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

The SSDC Area East Development Team considers all aspect of equalities in evaluating funding support. Supporting an accessible face to face, locally run LIC, with the ability to refer vulnerable people to the community office for additional support, is complementary to SSDC run customer access services.

Background Papers:

File with SLA.
