



northernireland
tourist board

Minimum Standards of Operation for Networked Visitor Information Centres

nitb.com

Standards Of Operation

A key principle of the services provided by Networked Visitor Information Centres (VICs) is that they offer high standards of customer service and professional impartial advice at all times. In addition to the provision of excellent standards of service to visitors and local residents, VIC's will also play a hub role in the dissemination of visitor information thus ensuring that the VIC is a vital link to local trade / stakeholders.

SECTION A:

KEY PRINCIPLES:

All Networked VIC's will:

1. Have adequate floor and display space for the provision of free visitor information.
2. Not charge for entry into the VIC.
3. Have at least 1 dedicated, named staff member (or 2 part time equivalents) responsible for the overall operation of the service provision and centre on a day to day basis.
4. Have a written literature racking policy for the facility which follows NITB guidance and indicates understanding of visitors' information needs. This should be agreed with the local Council / managing agency.
5. Have a formal complaints procedure in line with local authority / managing agent and NITB protocol.
6. Participate in NITB's quality assurance mystery shopper programme.
7. Counter / floor staff to wear uniform in line with agreed VIC Network uniform protocol or managing agency uniform that is reflective of their customer service role. Corporate Network i pins, and name badges must also be worn.
8. Record statistics and measure performance according to NITB identified matrix.
9. Comply with the current Disability Discrimination legislation. Any amends to this in the future should be delivered by the Managing Authority.
10. Prominently display the agreed corporate national visitor information logo, both internally and externally. Agreement has been reached across the network that this will be the pink hexagon with the white information "i" as per the brand guidelines issued in March 2013.
11. Agree to release staff, as appropriate, to attend NITB training programmes.

SECTION B:

SERVICES PROVIDED:

All Networked VICs must provide visitors with tailored visitor information by excellent, personalised customer service.

It is also a requirement that visitor information support is delivered to the local tourism trade and stakeholders.

During the hours of opening all Networked VIC's should:

1. Display clearly details of the services available at the Tourist Information Centre via window displays and/ or facilities board.
2. Provide personalised face to face visitor information services to visitors in the Tourist Information Centre.
3. Provide personalised visitor information advice by telephone according to opening times. Where a dedicated phone line to the VIC is not possible every effort should be made to ensure that tourism services are option 1 in the menu choice.
4. Provide personalised visitor information by email. Emails should be acknowledged within 24 hours of receipt and answered in full within 48 hours of acknowledgement.
5. Provide information on areas across Northern Ireland in line with visitors needs.
6. Provide accurate local public transport information.
7. Display an up to date map of Northern Ireland and the local area in which the VIC is situated. In urban areas street maps should also be provided.
8. Stock and display appropriate free literature and maps produced by NITB and the local Destination and other suitable literature necessary to service visitor's information needs.
9. Have adequate computer connectivity and access to meet staff and visitor needs.
10. 24 hour message relay information system (email and phone).
11. Out of hours provision as per section below.

Local VICs Services

Reflect the minimum standards identified above.

In addition to the Minimum Standards listed above Destination and Gateway VIC's should provide the following:

DESTINATION VIC SERVICES:

- Dedicated desk(s) to service tourism enquiries.
- Dedicated phone line(s) to service tourism enquiries.
- Must have personalised face to face information services at all times during the hours of opening.
- Must hold NITB literature covering the local area, the wider destination, all of Northern Ireland and other suitable literature to service the visitors' needs.
- Show evidence of supporting local arts and craft industry (theatre tickets etc)

- **Must offer accommodation booking service as per Council accommodation booking terms and conditions.**
- **If staff on duty have language skills these should be clearly displayed.**

GATEWAY VIC SERVICES

All of the minimum and destination standards listed above plus:

- **Operate a bureau de change or similar service.**
- **Stock the full complement of Northern Ireland literature to support visitors' information needs.**
- **Ticketing services for range of visitor attractions and events.**
- **During peak times and also in locations of shared services, visitors' informational needs to be given dedicated resources to ensure specific needs are met.**
- **Operate left luggage facilities where managing agent is responsible for the facility.**
- **Provide a seated rest area for visitors to review their informational needs.**
- **Provide WIFI access**
- **Airport VIC's must provide sufficient free literature to service enquiries when closed.**
- **All efforts should be made to ensure there are staff with proficiency in a range of languages in line with visitor trends. If staff on duty have language skills these should be clearly displayed.**

SECTION C:

1. OPENING PERIODS AND TIMES

A key principle of all VICs is that they will be accessible to visitors and trade stakeholders as per their audience requirements. Precise opening times will be subject to local demand and conditions but the principle of meeting visitor / audience needs should be applied at all times.

Local VIC

Monday – Friday, 10:00-17:00 and during the lunch period, except in exceptional circumstances.

Where local VIC is in a shared facility there must be clear direction to and adequate supply of free tourist information available when the VIC is closed but main facility remains open.

DESTINATION VIC opening hours

Destination VIC's should be open 7 days per week (June - September) and 6 days a week the rest of the year.

Destination VIC's must open on public holidays with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day.

