

Title of Report:	Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card - Update
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	16th February 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating our Economy & Contributing to Prosperity Innovation and Transformation
Outcome	The Council will embrace new technologies and processes where they can bring about better experiences for citizens and visitors.
Lead Officer	Town & Village Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	n/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the Causeway Coast and Glens Gift Card Programme which promotes the 'Shop Eat Enjoy Local' message throughout the Borough and promotes our towns to both the local population and visitors to the Borough.

2.0 Background

Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card was launched in late November 2019 as part of a five year contract with Miconex, who manage town gift card programmes across the UK & Ireland, of which there are now **64 town gift card programmes**, an increase from 25 programmes when Council joined.

There are also now 5 Gift Card programmes in NI. In NI, three of the programmes are managed by BID's (Business Improvement District) and Antrim Town Gift Card is managed by Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. Other local Councils have been in contact with TVM to discuss the implementation of a gift card programme in their areas.

The Causeway Coast & Glens gift card programme **remains the only programme that has been introduced across an entire Council area**, incorporating a number of towns and villages across a geography, within the UK. All other gift card programmes are town centre based.

This brings different financial and administrative challenges compared to those of a BID which focuses on one town centre with businesses they are involved with on a regular basis.

The Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card offers flexibility and choice, while supporting the Borough's local business community and its town centres which are home to a high quality and varied retail offering. The benefits of the gift card are highlighted in **Annex A**.

The Gift Cards, which are redeemable across the Borough and not just in one specific town or outlet, are designed to help retain spend within Causeway Coast and Glens, and is part of the Town & Village Management's ongoing 'Shop Eat Enjoy Local' campaign.

The Gift Card can be used across a host of participating businesses within the Borough, including shops, wholesalers, hair and beauty salons, hotels, cafes, restaurants, and tourism experiences. There are currently 222 outlets, including local market traders, signed up to accept the Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card. There is no charge to a business to be involved in this programme.

For Town & Village Management, the Gift Card programme is one of the main work streams within the Business Plan in enabling the team to:

- Increase spend and footfall in the local economy.
- Drive additional spend to local businesses by locking spend locally and providing an alternative to national store gift cards.
- Create a network where the businesses can help each other.
- Create revenue which can be used to develop a marketing and training programme for the businesses.

The Gift Card can be bought online at www.causewaycoastandglensgiftcard.co.uk, a dedicated website for the Gift Card which lists all the participating businesses, or from one of the local Council Visitor Information Centres, although these have been closed for a large part of the year as part of the Covid-19 restrictions.

The card can be loaded with any amount from £10 and the recipient can choose to spend the balance in one transaction, or it can be used for multiple purchases in different outlets up to the value of the card.

Town & Village Management have access to an online management platform to monitor uptake and usage of the Gift Card across the Borough. This helps to give insight into where the Gift Cards are purchased and where they are being redeemed across the Borough.

3.0 Update

Position to 31 December 2020.

The Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card launched at end November 2019 with the first sale on 2 December via Coleraine Visitor Centre.

Gift Cards have been purchased for staff Christmas gifts, teacher's gifts, student prizes, competition prizes, thank-you gifts and birthday & Christmas presents. Council departments have purchased 76 cards [value £3580] for prize draws, competitions, or marketing purposes.

Cards have been purchased from throughout Northern Ireland – Belfast, Newtownards, Lisburn, Cookstown, Ballymena and Londonderry, also Glasgow, Newcastle upon Tyne, Surrey, Oxford and as far as Australia! Gift cards can be posted to the purchaser or to the recipient with a message if requested.

A quarterly breakdown of Gift Card sales to 31 December 2020

Quarter ending	Cumulative sales of Gift Card	Cumulative No. of Gift Cards Purchased
31/12/2019	£3,040	81
31/03/2020	£3,140	83
30/06/2020	£3,940	104
30/09/2020	£4,380	112
31/12/2020	£22,540	574

Annual costs to date:

Year 1 2018/19 £8803.03

Year 2 2019/20 £10678.48

Plans to promote and develop the gift card in the Borough were negatively impacted by the economic restrictions as a result of Covid-19 crisis. Between March and December there were a number of Government imposed lockdowns and 'circuit breakers' affecting a wide range of businesses across the Borough. Promotion was undertaken from November 2020 for the Christmas market for gift card sales.

Various promotional activities were undertaken to promote and raise awareness of the gift card for the Christmas market. This included using social media channels – Facebook 'Shop Eat Enjoy Local' and Council Facebook posts, local radio adverts through Q Radio, Causeway Coast Blast 106 and FUSE FM Ballymoney and a range of adverts, editorials and digital editorial with local newspapers and magazines including Chronicle, Times, Newsletter, Local Women and the Council's Citizens Newsletter.

Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card is also included in the Town & City Gift Card website, www.townandcitygiftcards.com

Feedback has been that all PR mediums worked as people responded to adverts in the newspapers (as these are also available in digital format so have a wider reach), the Citizens Newsletter and Facebook posts.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions the Visitor Information Centres (VIC) across the Borough were largely closed during the year. Limavady VIC was the only VIC to reopen on 11 December with reduced opening hours of 2 days per week. From 11 December to 23 December, £935 Gift Card sales were made in Limavady VIC. Several people were in contact looking for gift cards at short notice, but this could not be fulfilled due to no Visitor Information Centres being open. A number of sales were also made over the phone, but potential sales were also lost due to many people preferring to purchase in person.

The Gift Cards have been redeemed 170 times since Christmas 2019 to a total value of £4,161.11. They have been redeemed in a range of businesses including clothing, footwear, homewares, jewellery, butchers, supermarkets, off licences and cafes and have been accepted in outlets across the Borough (Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Coleraine, Garvagh, Limavady and Portrush).

As a greater value of gift cards were purchased for Christmas 2020, the spend on these has been limited as a lockdown was introduced on 26 December for a minimum of 6 weeks.

4.0 Future Plans

A detailed marketing plan for 2021/22, involving social media and printed adverts, will be put in place to implement a number of marketing campaigns around key events, such as Mother's/Father's Days, end of school term and Christmas. It will also be promoted throughout the year as a great gift idea for those hard-to-buy-for people or other occasions such as a leaving work gift, weddings, and birthdays. It is anticipated that the gift cards would become a popular birthday present or a simple way to say 'thank you' for a good turn and especially popular for Christmas, with all the registered businesses benefitting.

An awareness campaign will also be developed for local businesses in the Borough to make them aware of the benefits and opportunities of being involved in the Gift Card Programme. Also promoting to businesses how they could use the Gift Card as an incentive or reward for employees such as long-service achievements, whilst at the same time supporting the local economy. The aim is to have all town retail businesses participating.

The initial premise of a town gift card programme was to increase footfall in local towns as the person had to be present to swipe a gift card as payment.

However, due to the current situation regarding Covid19 and the many restrictions which have impacted on many of the businesses, resulting in an increase in online business to help them to remain sustainable.

This has been an issue across the UK and Miconex have introduced a new gift card design that can be used online and in store. A plan for 2021/22 would be to change the current Gift Card to the new 'chip & pin' card, which will appeal to a greater customer base as it can be used online and in-store giving the recipient more flexibility. This will also allow more businesses to join the programme as many of our local businesses operate with a mobile card reader which does not accept a 'swipe card' therefore they are unable to be part of the current programme.

By being part of the Town & City Gift Card website, Miconex undertake UK and international promotion for all gift card programmes, promoting the gift cards as a great gift for people who live elsewhere but have relatives or friends at 'home'. They will be able to go online, order the Causeway Gift Card and have it sent to a local address.

Annex A: Benefits for Local Businesses & Customers

Benefits for Local Business

The local businesses are very supportive of the scheme and can see the benefits of it, especially as it is encouraging people to shop locally and allows them to spend across a variety of outlets and businesses and does not restrict them to spending in one place.

From research, some benefits for businesses include:

- *It's free* – no charge for a business to be part of the Programme.
- *Introduces new customers* – people that receive a town gift card tend to explore more and 15% of redemption is by customers visiting a business for the first time.
- *Brings additional spend* – customers redeeming gift cards on average spend 35% more than the value of the gift card and tend to upgrade their purchase, going for higher value products.
- *Easy to implement* – Programme uses the existing Mastercard infrastructure.
- *No changes are required* to software or hardware to accept the gift card.
- *Pays automatically* – businesses receive the full value of the money spent via their existing payment channels – there are no additional fees involved.
- *Helps increase sales* - particularly in the quieter months, with post Xmas being a peak time for redemptions.
- *A greater revenue pull* than a regular store gift card.
- *Independent traders* can have access to a gift card to be able to operate on the same level as larger retail outlets who already have their own gift card.

Benefits for Customers

As the Causeway Coast & Glens Gift Card is still relatively new, more awareness and promotion of the Causeway Coast & Gift Card will be taking place over the next few months to raise its profile and encourage people to opt for this Gift Card – as a 'gift of choice' as opposed to a shop brand gift card.

From research, some benefits for customers include:

- *Offers choice* – recipients like the fact that the gift cards can be used on a huge range of products and experiences. They offer more choice than single-branded gift cards or vouchers.
- *Much more flexibility* – a recipient does not have to use the full value of the gift card in one business, they can enjoy spending at multiple businesses, over a period of a whole year.
- *Supports local economy* – when you buy a town gift card for someone, you know that the money is going to stay local.
- *Works for everyone* – we all have someone that is difficult to buy a present for. The Causeway Gift Card gives the choice back to the recipient ensuring they get something they really want.
- *It is secure* – the gift card programmes are secured by Mastercard. The way the programme would be set up means that there always needs to be sufficient funds to cover all the 'live' cards.
- *Affordability* – a gift card is available at any value from £10 to £500. Customers can use it in one go or in several visits to different businesses over several months.

- *Easy way to shop.*