



Tourism Recovery in Wyre Task Group

Draft Report

Chairman:

Councillor Peter Le Marinel

Task Group Members:

Councillor Ken Minto
Councillor Lady D Atkins
Councillor Callum Baxter
Councillor Colette Fairbanks
Councillor Rachel George
Councillor Phil Orme
Councillor Mary Stirzaker
Councillor David Walmsley
Councillor Lynn Walmsley

Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Chairman: Councillor John Ibison

• Introduction	Page 3
• Aims of review	Page 4
• The review process	Page 4 - 5
• Summary of evidence provided by Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities and Councillor Lynne Bowen, Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder	Page 6 - 8
• Summary of evidence provided by Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development officer	Page 9 - 13
• Summary of evidence provided by Emma Lyons, Communications and Marketing Manager	Page 14 - 15
• Summary of evidence provided by Vikki Harries, Marketing Lancashire	Page 16 - 20
• Summary of evidence provided by Jane Cole and James Carney, Blackpool Transport	Page 21 - 23
• Summary of evidence provided by Toni Tester, Contact Centre Reception Area Team Leader	Page 24 - 25
• Summary of evidence provided by Julia Robinson, Commercial Manager Waterfront Venues	Page 26 - 29
• Summary of evidence provided by Chris Wyatt, Arts and Events Development Officer	Page 30 - 32
• Summary of evidence from councillor visits to Visit Garstang Centre	Page 33 - 34
• Summary evidence from the task group's business and visitors surveys	Page 35 - 36
• Supporting documents	Page 37
• Conclusions and recommendations	Page 38 - 41
• Councillors' attendances	Page 42
• List of appendices and references	Page 43
• Appendices	Page 44

Introduction

Tourism is vital to Wyre and its local economy. The impacts of Covid-19 have been detrimental to many people, sectors, industries and businesses across the whole of the United Kingdom and the World.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified the need to support the recovery of Wyre's tourism sector; therefore, they decided to commission a task group for review.

Members identified the unique nature of Wyre - from its market towns to its rural and coastal offerings. They aimed to support this post-pandemic recovery period to encourage people back to stay and to, additionally, identify opportunities for income, cost savings and improved ways of working wherever possible.

The group noted in the early stages of the review that tourism is a broad topic; therefore, this could be a risk to their work. For their review to have an impact, the group realised that it needed to be focused and meaningful. Their focus was regarding:

- The marketing of tourism in Wyre
- The Discover Wyre website
- Digital strategy
- The return of coach industries
- Wyre's information centres
- Events in Wyre

In addition, the group identified that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should look at a focused review of the theatres (Thornton Little Theatre and Marine Hall) and other council-run facilities in the future, as they found this did not come under their current scope.

Aims of review

The aims of the review, as specified in the scoping document (see Appendix A), were as follows:

1. To assess how the Covid-19 pandemic may have affected the tourism offer in Wyre
2. To explore the ReDiscover Wyre Campaign
3. To capitalise on 'staycations'
4. To understand Wyre's USP The Great Outdoors and identify enhancements
5. To explore both the rural and coastal offerings including the impact of recent filming in the area
6. To understand Wyre's support for local businesses and identify opportunities
7. To identify areas of improvement particularly with a focus on the Welcome Back Fund
8. To make succinct recommendations to Cabinet on how we can support tourism recovery in Wyre
9. To make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on specific and focused related topics that might be considered for further scrutiny review

The review process

For its first meeting, the task group invited Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities, and Councillor Lynne Bowen, Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder. They also attended the group's final meeting to comment on the emerging draft recommendations.

The group subsequently interviewed Alexandra Holt, the Tourism Development Officer, and Emma Lyons, the Communications and Marketing Officer, Vikki Harris, Marketing Lancashire, and the group received written responses from Jane Cole, Chief Executive of Blackpool Transport and the President of the CPT, and a presentation from James Carney, Finance and Commercial Director Blackpool Transport. Members also invited Julia Robinson, Commercial Manager Waterfront Venues, and Chris Wyatt, Arts and Events Development Officer, to interview.

Members also received some information from Toni Tester, Contact Centre Reception Area Team Leader, surrounding the wedding and events offer at Poulton-le-Fylde Civic Centre.

Some members of the group attended a site visit to Visit Garstang Centre, in which they updated the group with their findings. Councillors would like to thank Alexandra Holt for helping with the organisation of the site visit and answering any additional questions. She has been of great help to the task group.

The group additionally produced two public surveys regarding tourism, one for local businesses in Wyre and one for visitors to Wyre. The members of the group and the Democratic Services Officer distributed the online version of the survey. Members also carried out several face-to-face survey sessions in the tourism hot spots across the borough. Again, the group would like to thank Sara Ordonez, Senior Engagement Officer, for her assistance with the creation of these surveys. The members appreciated her expert knowledge.

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities) and Councillor Lynne Bowen (Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder).

Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities and Councillor Lynne Bowen, Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder, attended the initial meeting of the task group to assist the group with an understanding of the context within which the review would take place. They presented the group with an overview of tourism in Wyre and some information regarding tourism recovery as the borough emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

Councillor Lynne Bowen highlighted to the group the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on industries such as tourism. She described tourism recovery as an important area for the council. In 2018, tourism brought in over 4.8 million people to Wyre in the year 2018, which generated 362 million pounds for the Wyre economy. She finally expressed a desire for Wyre to be promoted as a destination to stay and a place to return.

Wyre Council had a partnership with Marketing Lancashire who helped promote Wyre via social media and other avenues. She added that Discover Wyre guides were effectively distributed on a national scale.

Marianne Hesketh updated the group on what the council had done to help businesses and the tourism sector during the pandemic. She explained that the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board have been reviewing the coach industry, in particular, and found that it had adversely been affected. She drew member's attention towards the Welcome Back Fund that had been awarded to Wyre Council by the government to encourage people back to Wyre following the pandemic.

Following their presentations, Marianne Hesketh and Councillor Bowen were asked a number of questions and made some additional comments to assist councillors to meet the aims of the review.

After the meeting, the Corporate Director Communities provided members with the Welcome Back Fund action plan.

The following further information is relevant to the review's purpose and aims:

- Welcome Back Fund Programme allocation of £199,180 (approx)
- Proposed interventions:
 - Improve the look of vacant shop units in our town centres
 - Live street arts animation
 - Supporting sustainable community event use
 - Event enhancement and encouraging community involvement in events
 - Development and expand virtual and physical town trails
 - Recruit 'Welcome Back to Wyre' Ambassadors
 - Welcoming Back Coach Groups
 - Welcome Back Marketing and Communications Post
 - Christmas Lights Switch-on events

- Support for 'In bloom' groups to recognise that business sponsorship may be affected due to the pandemic

Marianne Hesketh additionally drew member's attention towards a recent article by LancsLive. This article highlighted Wyre as being the top spot for recreational and retail spending, however, there has been a decrease in this by 5 per cent overall. It explained that Wyre had seen a massive 88 per cent increase in Holiday Park spends; it is evident that people are purchasing more for their holiday through 'packages' instead of taking basics and then spending outside of their accommodation (Heeds, 2021).

As requested, Marianne Hesketh provided the group with some figures that addressed the cost of service and overall capital profit of Marine Hall, Thornton Little Theatre and Garstang Information Centre:

3040 Marine Hall

Category	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21
Employee	£299,200.34	£322,950.43	£287,389.74
Premises	£80,160.53	£94,823.43	£130,844.26
Travel	£449.01	£76.21	£149.81
Supplies and Services	£228,731.59	£215,896.93	£20,124.50
Third Party	£1,428.00	£10,356.56	£0.00
Support Services	£108,282.15	£124,854.36	£113,981.12
	-	-	-
Income	£491,224.28	£477,165.32	£183,707.15
-Surplus/Deficit	£227,027.34	£291,792.60	£368,782.28
Capital	£169,012.16	£169,012.15	£109,426.30

3043 Thornton Little Theatre

Category	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21
Employee	£100,950.00	£125,666.26	£105,277.02
Premises	£28,152.16	£31,169.48	£24,041.83
Travel	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Supplies and Services	£74,998.00	£48,984.51	£590.17
Third Party	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Support Services	£19,216.58	£26,472.17	£30,185.10
	-	-	-
Income	£129,733.90	-£99,616.16	-£41,380.42
-Surplus/Deficit	£93,582.84	£132,676.26	£118,713.70
Capital	£38,363.69	£38,363.69	£53,716.75

3171 Garstang TIC

Category	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21
Employee	£20,972.85	£21,919.19	£22,583.44
Premises	£24,451.09	£26,849.95	£25,652.81
Travel	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Supplies and Services	£12,805.66	£12,376.33	£6,357.33
Third Party	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Support Services	£10,746.20	£21,586.92	£18,031.04
Income	-£13,519.06	-£14,248.91	-£5,656.49
-Surplus/Deficit	£55,456.74	£68,483.48	£66,968.13
Capital	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development Officer.

Alexandra Holt attended the second meeting of the task group where members interviewed her.

She was asked a number of questions about tourism recovery in Wyre to which she provided very thorough answers.

The following are relevant to the group's aims.

Q1. What is the role of the Tourism Development Officer?

Alexandra Holt provided members with an overall picture of her role, which involved the production of the Discover Wyre guide and leaflets, digital releases, digital display screens, social media, the management of information flagships, the Discover Wyre website, and working with partners such as Visit Fylde, Visit Blackpool, Marketing Lancashire, Morecombe Bay, and Forest of Bowland. She had also been involved in promotional work to encourage coach industries back to Wyre.

She explained about the two main tourist information centres one in Garstang and one in Fleetwood, hosted by Marine Hall.

Q2. What is your involvement with the Discover Wyre website?

Alexandra Holt explained her role was to update the Discover Wyre website. The Discover Wyre website was currently 240 pages and worked in synergy with the Wyre Council website.

Q3. Other than the website, what other marketing strategies does the council use?

She updated members that she was currently working with Fylde Council to create a set of digitised walks that would cross the boundaries of Wyre and Fylde. Other work included working with Blackpool on the coach industry to get the coach groups back to Wyre. She had recently produced a presentation to several members of the CPT (Coach Passenger Transport Group) to encourage them to come to the borough. She added her work on a double-page spread in Visit Blackpool's brochure. The most immediate marketing work that could be done was digital. Wyre was a small district and not many people knew exactly what Wyre is. People associated Wyre with the small towns within the borough.

Q4. What are the latest tourism figures in Wyre and what is the average spend of Wyre visitors?

Alexandra Holt shared round an information sheet that included tourism economy statistics 2018; she did explain that these would be slightly out of date as they were pre Covid-19 statistics.

Key statistics:

- Over 4.8 million tourism visits, equating to 7 per cent of all tourism visits to Lancashire
- A total of £361.635 million was generated within the local economy through visitor and tourism business expenditure
- 672,000 visits were made by visitors staying in Wyre as part of a holiday or short break, generating 3.192 million nights in accommodation across the district
- 4.151 million tourism visits made by day visitors to the district
- Total bedstock in Wyre is 17,853 beds
- Visitors to Wyre supported 4,362 full-time equivalent jobs
- More than 7.3 million visitor days and nights were generated by visitors to Wyre in 2018
- Economic impact changes by -3.0 per cent between 2017 and 2018
- Visitor numbers changes by -1.8 per cent between 2017 and 2018.

She provided a brief overview and explained that Wyre had around 5 million visitors a year, there were around 18 thousand beds, and the total amount generated within the local economy was 362 million pounds per annum. A day visitor on average spent just under 37 pounds and a staying visitor just under 67 pounds a day.

Q5. What events have done well in Wyre?

Alexandra Holt explained a number of great events that come to Wyre. Some examples were:

- The Beer and Cider Festival at Marine Hall in early February
- Easter at Marsh Mill
- Scorton Bikes and Barrows early May Day Bank Holiday
- Cleveleys Classic Car Show in early June
- Fleetwood Carnival in mid June
- Garstang Scarecrow Festival in early July
- Great Eccleston Show in mid July
- Fleetwood Festival of Transport (Tram Sunday) in late July
- Wyre Estuary Country Park Open Day in late July
- Fylde Coast Food and Drink Festival at Marine Hall in mid August
- Great Eccleston Tractor Pull August Bank Holiday
- Guys Oyster Festival in early September
- Marine Hall Christmas Market in mid November
- Poulton Christmas Festival in early December
- Panto at Marine Hall in early December

She emphasised the Garstang Show, as it was a great example of how the borough can cross-promote. She explained that thankfully, the Garstang Show would be going ahead in 2021 and the Garstang Information Centre had begun to sell tickets for the event.

Q6. What future events are coming to Wyre?

She updated members that there had recently been an 'In Memoriam' event in Fleetwood, which was an art installation in Marine Hall gardens.

Q7. What are the impacts of Covid-19 on tourism in Wyre?

Wyre had commissioned Marketing Lancashire to create a report on the evaluation of tourism in the borough for the year 2020, which should be published by the end of August 2021.

She explained that on average Garstang Information Centre got around 25,000 visitors a year, however, in 2020, they received 7,000 visitors. Many of our main events had not been able to take place last year due to Covid-19, so that had a massive impact on the tourism offer. She stated that Wyre tourism statistics were down to around half the average (40-45 thousand visitors). However, she did reassure members that this was symptomatic across the whole of Lancashire.

Q8. What are the usual demographics of visitors to Wyre (target audience)?

She stated that Wyre was particularly popular with Scotland because of being on the border of Blackpool. Wyre also received visitors from Yorkshire, the rest of Lancashire and Staffordshire. Visitors liked our coastal and rural dimensions.

Q9. What is being done to develop and expand virtual and physical town trails?

She referred to her earlier example of the digital trails with Fylde Council. There was also money through the Heritage Action Zone Fund that had allowed the creation of five community-led trails in Fleetwood. The team leading on this would also like to create an extra trail in Cleveleys with some Welcome Back funding. Digital walks were advertised on the Discover Wyre website and the Wyre Council website.

Q10. What is being done to increase coach trips to the area?

Alexandra Holt updated members that the Welcome Back Fund had allowed her to create four itineraries for coach visits to Fleetwood, Garstang, Cleveleys and Poulton-le-Fylde. This would then be promoted to the CPT (Coach Passenger Transport Group) to come to the borough for a day of familiarisation.

She added that Wyre offered a bespoke service, free of charge, for coach industries where there was help with parking, itineraries, accommodation and food and drink.

Q11. Is there a clear traditional and digital marketing strategy specifically designed to boost tourism in Wyre?

Alexandra Holt explained to the group that she used more of a development strategy rather than a digital strategy that itemised the areas she needed to focus on.

Q12. Is it possible to see the Google Analytics data for the discover Wyre website?

Alexandra Holt passed out some google analytics data to the group that covered the year period 2019 to 2021.

Key points:

- In 2019 (Jan – Dec) page views were 96,610
- In 2020 (Jan – Dec) page views were 40,030
- In 2021 (Jan – July) page views were 23,021
- The average time on the page, the bounce rate and the exit percentage was relatively consistent for all three years.

She highlighted to members that the number of visitors to the site was highest in 2019, and then it dropped in 2020 and was slowly rising again in 2021. She additionally described the site's popular pages such as Things To Do, Lancashire Country Park and Events.

The full Google Analytics data can be found at Appendix B of this report.

Q13. How much does it cost for a double page spread in Visit Blackpool's brochure and how big is its reach?

Alexandra Holt explained that the cost for one page was usually £1,800 however; as Wyre was a district council, they allowed us a double page spread with some extra editorial space for the same price. Other council assets were also involved such as Wyre Estuary Park and Marine Hall, which allowed for the spending to be distributed. Regarding the guides reach, she believed that they produced around 100,000 guides but could not give the members an exact figure at that moment.

Q14. What would you change, if anything, about the Discover Wyre Website?

She suggested that there was a possibility that the Discover Website may be brought more in-house. She explained that she liked the group's idea of making the website more about the individual areas and towns within the borough to make it easier for members of the public to navigate. There were some pages that the Tourism Officer explained currently worked well but could be improved. She added that there could be potential to add a page about the statues and sculptures around the borough.

Q15. Do you work in the information centres?

She explained, as a manager, she liked to get involved in the information centres to have a practical insight into their operation.

Q16. Has Wyre got a similar brochure to the Visit Blackpool one?

Alexandra Holt introduced Discover Wyre's 2019 guide to members. She stated that 10,000 of these guides were produced in 2019, 6,000 were for national distribution and

4,000 were for local usage all around the borough. She hoped to produce an updated version of this guide.

Some members discussed other tourism related topics such as the distribution of leaflets and guides, coach ambassadors and the parking options for coaches. It was asked whether it would be possible to create a booking system for coaches to park in Wyre owned car parks.

In addition, a member of the group approached Alexandra Holt with a question regarding the potential of renting out Fleetwood boating lake as an option to generate income. Alexandra investigated this request and an answer was provided by Sharon Smales, Wyre's Estates Assistant, and shared with members. She explained that the current position is that the Blackpool and Fylde College have rights to use the boating lake contained in their lease for the boat stores. They use the entire lake on a daily basis and so any decision to offer concessions on the lake would be subject to negotiations with the college and to a lesser extent the Outdoor Adventure Group who also have rights but currently only use once a week. If we were able to negotiate terms with the college and OAG then any concession would have to be advertised.

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Emma Lyons, Communications and Marketing Manager.

Additionally, Emma Lyons, Communications and Marketing Manager, attended the second task group meeting.

Members of the task group then asked questions mainly surrounding the communications team involvement with tourism and received answers. The following information is relevant to the group's goals:

Q1. What is your involvement with the Discover Wyre website?

Emma Lyons addressed the group and explained her role as the Communications and Marketing Manager. She added that the communications team supported the Tourism Development Officer but their involvement in the operational side of the Discover Wyre Website was limited.

She explained that there was a current review of the Discovery Wyre website, following the launch of the new Wyre Council website; she added that this could be an opportunity to change the current CMS hosting system (New Mind). The Fleetwood Market website was separate and was run by a company that the council paid for, the theatre websites and council websites were all run in-house.

Q2. Other than the website, what other marketing strategies does the council use?

Emma Lyons explained to members about the Communications 2019 campaigns plan, however, highlighted that this had now been out of date due to Covid-19.

Some other examples of campaigns were the Reopening campaign and the Holiday Activity Fund campaign. Social media was of great importance in terms of marketing.

Q3. What events have done well in Wyre?

She informed members that Chris Wyatt was the officer who was involved with the management of events. Regarding promotion, the communications team role was to help promote Wyre council hosted events and the Tourism Development Officer promoted the external events in Wyre.

Q4. Is there a clear traditional and digital marketing strategy specifically designed to boost tourism in Wyre?

She explained that the Discover Wyre website did not have a digital strategy although expressed that one could be beneficial. Emma Lyons updated members that the Welcome Back Fund had allowed communications to recruit a Welcome Back Communications and Marketing Officer to help assist and promote the Welcome Back Campaign.

Q5. Is it possible to see the Google Analytics data for the discover Wyre website?

Emma Lyons explained some of the google analytics for the Discover Wyre website and compared them to the Wyre Council website.

Key findings:

- Discover Wyre audience overview for 2019. The average number of daily users is 137, the average number of daily site visits is 167
- Discover Wyre audience overview for 2020 (year of Covid-19). The average number of daily users is 58.9; the average number of daily site visits is 67.8.
- Discover Wyre audience overview for 2021 to the present. The average number of daily users is 61; the average number of daily site visits is 68.4.
- The main Wyre Council website audience overview for the new site from 2 July to present. The average number of daily users is 1769; the average number of daily site visits is 2706.
- The usage statistics from the old Wyre Council website from 2020 (Jan – Dec). The average number of daily users is 1221. The average number of daily site visits is 4364.

Q6. In terms of marketing the tourism offer in Wyre what could be done differently?

She expressed that it could be a good idea to market Wyre as the different towns or find a new way to put Wyre as a whole on the map.

Q7. Who operates Marketing Lancashire?

Emma Lyons could not answer but she added that the council paid a substantial membership each year.

Summary of evidence provided by Vikki Harries, Marketing Lancashire.

Vikki Harries from Marketing Lancashire attended the third meeting of the task group. She was interviewed by members and answered the following relevant questions.

Q1. How much does Wyre Council pay Marketing Lancashire and what service do you provide?

Vikki Harries explained that Market Lancashire was a non-for-profit organisation that provided the destination organisation management for the county of Lancashire. The organisation aimed to benefit their local authority and business partners and promote the county as a place to live, work, visit, invest and study. She explained that Lancashire's tourism sector had around 4,000 businesses and around 40,000 jobs.

She updated members that the pre-pandemic 10-year strategy, that was due to be launched, had been pushed back to due Covid-19, as it was thought that focusing on growth was not appropriate. She added that the strategy was currently being reviewed with the desire to relaunch by the end of the financial year. In February 2021, they launched Redefining the Rule of Six - A Recovery Plan for Lancashire Tourism and Hospitality.

Vikki Harries explained Wyre Council's contribution to Marketing Lancashire was £4,500 per year and pointed out that this figure was lower than it used to be.

Q2. Was there a reason for the decrease in the contribution price?

She explained that the decrease in price was to assist the district with its finances.

Q3. What is your target market?

She emphasised that the North West of England was the main contributor to the overall tourism in Lancashire, 60 – 90 minutes of drive time. They also regularly get visitors from London, the South East and Scotland. She added that international visitors to Lancashire was quite low around 2 per cent of all visitors are international. One aim was to promote Lancashire to an international crowd.

Q4. What digital advertising/strategy do you use?

Vikki Harries described that Marketing Lancashire was mostly digital, as they believed it produced the best results.

Q5. In response to the Redefining the Rule of Six - A Recovery Plan for Lancashire Tourism and Hospitality. Could you give any examples of your other communication campaigns? e.g. E-newsletters, websites?

She updated members that the organisation had run two consumer-facing recovery campaigns since the pandemic begun; one at the end of 2020 called Enjoy Summer Safely and one at the start of 2021 called Escape The Everyday.

This was a large campaign that ran throughout the whole of England that resulted in seven million social media impressions and 170 thousand click-throughs back to the Marketing Lancashire website. Three films were produced as part of the campaign in which Wyre played a big part. One of the films addressed accessibility and the focus was on Fleetwood's Beach Wheelchair Scheme. Vikki Harries shared the below information following the meeting.

