

DECISION

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: 9 SEPTEMBER, 2021
title: MARKETING LANCASHIRE
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To outline the role of Marketing Lancashire in relation to the Council's tourism work.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
- Corporate Priorities - To encourage economic development throughout the borough, with specific focus on tourism
- Other Considerations – To develop, with relevant partners, measures to support the visitor economy
- Corporate Priorities - To ensure a well-managed council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 At its meeting in May 2021 the committee requested a report on Marketing Lancashire.

2.2 Marketing Lancashire is a destination management organisation (DMO). It promotes Lancashire as a destination and a place for visitors, occupiers, developers, investors and businesses.

It uses the brand "We are Lancashire" to promote the County across a range of sectors including tourism, along with wider economic development. It has a leading role to play in the visitor economy strategy of the County which incorporates approximately 4,000 businesses. It co-ordinates research such as visitor surveys with leisure and international visitors, and commissions economic impact reports.

2.3 It promotes Lancashire as a business events destination and as a place to invest and do business. In addition, it provides the PR, digital marketing, and events function for the Lancashire LEP.

2.4 Marketing Lancashire receives funding from business and local authority subscriptions, as well as deriving income from commercial activities. It also draws down funding from central government and coordinates collaborative funding bids.

3. GOVERNMENT REVIEW

3.1 There is some concern nationally about both the number and value of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and in March 2021, the government announced an independent review to assess how DMOs across England are funded and structured, and how they perform their roles. There are a very large number of DMO's across the country, and they can take many forms. They can be based on identifiable tourism regions, single destinations, or in the case in Lancashire, a county local

authority administrative area. The purpose of the review is to establish whether there may be a more efficient and effective model for supporting English tourism at the regional level, and if so, what that model may be. The review, once complete, will report to the DCMS Secretary of State.

3.2 The scope of the review will seek to examine the extent to which the DMOs:

- are economically efficient, effective, and sustainable (regarding funding, structure and performance).
- best enable the government to meet its leisure and business tourism policy objectives at a national, regional, and local level.
- engage within the wider local and regional economic landscape, and the current focus on English devolution and levelling up.

3.3 Once complete, and depending upon the outcome of the findings, the review will make recommendations, to government, the tourism sector, or both as appropriate, about:

- whether DMOs might be structured or funded differently, and if so, how any proposals might maximise post-COVID-19 recovery and long-term success.
- what the role of DMOs should be, bearing in mind existing other local structures such as local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), mayoral combined authorities (MCAs), local authorities and other similar local/regional bodies, and where these might intersect.
- how DMOs should best engage with, and be engaged by, VisitEngland, VisitBritain and DCMS, as well as wider government/public bodies where relevant (e.g., Arts Council England; UK Sport).

3.4 Whilst the Council hasn't been a direct consultee, the Council's Tourism Officer has involved in the national consultation, in his capacity as a board member of the Tourism Management Institute.

4 ISSUES

4.1 This Council has supported the work of Marketing Lancashire for several years with a subscription of £5000 p.a. Up until recent years, an agreement, called the 'annual subvention', has been in place to account for the service they provide for our subscription. This was, in effect, a form of service level agreement.

4.2 Most recently, Marketing Lancashire has dispensed with their subvention agreements with district councils, which means there are limited ways in which the organisation remains accountable in terms of value for money.

4.3 Marketing Lancashire maintain a high profile for the County with promotional activities which are largely online, using website and social media channels. They also coordinate statistical research such as STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model) and an annual visitor survey. Although not definitive in scope, this information provides useful trend analysis of the economic impact of tourism for the Borough as well as Lancashire as a whole.

- 4.4 Your officers are keen to ensure that this Council gets value for money for the Council's annual subscription, and in order to ensure this, it is felt that the following areas of current concern need to be addressed.
- The lack of tourism strategy, in terms of destination management rather than destination marketing, particularly in relation to sustainability and 'over tourism'.
 - The demise of the identity of 'Ribble Valley' as a strong generic sub-brand of the county on Visit Lancashire media.
 - Limited communication of the delivery of tourism and recognition of the potential of working with districts.
 - Weak collaboration on social media and marketing.
 - Lack of involvement in the development of strategy and future marketing campaigns.
- 4.5 It is therefore suggested that your officers draft new conditions for the delivery of service and negotiate with Marketing Lancashire in order to establish a better working relationship which ensures value for money, and the effective delivery of tourism strategy.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The £5k subscription is included in the revenue budget annually.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – This Council showed remarkable foresight in the mid-1990s by adopting a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy long before it was recognised as a national objective. By creating the Food Trail and concentrating our marketing efforts on the food, walking and cycling sections, we aimed to 'protect the product' that attracts visitors – our natural environment. Your officers are concerned that the focus of Marketing Lancashire is in dishing up visitor numbers at all costs.
- Political - None
- Reputation – Tourism is an important aspect of the Borough's economy, with an annual visitor spend (pre-pandemic) of over £250 million.
- Equality & Diversity – None in the context of this report

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Ask officers to draft new conditions for the delivery of service and negotiate with Marketing Lancashire to establish a better working relationship which ensures value for money, and the effective delivery of coordinated tourism strategy.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS; none

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