

England's tourism strategy

Summary

This paper gives background information and key messages to accompany a presentation from James Berresford (Chief Executive, VisitEngland) on the new tourism strategy for England.

Recommendations

That members note the report and comment on the findings and direction of England's tourism strategy, as outlined in the presentation.

Action

Subject to members' comments, officers to take forward any suggested actions.

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Background

1. A key recommendation of the British Tourism Framework Review was that the Government create a national tourism agency for England, with responsibility for domestic tourism marketing and policy support. The creation of VisitEngland (VE) puts England on a par with the devolved nations. VisitEngland has been tasked with creating a tourism strategy for England that binds all partners in to a single vision for the future of tourism in England.
2. Members' asked that the James Berresford (Chief Executive, VisitEngland) be invited to meet the Board and update the LGA on the development of the strategy at the earliest opportunity.
3. On 28 July, Cllr Chris White attended a "critical friends" session at VE to feed into early scoping of this work. James Berresford also spoke at the LGA conference workshop *harnessing the potential of the visitor economy* on 1 July 2009. Following the Board meeting Cllr White and Cllr Eaton (Chairman, LGA) will meet Lady Penelope Cobham, (Chairman, VisitEngland) and James Berresford to discuss tourism support by local authorities, with a particular focus on support during the recession.

Tourism and local authorities

4. Tourism is the fifth largest sector of the UK economy. Councils recognise that tourism has the potential to support employment, investment and skills development in the present economic downturn. Councils are the largest public funder of the visitor economy, investing £120m per year in tourism support.
5. They also spend a significant amount on culture and heritage - £1.8bn in 2005-2006 - and support major cultural, business and sporting events; all of which are key attractions for tourists.
6. Many tourism offices are owned or managed by councils and provide a vital source of information for visitors. Local authorities also provide the core infrastructure essential to the tourist experience, such as transport facilities and clean, safe and attractive public spaces.
7. The World Economic Forum travel and tourism competitiveness index placed Britain 6th from 130 countries in 2008. It notes that "Britain's relative strengths are the quality of the supporting infrastructure and the cultural/leisure/natural resource offer." Local government is a massive investor in these sectors, and the ongoing efforts of councils to support, develop, exploit and market these resources will be a key driver of growth in the visitor economy.

Key messages

8. In responding to the presentation from VE, members may wish to consider the following points:
 - Councils have the place-shaping and convening powers to promote tourism efficiently and in conjunction with local culture, heritage and sport attractions, and making links with local transport, regeneration projects and the wider industry and public agencies and services. **How will the strategy encourage and support the local political leadership and local partnership working necessary to make this happen?**
 - Tourists visit destinations, not administrative regions. What does England's tourism strategy consider to be the appropriate mechanism and role for councils to input into local tourism support and marketing, and **how can we ensure visitors are attracted to "real" places?**
 - Local and regional tourism support needs to be better joined up. In a recent survey 84% of councils told the LGA that improving the quality and flow of information from RDAs about funding opportunities for tourism was the key to success. **How does the strategy envisage relations between regions, sub-regions and local places operating? And how could these be improved?**
 - It is estimated that 50 – 75% of the economic benefits of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will accrue to tourism. The Games are a once in a generation chance to bring all tourism sectors together around a clear goal. **Does the strategy accurately reflect the importance of the Games? And what steps can be taken at a national and local level to ensure that the benefits of 2012 Tourism are spread across the whole of the UK?**

Financial Implications

9. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Implications for Wales

10. VisitEngland's remit does not extend to Wales.

Contact Officer: Steve Skelton
Phone No: 020 7664 3074
Email: steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk