

CULTURE, RECREATION AND TOURISM CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 51a

Brighton & Hove City Council

**BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL
CULTURE, TOURISM & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**4.00PM 23 NOVEMBER 2009
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL**

DRAFT MINUTES – EXTRACT

Present: Councillors: Randall (Chairman); Davis; Drake (Deputy Chairman), Harmer-Strange, Kennedy, Marsh and Older.

37.1 The Visitor Services Manager, Suzanne Mantell introduced the report. She explained that since 2000, the VisitBrighton Contact Centre had operated a premium rate line. Prior to this, only about 51,000 of 500,000 attempted calls were being answered. Following the introduction of the premium rate line, all calls were answered. The number of calls and income had dropped by around a third year-on-year. There were six options. Option 1 was to keep the premium rate line but it was suggested that this was unsustainable. Option 2 was to keep the line but change the costs but this would further reduce income. Option 3 was to increase the cost of the calls but this may lead to a drop in call volume. Option 4 was to use an 0871 number. Option 5 was the favoured option – to relocate to the Royal Pavilion and work with that team. This option would enable the Visitor Centre to charge a local rate and use the system in place for the Pavilion. They could have different numbers for different aspects of the service. Option 6 was to cease call handling but this would send out a negative message.

37.2 A question was asked about what contingency plans were in place to deal with the danger that the number of calls might grow and there would not be sufficient people to answer the calls. In reply, Ms Mantell explained that they would work with the Pavilion staff and the new system allowed the manager to see the volume of calls and act accordingly. It was hoped that more inquiries could be converted into bookings as more people would use a local number.

37.3 In response to a question, it was confirmed that there were currently 3 or 4 counter staff at the Visitor Centre but the telephone calls were answered at Brighton Town Hall. 1 or 2 people would be relocated to the Pavilion Contact Centre. It was confirmed that no posts would be lost under Option 5.

37.4 Further information was requested on why VisitLondon had ceased to offer a call handling service. It was explained that this stopped around 8 years ago as it was felt that they were not influencing businesses in the city. VisitLondon were now solely a marketing organisation.

37.5 The report stated that when the premium line service was introduced, it was supported by the Brighton & Hove Hotels Association. Elaborating on that, it was explained that the Association were pleased that calls were no longer missed. They contributed to the work of the Visitor Centre through the partnership scheme. Also the Visitor Centre took a 10% deposit when a hotel room was booked, the other 90% was paid later to the hotel.

37.6 During the discussion of the report, of those members who expressed a preference, Option 5 was supported.

37.7 RESOLVED – *(a) that the Review and its recommendations are noted; and (b) that the comments of the Committee are forwarded to the Cabinet Member Meeting on 8 December.*