

Subject:	Tourism Recovery and VisitBrighton		
Date of Meeting:	15th September 2022		
Report of:	Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report outlines the performance of the visitor economy in 2021/22 and highlights the work done by VisitBrighton to promote the city and to support the recovery of the sector.
- 1.2 Covid-19 dealt a devastating blow to many tourism and hospitality businesses in Brighton & Hove, causing what maybe long-term damage to investment and employment. Business, operators, employees, and freelancers saw their livelihoods catastrophically impacted as they were forced to close during the Pandemic.
- 1.3 This report looks at the actions and activity of VisitBrighton over the course of a year, supporting the recovery of the visitor economy, generating economic and social value for the city.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee notes and acknowledges the work of VisitBrighton in supporting tourism and the wider visitor economy of Brighton & Hove.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In 2019, Brighton & Hove welcomed 12.37 million visitors, of which 1.67 million stayed overnight. The Visitor Economy was worth just under £1billion (£976.4m) in economic benefit and supported more than 24,000 jobs in the city, which equates to 17.5% of all employee jobs in Brighton & Hove¹
- 3.2 In 2020, Brighton & Hove welcomed 9m visitors, which represented a decrease of 27% on 2019 figures. This decrease was in line with other destinations across the UK.

¹ *The Economic Impact of Tourism Study, Brighton & Hove, 2019*

- 3.3 In 2020 the city welcomed 8.4m day visitors who generated £144m in economic benefit, down 64% on 2019, plus 0.6m overnight visitors who generated 2.03m bed nights creating £226m in economic benefit (a decrease of 61% on 2019).
- 3.4 In 2020 a day visitor generated £17.14 of economic benefit on their trip whilst a staying visitor generated £377 of economic benefit during their visit, equivalent to £111.33 in 24 hours; by attracting increased numbers of staying visitors, we can ensure that the economic impact of tourism grows in a sustainable manner, increasing revenues while minimising the impact on the city infrastructure.
- 3.5 In total, tourism generated £370m of economic benefit for Brighton and Hove in 2020, down 61% on 2019. The sector supported 6,748 FTE jobs and 9,213 jobs in Brighton & Hove which equates to around 7% of all employee jobs in Brighton & Hove, down from 17.5% in 2019. The visitor economy not only supports jobs which are directly generated in businesses where visitors spend money, for example, hotels but also indirectly supports jobs due to the purchases of goods & services by businesses benefiting from visitor expenditure i.e. jobs with local suppliers.²
- 3.6 The annual figures for 2021 will be available in December 2022 but we are hoping to see an increase in visitor numbers as the city began to recover over the course of the year.
- 3.7 Predictions for the continued recovery of the visitor economy in 22/23 are uncertain. COVID concerns are still impacting travel plans, and as overseas travel increases, the 'staycation' boom, from which Brighton has benefitted in 21/22, may become less buoyant. The cost-of-living crisis will impact on the decision to take day trips and short breaks while business are seeing their profitability squeezed due to the increase in food and fuel prices.³ Businesses face an uncertain 22/23. VisitBritain does not predict tourism in the UK to return in full to 2019 levels of volume and expenditure until 2025-6⁴
- 3.8 VisitBrighton's primary objective is to support the ongoing recovery of the visitor economy, ensuring Brighton stays a destination of choice, encouraging day visitors to extend their visit to a staying trip and encouraging short breakers to choose Brighton, optimising the economic contribution from tourism, sustaining employment, and generating wealth for the city.

VisitBrighton Impact 2021/22

- 3.9 VisitBrighton has four main areas of activity: Marketing, Convention Bureau, Partnership and Visitor Services.
- 3.10 VisitBrighton Marketing is responsible for promoting the city to both leisure and business visitors, uniting a fragmented landscape of chain, independent, SMEs, micro business and sole traders, representing the whole City with cohesive messaging to engage target domestic and international visitors and take them on a customer journey from "looking to booking to visiting to returning & recommending".

