

# Minute Extract

Meeting:	<b>Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>8 December 2003</b>

**17. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF TOURISM.** The Committee considered the report of the Prince 2 Project Board regarding the Best Value Review of Tourism.

The scope of the Best Value Review was agreed by Cabinet in April 2003, and was detailed within the report.

The Services included within the report were, Events, TIC, Conference and Group Travel, Seafront Gardens, Dotto train, Deckchairs, Bandstand, Public chairs, the Awareness Campaign, Sovereign Centre, Towner Art Gallery, Redoubt Fortress, Seafront Catering, Beachy Head Countryside Centre, the Downs and parks and retail offer.

A significant output of the review would be the development of a new Tourism Strategy outlining the future direction of the specific tourism development activities provided by the Council, as well as defining a framework of activity and direction for the future of tourism in Eastbourne.

In order to monitor the future strategy the BVR also considered current and future research needs and had agreed a baseline statement for the volume and value of tourism placing in context levels of employment, primary, secondary and tertiary spend by visitors to the destination of Eastbourne and the operations of tourism provided in the town. The model used had been adopted as the preferred academic model both by the Regional Development Agencies nationally and by the Regional Tourist Board in the South East.

Members noted that the review teams recommendations outlined in Appendix A of the report had been subject to stakeholder consultation and the findings were attached as Appendix B of the report. Members noted that the consultation process was not complete as some stakeholders were unable to attend the consultation workshop and these findings would be added to the final Best Value Implementation Plan to be adopted by Cabinet. In addition, the proposed draft Tourism Strategy would be subject to considerable consultation prior to discussion by Cabinet during 2004.

The Committee were advised that the Team had made a number of recommendations outlined in the improvement plan (appendix A).

Members noted that the review had allowed for detailed debate and investigation into how services were being delivered with a valuable input from partners and stakeholders. Examining the financial baseline data had established the tourism operations clearly for future planning and quality service delivery.

Members agree that it was important not only to implement the Improvement Plan but to monitor the plan as well and therefore standards of performance had been set. The Performance Management Task Group would carry out the monitoring.

Members recognised that some of the recommendations required additional work prior to a final decision being made as to their introduction. These were identified and highlighted as deferred items in Appendix A

Councillors Belsey and Mrs Teso were in attendance to answer Members questions.

Councillors Belsey and Mrs Teso gave a brief overview of the report, congratulating staff on the work undertaken as part of the review.

Members agreed in general with the majority of the recommendations although some raised serious concerns for the Members of the committee in particular; the market testing of the Dotto train, as it was an extremely successful facility operated by the Council. Members were advised that at present a Dotto train needed replacing and that the Council did not have the funds available, the Dotto train would be tested as part of an overall package if agreed, including profitable and non-profitable facilities in order to generate greater interest from the private sector. This was a deferred recommendation and greater discussion would take place before a final decision was made.

In addition Members also raised concerns regarding the proposals to cease the operation of the Redoubt. Members felt that this was an extremely important historic site in Eastbourne and should be maintained as a museum, for the benefit of Eastbourne residents and visitors. Councillor Leggett advised the Committee that a meeting had been held outside of the Review with the Trustees of the Redoubt with a view to discussing and obtaining additional funding for the improvements needed at the Museum. It was felt important that longer leases should be granted to allow greater access to funding from outside sources such as the Lottery Heritage fund. Members agreed that the marketing of the site had been weak and that may have resulted in the reduced usage of the site by visitors. The Head of Tourism Development recognised that the Redoubt facility offered great potential, and agreed that every effort would be made to find much needed additional funding. This was a deferred recommendation and greater discussion would take place before a final decision was made.

Members also raised concerns regarding the closure of the Beachy Head Countryside Centre, and acknowledged that the site was under funded and in great need of improvements not only to the stock, but also the maintenance of the building as well.

The proposals to close the Hippodrome Theatre raised serious concerns for Members, it was felt that it was an important site and should be kept open as a theatre, the Head of Tourism Development reminded Members that the site was dilapidated and that there were too many theatres seats in Eastbourne, as recognised in the best value review of theatres and that the performances available at the Hippodrome should be redirected to Council run facilities. Again this was a deferred recommendation and greater discussion would take place before a final decision was made.

Members raised concerns regarding the Tourism offer of the downland and that it may be marketed as the gateway to the National Park. It was important to ensure that the downland environment remained protected by the Council.

Members agreed that the current format of the Holiday guide could be ceased and replaced with four themed guides, Traditional Seaside, Culture (Arts and Heritage), Sports and Activities and Coast and Country.

It was felt that Eastbourne should be marketed as an 'all year round' destination, with six main events spanning the whole year. These would be monitored over a two to three period to decide whether the events were commercially viable. At present the two main events in Eastbourne were Airbourne and Skate.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the contents of the report be noted.

(2) That Cabinet be advised of the comments and concerns raised by the Committee.

**Democratic Services**, Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG

Tel (01323) 415022/415068 Minicom (01323) 415111 Fax (01323) 410322

E Mail: [councillors@eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:councillors@eastbourne.gov.uk)

For general Council enquiries, please telephone (01323) 410000

E-mail [enquiries@eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@eastbourne.gov.uk) Website at [www.eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.eastbourne.gov.uk)

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