

Area East: Local Information Centre's 2013/14 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.

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

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.

Report for 2013/14

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 2013 – 2014	Bruton	Castle Cary	Wincanton	Total numbers 2013-14
Provide a central point of contact for the community and visitors	Overall number of enquiries to LIC	2158	5795	1872	9825
	enquiries in person	2158	5738	1488	9384
	by telephone/ e- mail/post	0	57	384	441
Encourage & support a team of well-informed volunteers to run LIC	Number of volunteers	6	13	0	19

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 meeting with SSDC Tourism team
- Numbers on par with last year's accessing the LIC
- Interest: 15 French tourists accessed the LIC finding out information on re-tracing the Napoleonic Wars (French prisoners were stationed here in Wincanton).
- Seen an increase in visitors to the area researching family history.
- New residents to the town are happy with the welcome guide that has just 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
- Open winter (Nov to March) 9.30 to 12noon weekdays and Saturdays
- 10 "desk" volunteers plus Sally as chair
- 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 help Sally input material onto the town website (she is webmaster) and also deal with putting up of posters
- 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, chaired by Sally

2013/14 additional activities have been:

- The production of a new edition of the Castle Cary leaflet
- Re-print of our popular walks leaflets
- Taking on (January onwards) the showing of people round the new Shambles venue, and briefing hirers on its use
- Taking on the preliminaries of making bookings for the Shambles and undercroft over and above the coffee mornings.
- Joining in the "safer places" scheme
- Having regular informal "Volunteers tea parties" into which have been incorporated training sessions on disability awareness
- Session on giving out SSDC information (James Divall)
- Working out new systems for information gathering and sharing
- Selling tickets now for local events
- Registering students for new programme of adult learning to take place in the shambles.

Bruton report:

In addition to the statistical information Bruton LIC is working with the Town Council and Bruton Community Partnership to develop:

- A refurbished LIC and town office
- New branding for the town (to be implemented within the LIC)
- A new web site and town information signs (including new maps)
- Enhancements to signs in the town highlighting where the LIC is for the increased tourist due to Hauser and Wirth galleries.

Financial Implications

A total of £1,500, £500 per LIC is paid to the Town Councils from Area East: community grants budget

Corporate Priority Implications

Focus two: Environment

Focus four: 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