



SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 27th JANUARY 2025

PLACE MARKETING – LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Scrutiny Commission on the work of the Place Marketing Team for Leicester and Leicestershire.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The County Council's Strategic Plan emphasises the importance of enhancing Leicestershire's profile as a desirable location to visit, live, work, and do business. This strategy aims to stimulate investment and create a thriving environment for businesses to grow and prosper.
3. Following a review, the Cabinet approved the establishment of a Place Marketing Team (PMT) on 23rd November 2016. Jointly funded and managed by the Council and Leicester City Council, this team leads on place marketing, inward investment, and strategic tourism across the region.
4. The Scrutiny Commission receives regular updates on the PMT's work, with the most recent report provided in November 2023.

Background

5. Established in 2017 the PMT promotes the city and county as a place to visit, to live and invest in. Leicester City Council hosts the PMT with the County Council providing funding of £60,000 a year as well as two seconded members of staff at a cost of £143,418 (total cost £203,418 per annum). Leicester City Council provides funding of £60,000 a year as well as five full time members of staff, totalling £375,000 per annum.
6. The service works across Leicester and Leicestershire and delivers the following key areas of activity:
 - Strategic Tourism – positioning Leicester and Leicestershire as a cohesive visitor destination, through integrating and delivering in key public and private sector partnerships and contributing to the local economy. A public/private sector, Tourism Advisory Board is established to shape policy and the delivery of the Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan 2020-2025.
 - Place Marketing –to promote Leicester and Leicestershire as a destination to visit, invest and live. A strategic Place Marketing Coordination group, made up of public and private stakeholders is established to shape placed based strategies.

- Inward Investment – Providing an account management service to support businesses (both foreign and domestic) seeking to expand or relocate within Leicester and Leicestershire, as well as developers and investors looking to bring sites and properties to market. The inward investment service also hosts events and promotional activities throughout the year to highlight the potential opportunities available within the county.

Strategic Tourism

7. Latest data commissioned in the annual Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM), reports visitor numbers to Leicester and Leicestershire surged in 2023, generating a substantial economic impact. Leicestershire welcomed 31.27 million visitors, contributing £2.39 billion to the local economy. This figure surpasses the £2.1 billion target outlined in the current Tourism Growth Plan and represents a 15.5% increase compared to the previous year's £2.07 billion.
8. Visitor numbers rose by 2.46%, with the County attracting 21.04 million visitors and the City welcoming 10.24 million. The total number of visitor days increased to 38.53 million, up from 37.65 million in 2022. This growth is attributed to both an increase in visitors and the average length of stay.
9. The data shows growth in the number of tourism-related jobs with more than 22,922 people now employed in the visitor economy sector across the City and the County, an increase of 8.96% on 2022.

Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Accreditation

10. The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) and Visit England (VE) have introduced a new tiered structure of accredited tourist boards to manage and promote destinations. Leicester and Leicestershire successfully secured accreditation in January 2024, establishing a direct and strategic relationship with VE.
11. Accreditation as a LVEP provides the PMT with the opportunity to promote Leicester and Leicestershire nationally with government recognition and to participate in national marketing and travel trade activities. The LVEP offers opportunities for skills development, commissions, and access to grant funding as outlined above. The Partnership includes key stakeholders, including visitor economy businesses and district councils. More detail on the key priorities within the Growth Plan can be found in Appendix A.
12. The strategic tourism work is guided by the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB). This includes senior leaders from across the County, including businesses such as Everards Brewery, Great Central Railway, National Forest, Melton BID, Marriott Hotels and Public Sector representation, including the Chief Executive of Harborough District Council.
13. The LVEP will implement a strategic approach to regional destination management campaigns for the County of Leicestershire. Each campaign brings together the offers in each district under overarching themes encouraging visitors to explore the County. Through these joint promotional activities, the campaigns provide a more

comprehensive and engaging experience, capitalising on heightened visitor interest and maximising campaign exposure.