To date the campaign had:

- 7.1mn impressions
- The paid social media had a much stronger performance against objective than anticipated, delivering 87K clicks, 710% above forecast.
- The campaign landing pages on our website have had 133,411 page views May – July
- For the products featured in the campaign, we have seen a really positive uplift in their stats. The individual product pages featured have seen a 57% increase on 2020 and a 34 % increase in 2019.
- We've also sent more traffic to those businesses' websites. Their links have been clicked 61% up on 2020 and 46% up in 2019.
- Products featured in the campaign have been added to 749 consumer itineraries via our website itinerary builder from May – July compared to 101 for the same period in 2020 and 184 for the same period in 2019, so an increase of 407% in 2019.

Q6. Is written literature still an important marketing tool?

Vikki Harries explained that digital is the main marketing tool they currently use. However, Marketing Lancashire produced a number of themed printed guides throughout the year. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, printed literature had been of less importance however, it was an important factor going forward.

Q7. How important is social media for the success of your digital strategy?

Vikki Harries informed members of the importance of social media as a way to get information to people quickly which results in more people interacting and eventually spending.

Q8. Does using digital advertising, such as Google, significantly increase the traffic to your website?

She explained that Google Adwords did convert into more interactions, but she added that it was not always the best commercial solution. Social media provided better results in terms of cost per click.

Q9. Is it possible to see the Google Analytics data for the Marketing Lancashire and Visit Lancashire’s website?

She updated members that the figures for the first 3 months of 2021 was up by 33 per cent compared to 2019 and she added that there was a 190 per cent change in the destination pages meaning that more people were looking at the individual towns within Lancashire.

Wyre’s Stats April-June 2021

Wyre	Page views Q1 2021
Accommodation	22,895
Destinations	8,408
Events	47,977
F&D	10,947
Retail	10,609
Things to	37,387
Total	138,223

Q10. How do you fund the Visit Lancashire website?

She explained to members that Visit Lancashire was funded via Local Authorities contributions. They receive some core funding from Lancashire County Council and business partners pay a nominal fee for a years’ membership, which ranges from 160 to 250 a year depending on the size of the business. In addition, various sections of the Visit Lancashire website was monetised.

Q11. How much marketing space does Wyre receive?

Each town within Wyre received space on the Visit Lancashire website that linked back to the Discover Wyre website. There were also listings for some of the council-owned venues such as Marine Hall and the markets. She updated members that they were currently working with the communication team at Wyre to make sure the listings are up to date and relevant.

Q12. How does Visit Lancashire decide which Lancashire venues feature more prominently on the website than others? For instance, for wedding venues, you have to search "All Wedding Venues" in order to find most of the ones in Wyre.

Vikki Harries clarified that the wedding campaigns were monetised; therefore, the venues that feature more predominately are ones that have made contributions to be featured on the website.

Q13. Is there a link to the Discover Wyre tourism website on the Visit Lancashire website? After spending 45 minutes looking, even using the search engine on Visit Lancashire, I could not find it anywhere. Why is it not more prominent and easy to find?

Vikki Harries explained that the link to Discover Wyre was at the bottom of all of the destination pages related to Wyre.

She provided the following information after the conclusion of the meeting.

If you look at the listings for :

[Garstang](#)

[Poulton](#)

[Fleetwood](#)

[Cleveleys](#)

You'll see a content block, which people will read about the place and then there is a read more link that opens up the full article. At the end of the articles, they all have clear links back to your website and social media, which seems like the right place for these links to be from a customer journey perspective. It is also on our [Tourist Information Centre Page](#).

Q14. Do you have any examples of the initiatives that you have used to increase consumer confidence and drive up demand as we ease out of lockdown?

She explained that Marketing Lancashire has produced a number of campaigns to help support businesses throughout the pandemic such as the Escape The Everyday Campaign. Their next phase was to focus on short breaks with the hope to extend the season past the summer months.

Q15. How do you promote events in Lancashire?

Vikki Harries updated members that all the events in Lancashire were promoted on their website, via e-newsletters, via blogs, on their social media, via printed leaflets and via the press.

Q16. Following the recent filming in Cleveleys, do you think Wyre has the potential to be a destination for more filming opportunities and could this be something Marketing Lancashire capitalises on with their promotion of Wyre in the future?

Regarding the recent filming, Marketing Lancashire was heavily involved in the promotion of Wyre and the whole of Lancashire for filming opportunities. She explained to members that in terms of capitalising on the recent filming it would need to be released until any tourist or promotional work could be done.

Members made several comments and asked Vikki Harries some additional questions, and received answers, surrounding:

- Visitors from Liverpool cruises
- The Country Shows
- Target market research
- The use of social media influencers
- Guest House Associations
- The cost for council partners

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Jane Cole, Blackpool Transport and CPT, and James Carney, Blackpool Transport.

Jane Cole, Managing Director of Blackpool Transport and the President of the CPT, provided some written responses to the group's following questions.

Q1. How much has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the coach industry and public transport?

The number of local bus passenger journeys in England was 1.55 billion in the year ending March 2021, a 62% decrease when compared with a year earlier as a result of the nationwide movement restrictions due to COVID-19.

The Coach industry does not have UK statistics on journeys but I can confirm that the coach industry contributes £14 Billion to the UK economy providing vital footfall to holidays, attractions, concerts, sporting events, and festivals.

Coach companies experienced reduced turnover of between 50% and 90%.

An example is that one Coach operator carried 40,000 customers in 2019 and 200 in 2020.

Q2. What particular things do you have in place to attract coach businesses back to the Fylde Coast?

Through the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Visit, England, Visit Blackpool and a number of key trade media outlets, the Fylde and its attractions are marketed as being coach friendly.

Q3. Do you have any key statistics about the coach industry?

Jane Cole provided members with an attachment of the CPT Backing Britain's Coaches strategy.

The key statistics:

- 500 million coach journeys were made by British people in 2019
- 6.3 million adults took a coach trip in 2019
- 600,000 children were taken to school by coach in 2019
- 23 million coach trips were made to tourist attractions
- There are circa 2,500 coach operators in the UK, which provide 42,000 jobs across the country
- On average in 2019 British coaches carried some 38,000 passengers on local sightseeing tours
- Coach travel is 6 times safer than car use
- The pandemic has hit the coach industry hard; 80% of operators have seen their turnover reduce by over 50%, and almost 20% of operators have seen their turnover reduce by over 90%, a devastating impact on an industry that is normally fundamentally healthy and profitable
- One coach can keep up to 50 cars off the road
- Visits to tourist attractions and locations by coach contribute to £14 billion to the UK economy
- 19 per cent driver shortage across European bus and coach sector

Q4. What is the average spend of a tourist on Blackpool transport?

This is impossible to confirm as we do not differentiate between a tourist and a resident ticket, but using the tram as an example, which is heavily influenced by tourism visits, the average price paid is £2.91. This includes the average of all tickets purchased including saver tickets and single fare tickets.

Q5. Is there anything in place to encourage day visitors to Wyre that are staying in Blackpool?

Our mobile app (BPL Transport) and website contain a comprehensive 'Things to do' section which carries information about over 50 attractions in Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde. We use these pages as content marketing.

Q6. How accessible is Blackpool transport for people with disabilities?