Monday - Friday from 09:30 – 17:00 and during the lunch period

Saturday – minimum of 6 hours

Sunday – minimum of 4 hours

GATEWAY VIC opening hours:

7 days a week on a year round basis.

Monday – Friday 0930 – 1700

Saturday 0930 – 1800

Sunday 1100 - 1800

Gateway VIC's opening times should be reflective of transport arrival times.

Extended opening hours should be introduced 1st May – 31st August in line with visitor needs.

Above is inclusive of Public and Bank Holidays with the exception of Christmas Day. Reduced opening hours will be acceptable on these days although the opening hours should be agreed in writing with NITB in advance.

Seasonal Networked VIC's:

In the absence of proven tourist / visitor demand, information providers will open a minimum of 6 months of the year opening no later than Easter. There is a minimum requirement that the VIC will operate 7 days a week between 1st June – 31 August (check visitor profile to see if still demand in Sept) and weekends and Public / Bank Holidays from Easter – September.

Seasonal VIC's can be Destination VIC's.

2. OUT OF HOURS PROVISION

All VIC's must ensure that out-of-hours information is clearly visible from the outside of the building and that it is relevant and up to date. Out of hours information will include:

- i. Relevant website information (local council/managing agency website plus discovernorthernireland)
- ii. Key accommodation details
- iii. Emergency contact information
- iv. VIC opening hours
- v. Any available technological support (e.g. QR codes/kiosks/mobile phone apps)

Local & Destination VIC's

Should include contact details and opening hours for the nearest local visitor information point (this could be an arrangement with local business to stock literature or provide internet access with directions to local authority website and discovernorthernireland)

SECTION D:

Communication

A key principle of all networked VIC's is to ensure visitor information is widely distributed across all visitor touch-points in the local area. VICs must engage with their local trade and stakeholders to achieve this aim.

- i. All VICs will develop annual communication plans in relation to the principles outlined in the visitor information plan for Northern Ireland. A template is available on the key documents section of the VIC webpage on www.nitb.com.

- ii. Host an annual information & engagement session with stakeholders / local trade
- iii. Disseminate information to local tourism providers and stakeholders via a What's On Guide.

Local VICs

Will provide the 'What's On Guide' at least monthly during peak season (Easter to 30 September) and at least quarterly during non peak season (1st October to Easter)

Individual centres can determine a greater frequency, in line with local requirements.

Destination VICs

Will provide the "What's On Guide" weekly during peak season (Easter to 30 September) and monthly outside of this period (1st October – Easter).

Gateway VICs

Will provide the What's On Guide weekly on a year round basis.

SECTION E:

1. LOCATION

A key principle of the physical location of all Networked VIC's should be that they are:

- i. sited with regard to the main tourist flow and be located at ground level.
- ii. have car parking in close proximity to the VIC. If parking is not available then the VIC must be well signposted from all major car parks in the area.

2. SIGNPOSTING to the VIC

A key principle of all Networked VIC's is that they will be easily accessible and highly visible to visitors:

- i. subject to relevant regulations, be well signposted along all major approach roads.
- ii. subject to relevant regulations, be well signposted for both motorists and
- iii. pedestrians from all major points of arrival – e.g. finger posting for pedestrians from car parks, railway / bus stations etc.
- iv. Only use DRD Road Service approved signs to signpost VICs.

SECTION F:

ADMINISTRATION

A key principle of all Networked VICs is that they will:

- i. Record statistics on all enquiries and report these to NITB in an agreed format and timeframe.
- ii. Send a representative to the Network Supervisor meetings (4 per year, min 50%) and ensure that information is cascaded to wider team.
- iii. Review information on their Council area on NITB's website and liaise with NITB regarding amendments in an agreed format.
- iv. Gateway VIC's will be required to provide NITB with a full business plan.
- v. All VIC's will complete a communications plan template, as provided by NITB, to ensure the principles of the Visitor Information Plan for Northern Ireland are being delivered.

SECTION G:

NITB Support to the Network:

As part of their commitment to the VIC Network NITB will continue to support Networked VIC staff in the following ways:

- i. Provide a tailored VIC training and development programme
- ii. Provide VIC induction training for seasonal / new staff*
- iii. Provide Mystery Shopper quality assurance support
- iv. Provide On line tools (e.g. Just In Time Print, info via www.discovernorthernireland
- v. Provide financial assistance to the product knowledge familiarisation visits
- vi. Contribute to network uniform as agreed by VIC Uniform Committee

*In instances where this is difficult NITB will work with individual VIC Supervisors to ensure that they are provided with induction training content, tools and knowledge to deliver training content in their local VIC branch.

In addition to the above minimum standards there is a need for Gateway and Destination VIC's to work closely with their Destination Fora. NITB also request these VIC's to actively extend the reach of visitor information provision by establishing additional visitor information points in their locale.

This could be in partnership with the private sector (e.g. in a local pub) or it could be in the form of unmanned free literature or freestanding I.T. terminals with access to local tourist website and discovernorthernireland.com

If partnerships are being developed with the private sector NITB would request that as a minimum VIC's deliver an induction training session with staff to include frequently asked questions toolkit, World Host Training and product knowledge training.