Place Marketing

Strategic Place Marketing Group

14. Established in 2023, the Strategic Place Marketing Group serves as a platform for key stakeholders in Leicester and Leicestershire. Comprising representatives from the three universities, local government, business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation for Small Business, and cultural institutions, the group is dedicated to identifying and implementing strategic place marketing campaigns and group member initiatives that promote the region as a thriving destination.
15. By fostering collaboration and alignment among partners, the Strategic Place Marketing Group amplifies tourism campaigns and projects defined in the Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan 2020-2025. The group's key priorities for 2024 include:
 - Aligning with Visit England's priorities and the focus of Visit Leicester and surrounding districts.
 - Promotion of Leicestershire as a place for students to explore, increasing promotional activities around September and October, capitalising on student enrolment.
 - The creation of a business-to-business newsletter. This platform will enable partners to disseminate their sustainability initiatives and other relevant content, thereby enhancing the region's overall brand visibility and attracting investment.

Destination Management Website

16. Launched in 2017, the current destination management website used for promoting tourism and investment activities, has reached its operational limit. To effectively support the PMT's commercial activities and enhance user experience, a comprehensive website rebuild is imperative. A rigorous procurement process has recently commenced, outlining detailed specifications for a new platform to replace the current, outdated system and will result in the launch of a new destination management website in April 2025. Estimated costs for the new website will be circa £23,000 per annum over a five-year contract, to be jointly funded between Leicester City and Leicestershire County Council.
17. By prioritising a modern, user-friendly website, the Visit Leicester website will host event, hotel and attraction information for tourism businesses based across the county of Leicestershire. The new, county wide website aims to further increase its online presence, drive tourism revenue, and better serve both visitors and local businesses.

Commercial Strategy

18. Increasing commercial income provides a significant opportunity for the Place Marketing Team to achieve long-term financial sustainability. This marks a shift

towards a more commercial approach by generating income from both public and private sector partnerships. Since Q1 of 2024, the Place Marketing Team have established the following commercial income streams to support the sustainability of the service:

- Direct Hotel Booking: Utilising platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia, Visit Leicester can secure commission revenues without incurring additional costs for accommodation providers.
- High-Value Partnerships: The PMT has pivoted towards developing bespoke commercial packages. This targeted approach offers businesses the opportunity to access Visit Leicester's extensive marketing expertise, maximising their reach and driving ticket sales. This strategy has yielded significant success, particularly for attractions across the county.
- District Council Partnerships: Several district councils have commissioned Place Marketing to amplify their local tourism bureau's messaging. Primarily funded by UK Shared Prosperity funds, this partnership enables districts to engage with and attract visitors from a broader audience.
- The PMT successfully secured £13,500 of funding to refresh the image library of Leicester and Leicestershire aligning with Visit Britain/England's strategic communications. This initiative, commissioned by the PMT, has captured high-quality imagery of attractions and venues across all district areas in Leicestershire and are currently being used by attractions and district councils across the county.

19. Whilst in its first year of commercial activities, it is forecast that the PMT will generate circa £48,000 of commercial income by the end of the financial year. The income is intended to be used to reduce the budget pressures on Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council. By analysing booking trends and partner engagement, the PMT will continue to refine its commercial strategy. The new destination management website, due to complete by March 2025 will enable continued revenue growth. This strategic shift towards a more commercial Place Marketing Team help to position the service for long-term sustainability.

Group Travel

20. Attracting coach and group travel bookings has been a significant priority for the PMT in 2024 and is yielding the following, tangible results.

21. A recent booking from Probus Harpenden, comprising 50 delegates, is expected to contribute £8,717.50 to the local economy. The booking was taken following an exhibition of the Group Leisure Travel Show, organised by the PMT.

- PMT is actively negotiating with the Association of Group Travel Organisers (AGTO) to host their annual showcase event in the region during either October 2025 or February 2026. This prestigious event, valued at £24,000, would provide a unique opportunity for local attractions to connect directly with group travel bookers.
- At the Group Leisure and Travel Show in Milton Keynes, the PMT collaborated with seven partners to share exhibition costs and maximise Leicestershire's presence. This strategic approach resulted in engaging with over 130 group travel organisers, generating bookings for partners such as

Belvoir Castle, Brockleby Pies, King Richard III visitor centre and the Great Central Railway.