Our services are fully DDA compliant, making them accessible to wheelchairs and Class two electric scooters. Many of our buses have space for two wheelchair users, and all have one space as standard. In addition, we offer audio and visual next stop announcements. For customers who may have a non-visible disability, our 'Safer Journey Card' scheme offers a simple way for customers to communicate to our teams upon boarding, with a discrete card that can inform our team members of any additional requirements the customer may have.

Q7. What advertising opportunities do you provide on your buses and trams?

Advertising can be booked on the exterior of our buses and trams, by our third-party Global Media. All information can be found here:

<https://www.blackpooltransport.com/advertising-on-our-buses>

James Carney the Finance and Commercial Director at Blackpool Transport attended the third meeting to provide members with a presentation that addressed Climate Change Response Electric Buses and National Bus Strategy.

James Carney introduced his presentation. The main points that are relevant to the aims of the review are as follows:

- Zero Emissions Bus Regional Award (ZEBRA)
- A £126m fund - promoting electric buses in England
- Fares and ticketing – multi-modal tickets
- Service provision – 15 minute frequency
- Bus priorities and restraint of car use
- BTS has a 92% customer satisfaction score
- Travel app – 52 per cent of new downloads are from members of the public outside the FY postcode

Following the presentation, members asked James Carney some additional questions, and received answers, regarding:

- The 24-hour rider intermodal ticket offer and the expansion of this offer to other modes of transport such as the Fleetwood to Knott End Ferry.
- Coach parking
- The recruitment of bus and tram drivers particularly the recruitment of women
- Night services for buses
- Bus lanes and park and ride schemes
- Continuation of cash payments and exploring the Oyster card system

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Toni Tester, Contact Centre Reception Area Team Leader.

Members were interested to understand more about the wedding and other events offer at the Civic Centre and they wanted to gather some information particularly regarding customer satisfaction.

Toni Tester, Contact Centre Reception Area Team Leader, provided members with a feedback snapshot; she explained that people, who book the Civic Centre as the venue for their wedding, tend to love the fact that you can have a drink on the grounds after the ceremony whilst having their photo taken and socialising with their guests. They also like it as we only take one ceremony a day so there is no rushing them. I have only ever had one bride who did not go ahead with the booking and the reason was that she wanted to move the seating in the Council Chamber. The grounds are amazing and I think we have the potential to book many weddings with good income.

A mid-week ceremony is £350 and a weekend or bank holiday is £650.

She added a possible improvement would be new flooring and new seating in the Members Lounge.

She also supplied the group with three customer feedbacks, who had recently had their wedding at this venue.

Customer one:

"We are more than happy to share some of the pics with you, it was a lovely ceremony and all the guests commented on how nice and relaxed it was and how they enjoyed having a champagne in the gardens. The women who assisted on the day were also fantastic, friendly and accommodating, so thank you."

Customer two:

"We loved having the ceremony at the civic centre! I think the room could do with modernising slightly! Maybe an updated sound system too? In addition, the couches are quite low down - was a bit tricky for my dad to get out! We loved the garden and look of the building! Looks great on the photos! Overall, great experience!"

Customer three:

"The location was great, with easy access and parking available for guests. The room was lovely and airy with lots of natural light. I particularly liked the direct access to the garden for our post-wedding photos. The women who assisted on the day were friendly and helpful. Our guests commented on how lovely they were. The only improvement I can think of would be to modernise the members lounge. More neutral and modern furniture/decor would I think may this appealing to many more couples."

Customer four:

"I would just like to thank you and your colleague (I think it was Sarah, apologies if that isn't correct) for the most fantastic time on our wedding day last Friday. It could not have gone any better for us and everyone commented on how wonderful the venue

was. From the start of us booking our wedding with you, over 18 months ago and it being delayed and re-booked, you have kept us up to date and reassured us of everything. If there were an employee reward and recognition scheme, I would certainly put you both forward for an award as you both represented Wyre Council exceptionally well. The only thing I would say that could be improved is maybe the room could do with being modernised.”

Customer five:

“Deciding to have our wedding ceremony within the Members Lounge at Wyre Civic Centre was the perfect choice for us; the room was bright, intimate and relaxed with access to the beautiful grounds. The organisation was faultless throughout the Pandemic rearrangements and at the final sprint; we were in very safe hands throughout. Without Toni and the team, our day would not have been as relaxed and stress free as it was. Thank you!

And thank you so much for all your help with organising the ceremony, you took all the stress out of it and that was very much appreciated.”

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided by Julia Robinson, Commercial Manager Waterfront Venues.

Julia Robinson, Commercial Manager Waterfronts Venues, was invited to attend the fourth meeting. She was interviewed by members and answered the following questions.

Q1. What do you believe are the biggest hurdles/obstacles in your role?

Julia Robinson introduced herself to the group and explained the key aspects of her role and the issues she occasionally faced. She explained that she does find difficulties in acting commercially with a council framework.

Q2. As you are responsible for Wyre Theatres (Marine Hall and Thornton Little Theatre), Markets (Fleetwood, Poulton and Cleveleys), The Mount Pavilion, Wyre Weddings, can you tell us how these assets generate income for the council?

Julia Robinson updated members on the Fleetwood Market, Wyre's flagship market, and explained the difficulties that it had faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. However, she stated that recently the market had improved financially and in terms of footfall. She added that the coach trips were returning to Fleetwood Market. She updated members that the new outdoor kiosks would be filled with new local businesses in the coming weeks and the Market House Studios were now fully let with a waiting list showing a demand for possible future studios.

She explained the improvements and successes of Wyre's theatres. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the roles of both Thornton Little Theatre and Marine Hall changed and they were used as Influenza and Covid-19 vaccination hubs and food banks. She explained that Marine Hall's 2020 programme of events went out just before the first lockdown in March 2020; therefore, the events have been rescheduled multiple times since.

She stated to members that she was confident the theatres would successfully recover over time.

Since the refurbishment of Mount Pavilion, the venue had been extremely successful, with six wedding events since the reopening at the end of June 2021 and there are two more scheduled for the end of 2021 with more scheduled in 2022.

She updated members that for the different venues they have commercial rates and community rates. Attached at Appendix B.

Q3. What events do you have scheduled at the different venues?

Since the easing of government guidelines, the venues had held the local elections in May and there had been several community meetings and weddings held. She updated members that Thornton Little Theatre is out of use until 2022 due to vaccinations. She highlighted that they were re-introducing events and groups back and that due to Marine Hall's size and capacity limits (600 seater) the events are safe and Covid-19 secure.

She explained some of the events that had returned to Marine Hall such as community group meetings, tea dancers, singing groups and some private hire events/concerts.

Q4. Are there any future events you would like to do?

Julia Robinson expressed that there could be the possibility to look at future larger outdoor events that are ticketed.

Q5. What are the prices for hiring out the Wyre theatres (TLT and MH)?

She alerted to her previous comments surrounding commercial and community fees. Attached at Appendix B.

Q6. What wedding offer do you provide at these venues?

Julia Robinson explained the typical wedding offer that was provided at Marine Hall, the Mount and Thornton Little Theatre. She also showed them the Wyre Weddings booklet; however, she noted that this was created pre-pandemic.

She presented members with the Marine Hall wedding venue hire prices. Attached at Appendix B.

Q7. We have had some feedback from people that had their wedding at the Civic Centre and one point that has come up a number of times is the furniture in the Members Lounge, is there any likelihood of this being updated anytime soon? Do you believe this would lead to a greater number of bookings? (This may not be in your remit).

She explained that Toni Tester, Contact Centre Reception Area Team Leader, assists with weddings held at the Civic Centre. Julia Robinson noted that the furniture did require an update, which could then increase the capacity of the event and possibly the council could then look at increasing its pricing. She added that it was interesting to note the feedback regarding the appearance of the Members Lounge.