² *The Economic Impact of Tourism Study, Brighton & Hove, 2020*

³ *Domestic Sentiment Tracker, VisitBritain, July 2022*

⁴ *The Tourism Recovery Plan, DCMS, June 2021*

- 3.11 VisitBrighton promotes Brighton & Hove as the destination of choice to:
- Domestic mid-week staying leisure visitors, filling a ‘need’ period outside of weekends and school holidays.
 - Staying international leisure visitors.
 - Domestic and international business visitors.
- 3.12 In 2021/22 VisitBrighton worked with the national press and media, providing content, imagery and pitching story ideas to generate positive domestic travel media coverage about the city with an advertising value equivalent value (AVE) of £1.8million in regional and national titles including: The Guardian, Sunday Times, Evening Standard, Metro, Daily Telegraph, OK Magazine, and Olive Magazine (see Appendix 1). All content focused on driving staycation visitors to Brighton & Hove. As increasing numbers of destinations compete for coverage, the work of VisitBrighton essential to ensure the city maintains prominence in on and offline media,
- 3.13 The main online marketing tool www.visitbrighton.com was redeveloped integrating User Generated Content, which encourages engagement and dwell time, and was successfully re-launched in April 2022. From April 2021 to March 2022 www.visitbrighton.com attracted 2.5m page views made by over 1m users, with visitors seeking information on things to do and planning their visit (see Appendix 1).
- 3.14 VisitBrighton has in excess of 120,000 follows on social media channels and 10,000 subscribers to monthly newsletter with organic content receiving over 44m impressions in 20/21. Social engagement is critical for inspiring younger audiences, encouraging them to develop lifelong loyalty to Brighton & Hove.
- 3.15 The Convention Bureau is responsible for promoting the city as a conference and meetings destination to domestic and international conference bookers, including political parties, associations, unions, and corporate organisations, who require a joined up citywide approach to secure their business. As more UK destinations enhance and augment their venues, the work of VisitBrighton is essential to ensure we continue to successfully compete with domestic and international destinations. In an average year, the Convention Bureau confirms approx. 60 conferences for the city, delivering 100,000 high-spend conference delegates, generating £40m of economic impact. Conferences take place mid-week Sept – June, outside of the key leisure periods, so it is essential this business is secured to ensure a buoyant year-round visitor economy (see Appendix 1).
- 3.16 Central to and cutting across all VisitBrighton’s work is its Partnership Scheme whereby local businesses engaged in tourism pay an annual fee, supporting VisitBrighton’s work in promoting the city nationally and internationally. In 2021/22 VisitBrighton worked with businesses including: accommodation providers, attractions, restaurants, shops, experience providers, venues, events, and conference venues.
- 3.17 The number of businesses in the VisitBrighton partnership declined post pandemic from a peak in 2018/19 of 550 to 355 partner businesses in 21/22 The decline was primarily due to business failure and the impact of financial

pressures, but partnership numbers are recovering in 22/23 with post-pandemic start-up businesses keen to join.

- 3.18 VisitBrighton has supported city businesses over the past two years by developing a Business Support Hub sign-posting citywide businesses engaged in tourism to relevant grants, resources and support. Regular newsletters were issued to businesses providing updates on latest government guidance and funding opportunities which obtained an average open rate of 32.97%. Support was also given to Brighton & Hove City Council colleagues assisting in processing of numerous grant funding applications.
- 3.19 Visitor Services supports and trains employees of businesses engaged in the visitor economy to provide information to visitors and residents, ensuring a citywide welcome, and supplies literature for 14 official Visitor Information Points (VIPs) across the city. Approximately 8,000 telephone and email enquiries from visitors were answered in 21/22 and we support two volunteer programmes including VisitBrighton Greeters and City Champions. Service achievements were recognised in 2021 with the VisitBrighton Visitor Services Officer winning 'Unsung Hero Award' at Tourism South East's Beautiful South Awards.
- 3.20 VisitBrighton is a well-liked and trusted service within the business community of Brighton & Hove. In terms of overall economic value, they significantly contribute to the overall economic impact value of £976.4m in 2019 and will continue to support the city through recovery and beyond to re-achieve these economic value figures.

3 Collaborative Working

- 4.1 VisitBrighton works collaboratively ensuring that the needs of the Brighton & Hove visitor economy are represented locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
- 4.2 VisitBrighton played a crucial role in developing and now delivering the Brighton & Hove Tourism Recovery Plan (see Appendix 2), working collaboratively with the Brighton & Hove Destination Experience Group. The plan was developed to aid the recovery of the visitor economy in the City post-pandemic with four key Strategic priorities:
 - To ensure Brighton visitor economy is represented locally, regionally, and nationally to ensure maximum support.
 - To build back consumer confidence and awareness.
 - To enhance 'look and feel' of the city to encourage repeat, high value visits.
 - To extend season to make Brighton a 'must visit' destination for high spend UK and international visitors year-round.
- 4.3 The Brighton & Hove Tourism Recovery Plan was formerly adopted by the Tourism, Equalities and Culture Committee on the 17th June 2021
- 4.4 During 2020 VisitBrighton was instrumental in setting up the Sussex Visitor Economy Group comprising officers from Brighton & Hove City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and Destination

Management Organisations (DMOs) Experience West Sussex, Visit Eastbourne and Visit 1066 Country. Market insight tells us we have an opportunity to significantly increase our market share of longer staying domestic and overseas visitors by working together in a stronger joined-up approach across Sussex. The group will capitalise on the opportunities of cross-county working, including strong representation to the government, which is increasingly important considering the governments soon to be launched Local Visitor Economy Partnership accreditation scheme.