- The PMT's quarterly newsletter, distributed to a database of over 600 group travel organisers amongst others, continues to be a valuable tool for promoting group-friendly attractions. With an impressive 30% subscribers regularly reading the newsletter, it is an effective communication method, reaching a group travel target audience.
- Recognition of the PMT's commitment to the group travel market was further solidified by being shortlisted for the Group Leisure and Travel Awards for Best UK Destination for Groups for the second consecutive year.

Campaigns – Uncover the Story/Fitcation/Taste the Place

22. The PMT's email newsletter audience continues to expand and now reaches 12,000 subscribers. This valuable platform serves as a direct channel to engage with individuals interested in exploring the region's attractions and accommodation providers.
23. A key focus has been on promoting the Uncover the Story, a campaign aimed at showcasing attractions, hidden gems and telling the story about Leicestershire's history. The campaign attracted over 15,900 individuals to the Uncover the Story web pages, with Melton, Harborough, and Lutterworth emerging as popular destinations.
24. The Fitcation campaign aims to encourage visitors to explore the county through active travel and experiences such as cycling, swimming and sporting activities. The campaign was strategically featured during the spring and summer seasons, generated and additional 3,106 users.
25. Taste the Place, a central focus of PMT's efforts, received significant investment from district UK Shared Prosperity Funds to create compelling video and print assets for their individual areas. An additional investment in paid social media expanded the campaign's reach to 1.6 million people viewing the promotional campaign online. Positive feedback from local businesses like Dreamy Cow Ice Cream (Norton Juxta-Twycross, NW Leics), Wellie Deli (Newbold Coleorton, Hinckley & Bosworth), and Stanton Lakes (Stoney Stanton, Blaby) confirms the campaign's effectiveness in driving increased visitor traffic.

Sustainable Tourism

26. Supporting County net zero ambitions, and in alignment with Visit England's core priorities, and the LVEP Growth Plan, focussed work in this area recognises the associated challenge of balancing increased visitor numbers with a reduced carbon footprint. District and Borough Councils are supporting this work, utilising UKSPF monies to work with Visit Leicester on Case Studies, highlighting best practice in the local visitor economy. Businesses are also being developed and supported with dedicated business support, encouraging them to apply for green accreditation and helping them implement sustainable practices. This also links to the Fitcation campaign expanding its product reach by promoting walking and cycling routes throughout city and county and encouraging visitors to choose walking and cycling experiences. Visit Leicester has launched a digital-first initiative, Green Days, Green

Stays, Green Ways to promote Leicestershire's tourism businesses actively working towards sustainable goals.

27. A dedicated platform has been developed to showcase district-specific content and offer a range of activities for local authorities to select based on their localised priorities. These activities include:
 - Sustainable Tourism Case Studies: Highlighting exemplary businesses.
 - Desktop Research: Identifying businesses ready to embark on their sustainability journey.
 - Marketing and Promotion: Leveraging the PMT's media channels for maximum reach.
 - Business Support: Facilitating the attainment of national green tourism accreditation.
28. Harborough District Council have already engaged in this initiative, with the Eco Village in Harborough serving as the subject of the first case study. Melton Borough Council are also actively working on the sustainable tourism campaign.
29. This campaign adopts a dual-pronged approach, targeting both businesses and consumers. By sharing inspiring stories and raising awareness, we aim to encourage more businesses in the region to achieve green tourism accreditation and join the wider movement. Participating businesses also benefit from the potential for promotion by Visit England.
30. Through this strategic initiative, the PMT is actively contributing to a more sustainable tourism landscape while promoting the region's green credentials.

New Destination Management Plan 2025

31. The Tourism Growth Plan 2020-2025 set out ambitions for tourism across Leicester and Leicestershire positioning the region as a leading destination for leisure and business tourism. It has provided a framework for the City and County's efforts to attract an increasing number of leisure and business visitors to the area, whilst encouraging those visitors to stay longer and spend more. Work on a new Destination Management Plan for 2026-2030 will begin early next year to conclude in November 2025, ready to launch in January 2026. This will establish the new strategic direction, aligning with Visit England's priorities as set out in the forthcoming strategy and working closely with stakeholder groups to help shape its development and ensure relevance to the sector. Representing the LVEP, the Strategic Tourism Lead officer will attend the VE Strategy Consultation Day in October.