Q8. How do the Coach drivers that come to Fleetwood book a parking slot? Do they get any kind of incentive to come to Fleetwood?

Julia Robinson explained that there was no booking system for coaches. In terms of coaches coming to Fleetwood Market, she explained that they make them aware when they are arriving and at this moment in time, there is plenty of parking space. She added that the cleaner at the Fleetwood Market meets and greets the coach drivers to check where they have travelled from and how many visitors they have on board.

In terms of incentives, the drivers receive tokens to the café at the market where they can receive a free breakfast or snack, which was reimbursed to the café. The traders also enter the drivers into a free entry prize draw of £100 each month. These incentives assist with encouraging coaches to return.

Q9. If you were in a position to do something radical, where tourism is concerned, what would it be?

She again explained some of the difficulties in working commercially in a council structure and suggested whether other management options should be examined such as through a separate trading arm. This may result in better value for money, reduced risk to the council and improved services.

Q10. Which officer do you report to?

Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities.

Q11. Do you know if the people visiting the theatres and markets are visitors to Wyre or are they locals?

Julia Robinson explained that it was a mixture. Many of the visitors are regulars who are from the North West and Yorkshire.

Q12. Could the Pier site in Fleetwood be a big enough space for a large outdoor event?

She explained that this had been looked into.

Q13. Are the art studios at Fleetwood Market accessible?

Julia Robinson updated that unfortunately, the spaces on the higher floors were not currently accessible, however, there were accessible studios on the ground floor that were filled. She added that they are exploring the possibilities of extra ground floor space and other accessible options.

Q14. Have the festive light switch on dates for the year after been set yet?

Julia Robinson explained the importance of setting the date of next year's event as it helps with traders rebooking and she would know the date soon.

Q15. Are we in contact with the hotels in Fleetwood?

She explained that she is in close contact with the hotel offers around Fleetwood. She additionally mentioned the several numbers of Airbnb's in the area.

Q16. After visiting the Marine Hall it was noticed that some of the TVs were not in use. How long has it been since you have had IT issues and what is being done to resolve this?

She explained that IT was a problem at Marine Hall, which can sometimes affect the running of the services.

Q17. Is there a potential to have geocaching at Marine Hall?

Julia Robinson updated members that Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development Officer, was working on introducing geocaching at the Marine Hall.

Q18. Does the Market advertise Marine Hall and vice versa?

She explained that each of the venues advertises all the venues in the borough. She added that it is important for the venues to be integrated and work as one.

Q19. Has the Citizens Advice Service returned to Fleetwood Market?

Julia Robinson explained that since the first lockdown the Citizens Advice Service had not returned to the space.

Q20. How does Anti-Social Behaviour affect tourism to our theatres and markets?

Julia Robinson highlighted to members that this was still a problem in the area and explained some of the recent anti-social behaviour that had occurred. She stated that they now employ an overnight security guard at Fleetwood Market and there was a weekend mobile security guard for Marine Hall and Mount Pavilion.

Q21. How many staff do you employ?

She explained that currently she has around 20 staff and was hopeful to be advertising for new staff in the coming months.

Q22. Have you been in contact with Cuffe and Taylor regarding large outdoor events?

Julia Robinson explained that she has had conversations with Cuffe and Taylor in the past, but she suggested that events on that scale could be organised in-house.

She left some examples of leaflets for events, which councillors could view and take copies of.

Summary of evidence provided by Chris Wyatt, Arts and Events Development Officer.

Chris Wyatt, Arts and Events Development Officer, also attended the fourth meeting where he was interviewed and answered the following questions.

Q1. What do you believe are the biggest hurdles/obstacles in your role?

Chris Wyatt described the positives in his job and how he loved working for the council. He explained some obstacles such as finding the balance between being strategic and operational.

Q2. What creative community-based projects are coming up in the next year?

He highlighted that given the emergence out of the pandemic the council were hoping to return to many of their key community events and arts projects, such as Arts and Health work and Fun Arts.

Q3. How has covid-19 affected the events and arts industry in Wyre and how was your role affected in particular?

He explained the massive impact Covid-19 has had across the events and arts sector it had meant that a part of his role changed.

Q4. What plans are in place post Covid-19, to draw tourists and locals back to events in Wyre?

Chris Wyatt touched on the government-funded Welcome Back Fund that was awarded to Wyre Council as an incentive for recovery. He also explained that some of the events would need to have been rejuvenated due to the length of time some events have been unable to happen.

Q5. What Wyre organised events are going ahead this year?

He explained the new event called the Doors Project that will be happening at Marine Hall Gardens later in the year. He also explained there was a firework event organised in Garstang and there would be several Christmas Light Switch-on events happening in the different high streets across the borough. He highlighted that 2022 would be a better year for the arts and events sector to rejuvenate older events and encourage new events too.

Q6. Do these events generate income for the council?

In 2019 there was just short of £10,000 brought in through administration fees and the opportunity of fees from commercial facing events such as fairgrounds and circuses. He explained the main role of the district is to advise, enable and animate.

Q7. Which events are the most successful?

He explained three ways to measure success. In terms of numbers and visitor economy, the Cleveleys Car Show and Fleetwood Tram Sunday were very successful, in terms of local involvement Garstang Scarecrow festival was very successful and in terms of fundraising for the local community projects the Big Gig has many successes.

Q8. How do you promote these events to tourists?

He explained that he worked closely with Alexandra Holt, Tourism Development Officer, and the Communications team for the promotion of events. He also worked closely with the event organisers themselves. He touched on the work of the digital What's On Guide.

Q9. From the roughly 50 events you oversee per year, how evenly distributed are they throughout Wyre?

Chris Wyatt explained that events happen across the whole borough; however, he expressed the importance and popularity of Wyre's coast to host many events.

Q10. If someone had a suggestion for an event, that would draw tourists and locals alike, how would they communicate this to you and what support would be available?

Chris Wyatt explained to members that as his role is very creative and developmental he would always listen to any event idea that was put forward to him.

Q12. Please can you tell us about your work with Wyre Creatives, supporting local artists and LEON, local event organiser's network?

He explained his role within Wyre Creatives and LEON and the importance of the two groups in the creation of event opportunities.

Q13. How are the events you run currently advertised and how well are they attended? Do you have a return on investment figure for each event held?

He explained that they did look at a marketing campaign that helped with the different styles of marketing for each event, again he explained his close working relationship with the communications team to action this.

Q14. How can Wyre Council assist you to improve your service and ensure a better outcome, through either satisfaction or monetary, moving forward?

Chris Wyatt stated that in an ideal world, it would be beneficial to have an events team; however, he explained the good working relationships across the different teams within the council.

Several members asked Chris Wyatt additional questions surrounding the following topics:

- The Big Gig
- The Great Ecclestone Show
- An increase in leaflets and guides
- Arts and Health events

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided from councillor visits to Visit Garstang Centre.

Members of the task group visited the Garstang Tourist Information Centre and met with the staff who worked there. Their findings were as follows:

- Pre pandemic, the centre received on average 25,000 visitors a year.
- The centre was fully stocked and had appealing window displays.
- The centre sold locally branded products.
- WIFI had recently been installed at the centre where customers could ask a member of staff if they wished to use it.
- Tickets for certain events across the borough are sold at the centre.
- The planning for the 2022 Discovery Wyre brochure is in preparation and should be ready for distribution for early 2022, where 10,000 are printed and distributed 6,000 nationally and 4,000 locally and any joint partnership work with Blackpool, Fylde and Lancashire. Copies will be available at the Garstang Information Centre.
- Only one out of the three TV screens at the centre work. There was currently no funding available to replace the two broken TV screens at the centre.

Tourist Information Centres – Trading Performance 2018/2019, 2019/20, 2020/21

Councillor visits to the centre raised a number of questions about the costs, income and rent figures, which are summarised in the table below.

	18.19	19.20	20.21	Projection 21.22
Income	-11,566.04	-9,938.06	-5,656.49	4,328.81
Cost of goods	8,957.33	6,078.82	4,498.34	-4,790.43
Gross Profit	-2,608.71	-3,859.24	-1,158.15	-461.62
Gross Margin %	22.55%	38.83%	20.47%	-10.66%

Rent £15,960 per annum (£3,990 qtr)

Task group members made a number of comments and observations following their visit to the centre.

- Members were extremely impressed with the visual aspect and location of the centre.
- Members praised Alexandra and her staff for being very welcoming and helpful.
- They discussed the potential of Geocaching at the centre.

- Issues were raised around outdoor signage to help guide members of the public to the shop.
- It was raised that the Garstang Centre seemed to act as if it was a contact point for the residents of Wyre for none tourist-related issues such as bin collections and council tax.
- Members mentioned that Wyre Council branding across the centre was not visible enough and believed that this could be utilised to help promote the borough.
- Members explained some of the IT issues experienced within the centre.
- Members commented on the appearance of the centre.
- Members questioned the Covid-19 track and trace registration for the store, which had later been resolved.
- Members added that the centre was a wonderful asset to Wyre.

DRAFT

Summary of evidence provided from the task group's business and visitors surveys.

From 28 July to 8 September 2021, the Tourism Recovery Task Group, commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, conducted two surveys, one for visitors and one for businesses.

They believed that results from these public surveys would provide them with detailed information about the current tourism recovery offer in Wyre and for them to have a better understanding of the local businesses in the borough. It would then assist them in making appropriate recommendations to Wyre Council's Cabinet.

Members additionally expressed the importance of feedback from tourists who have visited the borough.

The visitors' survey explored the tourism experience of visitors to and across Wyre. The survey questions explored the respondent's visit, and included how the pandemic has affected people's confidence to travel, where people were travelling to and staying, how they were getting around, what they engaged in whilst visiting, and further questions about their experiences. Respondents were also asked if they were likely to recommend Wyre and if they had any suggestions for improvement based on their visit.

The business survey investigated how tourism affects local businesses in Wyre. The survey questions explored the respondent's type of business, and explored customer confidence due to the pandemic and the challenges they had faced. It explored where their customers usually visit from and when their busiest times are. It also asked for how they promote their business and how their customers hear about them. Respondents were also asked if there were any practical areas of help or advice that would help their business especially during the Covid-19 recovery period.

Approach

The agreed approach for this consultation was to:

1. Conduct face-to-face interviews – task group members were encouraged to undertake the survey at visitor spots either online with devices or with hard copy.
2. Make available printed questionnaires for task group members to distribute.
3. Use an online questionnaire - This approach enabled appropriate access to non-users and those people who did not have chance to speak with the volunteers.

The survey was estimated to take around five minutes, and responses were agreed to be kept anonymous.

Consultation respondents

In total, there were 51 responses to the visitor survey, that is, 36 online representations via the council's consultation link and 15 representations were hard copies received and input by Democratic Services. In total there were 10 completed responses for the business survey all filled in via the consultation link. Due to the low response rate, it is important to understand that the responses of this survey provide only a snapshot of the experience visitors to Wyre and local businesses have.

The final survey results for the visitor survey is attached at Appendix D.
The final survey results for the business survey is attached at Appendix E.

DRAFT

Supporting documents

Members were presented with a number of additional documents that supported them with their work.

- Update for O&S on Tourism and Visitor Services at Appendix F
- Marketing Lancashire redefining the rule of six – a recovery plan for Lancashire tourism and hospitality at Appendix G
- The Tourism Recovery Plan - GOV UK (Press release) at Appendix H

DRAFT

Conclusions and recommendations

In 2018, the tourism sector brought in a total of £361.635 million within the local economy through visitor and tourism business expenditure. After listening to all the evidence that was presented to them the task group concluded that, the support of tourism recovery is essential for Wyre's economy and businesses. Members were of the view that the council needs to do everything it can to encourage people to come to visit Wyre, stay and return.

The task group take the view that the borough of Wyre needs to be promoted as a tourist destination with the aim for 'Wyre' to be better known to potential tourists. They believed that the council name and logo should be more prominent across the boroughs tourist destinations, especially at Garstang and Fleetwood Information Centres.

They additionally concluded that the main area of focus for the recovery of tourism following the pandemic is to capitalise on the digital programmes to promote Wyre. The members of the group found that the current system used for the delivery of the Discovery Wyre website (Wyre's central tourism website) was underperforming especially when compared to the main Wyre Council website that is run fully in-house. Members understand that the current year (2021) Google Analytic Data shows the average number of users to the site is lower than the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Members explain that this could be a result of customer confidence with reemerging back into society. However, they feel that if improvements are made to the website such as the promotion of the individual towns and the increased promotion of local businesses will result in increased traffic to the site to even higher levels than before the pandemic. They are also of the view that changes should help members of the public navigate the site better. If more people are visiting the Discover Wyre Website then it is hoped this will revert to the number of visitors to Wyre. Members conclude that the best way to achieve this is to bring the Discover Wyre website fully in-house.

Members were of the view that introducing a nominal fee for local businesses to have more promotion on the Discover Wyre Website would improve relationships with local businesses and could be an appropriate way to generate income. Marketing Lancashire use this method, they have business partners that pay a nominal fee for a years' membership, which ranges from £160 to £250 a year depending on the size of the business. Members were of the view that this model could be replicated on the Discover Wyre website, but with a reduced fee of around £10 per annum, for example.

In addition to the website, members believe that social media is vastly important as a means to get information out to people quickly and to increase digital interaction. They identified that there was no digital strategy in place for tourism. Members saw the creation and implementation of a digital strategy across the various digital platforms as beneficial for recovery. An increase in digital interaction may then cause an increase in visitors to the borough.

The group found that while the Tourism, Events and Communication teams do sometimes work together, overall they work as three different teams. Members believe

that for the successful recovery of tourism in Wyre, these teams must work in synchronisation.

The task group identified the importance of the coach industry to bring and facilitate tourism to Wyre. They believe that the Fylde Coast must continue to be marketed as coach friendly. Members welcomed that the coaches are returning to places such as Fleetwood Market and that officers are already doing work such as the creation of itineraries. However, members are of the view that a more personal experience with the coach industries would be beneficial as they can then see first-hand what Wyre has to offer. This can be in the form of inviting businesses to the Civic Centre, for example and providing them with lunch and a promotional presentation.

Even though the members of the group realise that digital methods are the future for tourism, they concluded there is still the importance of traditional forms such as front-facing interaction at TICs to provide the public with advice and information. Therefore, members appreciate the need for the tourist information centres at Fleetwood and Garstang as they are in prime locations and provide a helpful service for visitors and residents. They did highlight the need for modernisation, such as the replacement or the fixing of the TV screens in both centres. Members saw the potential of these screens being used to host promotional pictures of the borough and/or to promote the different events.