- 4.5 VisitBrighton collaborates closely with Gatwick Gateway, Govia, Tourism South East, the Tourism Alliance, VisitEngland and VisitBritain, ensuring that the Brighton & Hove visitor economy is considered and represented regionally and nationally, amplifying our messaging to visitor audiences and ensuring we have a prominent voice in the development of national strategies.
- 4.6 VisitBrighton secured £100k digital media spend from DCMS to amplify VisitEngland's 'Enjoy Summer Safely' campaign with #nevernormalbrighton messaging in Summer 2021.
- 4.7 VisitBrighton lead on a bid to secure £100k funding from VisitBritain, in collaboration with Visitor Economy Sussex Group, to amplify 'Escape the Everyday' campaign in May/June 2022. The campaign developed and delivered by VisitBrighton, had incredible impact receiving over 15m impressions on digital channels, ensuring Sussex was a key destination consideration for visitors.
- 4.8 The Brighton & Hove Destination Experience Group is working collaboratively with VisitBrighton to develop a Destination Management Plan to drive the visitor economy forward in 2023 and beyond.
- 4.9 During 2023 consultation will begin with local businesses, regional partners, and national tourism agencies, to start the process of delivering a renewed Visitor Economy Strategy for Brighton & Hove from 2024 to 2030.

5 Financial Arrangements

- 5.1 The cost of VisitBrighton comprises salaries of £386,460 and expenditure on marketing activity, software licensing and tools at £346,790. The service had an annual budget of £733,250 in 2021/22.
- 5.2 VisitBrighton generates revenue of £391,170, through income streams including partnership fees, hotel and conference commissions and advertising which means the cost to Brighton & Hove City Council for this service is £342,080.
- 5.3 Through the VisitBrighton funding model of Partnership fees and Conference and Accommodation Commissions the service is currently 53% funded via the Private Sector and 47% funded by Brighton & Hove City Council. By supporting VisitBrighton, Brighton & Hove City Council are safeguarding the visitor economy which supports 7% of the population who are employed as a result of the visitor economy in Brighton & Hove and delivering high levels of economic impact for the city. The work of VisitBrighton benefits the whole city by keeping the destination top-of-mind for both leisure & business visitors and by encouraging

them to extend their stay in the city thereby increasing the economic benefit for all.

6. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 Not applicable - this committee paper is for noting.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

7.1 VisitBrighton regularly consults through its Business Partner network. The Brighton & Hove Destination Experience Group (DEG) was inaugurated in 2018 and is a working group made up of tourism business leaders in the city, combined with council officers. The purpose of the group is to provide a collaborative mechanism for monitoring, reviewing, and improving the visitor experience across the city.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The work of VisitBrighton in 21/22 has been critical in supporting the visitor economy in Brighton & Hove and will play an essential role in sustaining and growing the sector in future years.

8.2 In 21/22 VisitBrighton played a key role in shaping and delivering the Brighton & Hove Tourism Recovery Plan, leading on the representation of the citywide visitor economy locally, regionally, and nationally. Online and off-line press coverage and marketing campaigns delivered by VisitBrighton was critical in building back consumer awareness and confidence, while VisitBrighton was pivotal in ensuring the interests of tourism businesses have been represented across Council departments, ensuring their needs were understood. The work of VisitBrighton effectively promoted the city as a year-round destination, ensuring maximum revenues were generated from tourism throughout the year.

8.3 The value contribution that VisitBrighton generates in supporting the visitor economy is significant; the cost of the service to Brighton & Hove City Council is £342,080, which equates to a high value return on a relatively small city investment.

8.4 The city has been deeply affected by the pandemic since the first lockdown commenced in March 2020. The effect on health, wellbeing, the economy and on individual livelihoods has been immense. It may take years for the city to fully recover, for example in lost jobs, accumulated debts and small businesses that have folded. This is clearly demonstrated in Economic Impact figures for 2020 where £370m of economic benefit for the city was generated, down 61% on 2019.

8.5 Looking to the future, it is evident that the visitor economy will require ongoing support and representation as the continued impacts of Covid and emerging impacts of the cost-of-living crisis are felt. The role of VisitBrighton is critical to support the visitor economy, protecting jobs and revenues in a sector which generates major employment and enhances the city's reputation as a premier destination.

9. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications:

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any significant variations to budget will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.

Finance Officer Consulted: John Lack

Date: 5/8/22

Legal Implications:

- 9.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report which is for noting.

Lawyer Consulted: Alice Rowland

Date: 1/8/22

Equalities Implications:

- 9.3 None

Sustainability Implications:

- 9.4 None

Brexit Implications:

- 9.5 Unknown

Public Health Implications:

- 9.6 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 9.7 The city has been deeply affected by the pandemic since the first lockdown commenced in March 2020. The effect on health, wellbeing, the economy and on individual livelihoods has been immense. It may take years for the city to fully recover, for example in lost jobs, accumulated debts. The best route to recovery is through collective action which, via constructive dialogue with stakeholders, and VisitBrighton will be pivotal in identifying actions and working collaboratively with the business stakeholders of the city.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. VisitBrighton Overview 2021-22
2. Brighton & Hove Tourism Recovery Plan
3. Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy Strategy 2018-2023