Inward Investment

32. Inward investment is widely recognised as a positive type of investment activity and is identified as a key priority within the Leicester & Leicestershire Economic Growth Strategy 2021-2030 prepared by the former LLEP (Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership).
33. The inward investment service for Leicester and Leicestershire, "Invest in Leicester", provides a point of contact for account management and facilitating inward

investment, working in collaboration with public and private sector partners including the Department for Business and Trade (DBT).

Refined Approach to Delivering Inward Investment

34. In early 2024, following a comprehensive partnership engagement process, a review of Leicestershire's approach to inward investment agreed to focus on the following key priorities:
- Foster a collaborative investment ecosystem across the county.
 - Drive sustainable economic growth in Leicestershire.
 - Attract new investment to Leicestershire and support existing businesses in their expansion.
 - Enhance Leicestershire's national and international investment profile.
 - Work collaboratively to deliver growth and investment outcomes.
 - Implement a strategic approach to land allocation to support economic development.

Inward Investment Reporting

35. The PMT has expanded its key performance indicators (KPIs) to provide a more comprehensive assessment of its economic impact on Leicestershire.
36. The table below highlights the economic impact on Leicestershire derived from projects directly supported by the PMT through account management. Further details on the account management support offered for each success can be found in Appendix B.

| Key Performance Indicator | Reporting Period: 1 October 2023 – 31 December 2024 |
|--|--|
| No. of Enquiries Converted into Investment Decisions | 5 |
| Capital Investment | £36.4 million |
| Business Rates Generated per annum | £1.3 million |
| Total Salary Value per annum | £18.8 million |
| Total Investment Value* | £56.5 million |
| New Jobs Created | 402 |
| Safeguarded Jobs | 172 |
| Average Salary (New / Safeguarded Jobs) | £33,473 |

*Total Investment Value = Capital Investment + Business Rates + Total Salary Value

NB the financial information provided is commercially confidential and has therefore been aggregated and rounded.

DBT Reporting

37. The PMT serves as a point of contact between Leicestershire County Council and the DBT. This role involves providing the DBT with local knowledge and connections to the region's business support services and district and borough councils. This facilitates the DBT in successfully 'landing' their account-managed projects.

38. The table below highlights the economic impact to Leicestershire relating to projects where the PMT and local partners have supported the DBT to secure inward investment. Further details on the DBT account management support offered for each success can be found in Appendix B.

| Key Performance Indicator | Reporting Period: 1 October 2023 – 31 December 2024 |
|--|--|
| No. of Enquiries Converted into Investment Decisions | 3 |
| Capital Investment | £42.4 million |
| Business Rates Generated | £2.5 million |
| Total Salary Value | £14.9 million |
| Total Investment Value* | £59.8 million |
| New Jobs Created | 313 |
| Safeguarded Jobs | 62 |
| Average Salary (New / Safeguarded Jobs) | £39,666 |

*Total Investment Value = Capital Investment + Business Rates + Total Salary Value

NB the financial information provided is commercially confidential and has therefore been aggregated and rounded.

Partnership and Collaboration

39. The PMT has developed a collaborative network dedicated to attracting and supporting strategic investment, highlighting local opportunities, and presenting a unified, professional front for investment in Leicestershire. Key partnerships include:
- **Team Leicester:** The PMT work closely with Team Leicester to jointly host events at the MIPIM, UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) and hold networking sessions for the property industry to promote the city and county. Team Leicester is funded through its sponsorship base, whereby businesses pay a small sponsorship fee of £1,950 per annum with 100% of the funds reinvested into promotional events and activities. Sponsoring businesses can then attend events and network with attendees.
 - **East Midlands Freeport (EMF):** The PMT collaborates with the EMF team and has developed a two-way enquiry management process. The PMT has provided Leicestershire specific 'place' related content to feed into EMF marketing materials, and the EMF Chief Executive presented at networking events including at Invest in Leicester's bi-annual lunch for the region's property and construction sector.
 - **Midlands Engine:** The PMT is a member of the Midlands Trade & Investment Advisory Forum, ensuring that Leicestershire is represented and involved in the development of international trade and investment activities undertaken by the Midlands Engine. The Forum enables members to discuss issues, shape and suggest initiatives, and identify areas for collaboration.
40. For further details on these partnerships and specific examples of collaborative work, can be found in Appendix B.