During the review, the group concluded that, through customer satisfaction responses, the wedding events at the Civic Centre were highly praised, although one reoccurring issue was the appearance of the Members Lounge particularly the outdated furniture and flooring. Members express that an improvement to the appearance of the room would assist recovery as it may lead to more bookings resulting in members of the public staying in the area's local hotels and B&Bs. This may even result in them visiting other areas in the borough and potentially returning. In addition, councillors take the view that these improvements may not only increase wedding bookings but may have the potential to host events where groups or companies can book rooms in the Civic Centre, such as the Members Lounge, for meetings or small conferences.

Members of the group concluded that the return of mass outdoor events is essential for the recovery of tourism; especially as society learns to live with Covid-19; outdoor events can be described as safer because they can allow for social distancing and good ventilation. They believe that big events can draw people to Wyre from across the country and ticketing these events can generate income for the council. The Commercial Manager Waterfront Venues has indicated that her team has the potential to run outdoor-ticketed events in-house that could rival the events of other neighbouring boroughs. Events such as this have the potential to return year after year.

In addition, following some figures provided by the Corporate Director Communities regarding the cost of service of Marine Hall, Thornton Little Theatre and Garstang Information Centre, members questioned the current business model for these council's run facilities, as they are not reaching their commercial potential. The group understand that there has been reviews in the past that have looked into this, however, they are of the view that other business models must be explored as the subsidies for these facilities are too high and there is difficulty with running them within a council

business structure. The members see that this is not within their current scope, however, are of the view that it should be an area for future-focused review.

The task group concluded that the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet:

RECOMMENDATION ONE:

That the council concentrates on the promotion of Wyre as a tourist destination.

RECOMMENDATION TWO:

That the Discover Wyre website be brought in-house.

RECOMMENDATION THREE:

That improvements be made to the Discover Wyre website and for it to concentrate on promoting the individual towns within the borough ensuring all areas are covered equally.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:

To support the continuation of advertising local businesses on the Discover Wyre website and consider the feasibility of introducing an appropriate nominal fee for businesses where they will receive more promotion (an example may be £10 per annum).

RECOMMENDATION FIVE:

That a digital marketing strategy for the council's various digital platforms be created, in order to benefit the wider tourism strategy. In addition, report the defined objectives of this strategy back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION SIX:

That there is a continued collaborative working relationship between the Tourism, Events and Communication teams.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN:

That coach industries and businesses be invited back to Wyre to see what coach offer/packages Wyre can offer.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT:

That the Garstang and Fleetwood Information Centres continue to be supported, especially as we emerge out of Covid-19 lockdowns.

RECOMMENDATION NINE:

That the TV screens at the Garstang Information Centre and Fleetwood Information Centre (Marine Hall) be fixed.

RECOMMENDATION TEN:

To explore options that will enhance the Civic Centre, including the Members Lounge, to make it a more attractive venue for weddings and other events.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN:

To explore the possibility of holding large outdoor-ticketed events to be held in areas such as Marine Hall Gardens, for example.

RECOMMENDATION TWELVE:

That the implementation of those recommendations agreed by Cabinet be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee after 12 months.

RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider a further focused review of the theatres (Thornton Little Theatre and Marine Hall) and other council-run facilities, with the aim to explore the feasibility of a different business model to help them run on a more commercial basis.

Councillors' attendances

There were five meetings of the task group.

Name	Meetings attended (maximum 5)
Councillor Peter Le Marinel	5
Councillor Ken Minto	5
Councillor Lady D Atkins	5
Councillor Callum Baxter	3
Councillor Colette Fairbanks	2
Councillor Rachel George	3
Councillor Phil Orme	5
Councillor Mary Stirzaker	1
Councillor David Walmsley	5
Councillor Lynn Walmsley	5

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – Tourism Recovery in Wyre – final scoping document**
- Appendix B – Google Analytics data for the Discover Wyre Website**
- Appendix C – Marine Hall and Thornton Little - Theatre fees and charges**
- Appendix D – Visitor survey results report**
- Appendix E – Business survey results report**
- Appendix F – Update for O&S on Tourism and Visitor Services**
- Appendix G – Marketing Lancashire redefining the rule of six – a recovery plan for Lancashire tourism and hospitality**
- Appendix H – The Tourism Recovery Plan - GOV UK (Press release)**

References

Heeds, C., 2021. *Lancashire destinations where tourists are spending the most and least money*. LancsLive, [online] Available at: <<https://www.lancs.live/whats-on/whats-on-news/lancashire-destinations-tourists-spending-most-21068401>> [Accessed 13 September 2021].

Tourism Recovery in Wyre - Scrutiny Task Group

Final Scoping Document

Review Topic	Supporting tourism recovery in Wyre post-pandemic	
Chair and Vice-Chair	Cllr Le Marinel Cllr Minto	
Group Membership	Cllr D Atkins Cllr Baxter Cllr Fairbanks Cllr George Cllr Orme Cllr L Walmsley Cllr D Walmsley Cllr Stirzaker	
Officer Support	Marianne Unwin, Democratic Services Officer	
Purpose of the Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To review Wyre’s tourism recovery in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic - To make recommendations to Cabinet about actions that can be taken to enhance and support the borough’s tourism recovery following the pandemic 	
Role of Overview and Scrutiny in this Review (mark all that apply)	Holding Executive to account – decisions Existing budget and policy framework Contribution to policy development Holding Executive to account – performance Community champion Statutory duties / compliance with codes of practice	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Aims of Review	10. To assess how the Covid-19 pandemic may have affected the tourism offer in Wyre 11. To explore the ReDiscover Wyre Campaign 12. To capitalise on ‘staycations’ 13. To understand Wyre’s USP The Great Outdoors and identify enhancements 14. To explore both the rural and coastal offerings including the impact of recent filming in the area	

	<p>15. To understand Wyre’s support for local businesses and identify opportunities</p> <p>16. To identify areas of improvement particularly with a focus on the Welcome Back Fund</p> <p>17. To make succinct recommendations to Cabinet on how we can support tourism recovery in Wyre</p> <p>18. To make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on specific and focused related topics that might be considered for further scrutiny review</p>
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review previous reports and documentation (see below) - Review the Business Plan proposal (see below) - Review Wyre Council’s Discover Wyre website and the current ReDiscover Wyre marketing campaign - Compare arrangements with other similar Local Authorities - Interview witnesses - Site visits - Public consultations - Survey of tourism businesses
Scope of Review	<p>The review will focus on how the council supports tourism recovery within Wyre, specifically focusing on ‘staycations’ post-Covid 19 pandemic.</p> <p>The review will not consider car parking policies or charges.</p>
Potential Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder - Wyre Council officers (possibly to include the Corporate Director Communities, Tourism Officer, Arts and Events Officer, Communications and Marketing Manager) - Senior Economic Development Officer - Commercial Manager Waterfront Venues - Jane Littlewood (Creator of Visit Fylde Coast) - Marketing Lancashire
Documents to be considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Plan 2019 – 2023 - Update for O&S on Tourism and Visitor Services report (18 January 2021) - ReDiscover Wyre campaign plan - Welcome Back Fund Action Plan (to follow) - Report to Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board – Tourism Recovery - Marketing Lancashire report – ‘Redefine Lancashire’ marketing campaign
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any delay will reduce the impact of this review on the immediate post-COVID environment - Potential that the review’s remit may become too broad
Level of Publicity	Low
Indicators of a Successful Review	A clear recommendation to Cabinet influencing future decisions surrounding tourism recovery within Wyre

Intended Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An improved understanding of the current tourism offer in Wyre - More emphasis on 'staycations' in Wyre in a post-pandemic world - An increase in the number and spend of Wyre visitors
Approximate Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two months (two/three meetings)
Start Date	July 2021

DRAFT