Investor Events Programme

41. The PMT has developed a comprehensive events programme designed to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors. This has been part-funded by private sponsorship.

42. Highlights from the 2024 events programme include:

UKREiiF: The Leicester and Leicestershire delegation included representatives from the County and City Councils, District and Borough councils, Loughborough University, East Midlands Freeport, MIRA Technology Park, and University Hospital Leicester NHS Trust. The PMT coordinated a series of three interconnecting events for UKREiiF:

- A launch event prior to UKREiiF for 85 delegates to equip our ambassadors with positive messages and provide them with details of local development opportunities to showcase. Melton Borough Council presented their growth and regeneration plans. The event was fully funded through private sponsorship.
- A showcase session highlighted sustainable development in Leicester and Leicestershire, and that the area is 'open for business'. 100 delegates attended. The event was funded 50% through private sponsorship and 50% by County Council and City Council.
- A networking event, hosted by Team Leicester, connected 90 property and construction sector directors with senior council officers from Leicester, Leicestershire, Blaby, Melton and North West Leicestershire. The event was fully funded by Team Leicester sponsors.

Leicester and Leicestershire Property & Construction Lunches: In collaboration with private partners, the PMT established bi-annual networking and awareness raising lunches for the region's property and construction sector, held across Leicester and Leicestershire. These events offer an excellent opportunity to spotlight local authority projects, enabling stakeholders, including landowners, developers, commercial agents, and architects, to connect, resulting in improved awareness of local priorities and initiatives and engaging with key decision makers to support bringing sites and properties forwards.

In March 2024, **North West Leicestershire District Council and East Midlands Freeport** presented to 130 delegates about their development and regeneration opportunities. Future events include a 'universities as drivers of investment', featuring University of Leicester, De Montfort University, and Loughborough University, and 'spotlight' presentations from Blaby District Council and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's Chief Executives.

43. These events offer excellent return on investment for the County Council, as they are organised and managed by a private operator, who charge a commercial delegate rate with the PMT devising the agenda and influencing the attendee list.

44. Feedback highlights that the events outlined above are highly valued by the property industry and Leicestershire's county, district, and borough councils. These events serve as valuable platforms for showcasing projects underway across the region, enabling senior leaders from district and borough councils to discuss their regeneration objectives and masterplans with the property industry. The PMT successfully leveraged £43,350 in private sector funding for these events in 2024, representing a 143% return on the £17,820 provided by County Council for marketing materials, investment maps, events, web promotion and other promotional activities.
45. Further details of the events can be found in Appendix B.

DBT Funded Key Account Management Programme

46. In 2024, the PMT successfully secured funding from the DBT to establish a Key Account Management (KAM) Programme for the region. This initiative is designed to provide dedicated account management support to existing foreign-owned businesses and is a strategic priority for the DBT.
47. To date, the KAM programme has identified 41 foreign owned businesses within the County, account managing a total of 5 verified wins, creating a total of 102 jobs, and a financial investment totalling £14.2 million.
48. The KAM programme will continue until 31 March 2025, with funding in place to support its operations. The PMT provides monthly progress reports to the DBT, detailing all company interactions, new projects, investment wins, and job creation.

Resource Implications

49. Leicestershire County Council provides a financial contribution of £60,000 to the PMT. In addition, two members of staff are seconded to the PMT. The total cost is £203,670 per annum.

Conclusions

50. The views of the Commission are sought on the report together with the presentation provided by Mike Denby, Director of Inward Investment and Place Marketing.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

51. None

Equality Implications

52. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

52. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Background papers

Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan -

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/pdf/leicester-leicestershire-tourism-growth-plan.pdf

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Appendices

Appendix A - Recent Achievements and Current Activities: Strategic Tourism

Appendix B - Recent Achievements and Current Activities: Inward Investment

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