

## **SCRUTINY PANEL - ENVIRONMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel - Environment & Quality of Life held on Thursday, 24 February 2022 in the remotely via Zoom at 10.00 am**

**Committee** Mr H Blathwayt Dr V Holliday  
**Members Present:**

Mr J Rest

**Officers in Attendance:** Property, Project & Programme Manager (PPPM), Environmental Services Manager (ESM) and Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS)

### **10 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr L Withington and Cllr A Varley, with Cllr V Holliday joining the meeting from 11.00am.

### **11 MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **12 ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- i. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that the toilets in his Ward were subject to seasonal usage, and he had asked Parish Councils whether they were able to monitor usage. He added that he had discussed toilet cost sharing arrangements with a neighbouring authority, and it was suggested that ongoing discussions could be expected to take place.
- ii. Cllr J Rest stated that Fakenham had a generous supply of public conveniences, and noted that the Bridge Street Car Park facility covered a wide area and was busy as expected. He added that the Queens Road Car Park facilities also covered a wide area, with further toilets available for public use in shopping centres and the Library. It was noted that the Highfield Road facility saw very little use and consideration of closure may be justified by potential savings. The PPM noted that the Highfield Road Car Park was mainly used on market days, though even this was limited, with several other public convenience options available in the area. Cllr H Blathwayt noted that in addition to be an underused facility, its location on a car park meant that the Highfield Road facility would not be eligible for business rates relief, which added further to its running costs. Cllr J Rest suggested that he did not expect much cleaning of the facility to be required, given its limited use.
- iii. The PPM noted that Cllr V holliday had submitted comments via email regarding public conveniences in Walsingham, which she considered a high-tourism area that should be graded accordingly on the scoring matrix. It was noted that any changes to the facility would be difficult, given its listed status. Cllr H Blathwayt suggested that there were a number of other publicly available toilets in the area at the Anglican and Roman Catholic Shrines, as well as at various pubs.
- iv. The PPM noted that Cllr V Holliday had also reviewed public conveniences in

Blakeney, which she had found to be adequate, and Holt. It was noted that at the February Council meeting, the local Member for Holt had raised concerns regarding the Albert Street public conveniences. Cllr V Holliday had also raised concerns that there were issues with the provision across the town, with limited disabled access, and the Town Council's facilities currently closed for refurbishment. It was noted that there were a number of facilities across Holt, though it was accepted that the condition of some may be below public expectations. It was noted that improving existing provision was preferable, as focus remained on quality over quantity.

### **13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

### **14 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

### **15 QUALITY OF PROVISION**

- i. Cllr H Blathwayt introduced the item and noted that whilst reviewing public convenience requirements, the clear priorities that emerged were cleanliness and safety, which suggested that layout and lighting were also important. The PPM replied that it would be helpful to survey each block from a user's perspective, rather than focusing on physical condition. She added that expectations were also changing, with sustainability and gender neutral toilets becoming increasingly important.
- ii. The ESM informed Members that public convenience cleansing formed part of the wider Serco waste contract. He added that it was a common misconception that the contract required each facility to be cleaned a certain number of times per day, which was determined by an output specification requiring each facility to be kept to an acceptable level of cleanliness. It was noted that during busy periods, this could be three to four times per day with additional staff available to meet seasonal demand.
- iii. The ESM reported that in the last calendar year 32 worksheets had been raised for complaints, equating to two to three complaints per month, though some were considered unjustified as cleansing standards were often subjective. He added that in some cases older facilities were difficult to keep clean, which was a further challenge for public perception. It was suggested that updating older facilities would likely lead to improved public perception and potentially lower costs.
- iv. Cllr J Rest referred to complaints received and asked whether there were any recurring themes. The ESM replied that complaints were often unspecific and quoted issues such as being unclean or having excess water throughout the facility. It was noted that some locations had design or other flaws that made them very difficult to keep to a high standard.
- v. The PPM referred to the level of cleansing and asked if there was a specific standard required. The ESM replied that the contract did have specified outputs which generally resulted in a satisfactory level of cleanliness. Cllr H Blathwayt asked whether it would be worthwhile using a cleansing checklist, to which the ESM replied that this had been used previously. The ESM

stated that electronic monitoring systems were available to ensure that contractual cleansing requirements were being met, and companies offering this service were also able to provide payment systems, or monitor usage. It was reported that automatic locking arrangements had also been investigated by previous waste contractor, as it cost £54k per annum just to lock the facilities at night. The ESM stated that the previous quote for automatic opening and closing systems across the majority of the Council's public conveniences was approximately £120k, which would be paid back in just over two years. He added that the current waste contractor had also considered this option, and noted that a greater saving could be achieved if the Council implemented the technology itself.

- vi. Cllr H Blathwayt asked whether automatic closure would present any risk of locking customers inside, to which the ESM replied that this did happen on occasion even without the system, and an exit button would likely be provided. The ESM added that one issue could be an increased risk of anti-social behaviour, and whilst individual toilets may be easier to lock, this could be more expensive if locking systems were charged per door.
- vii. Cllr J Rest referred to toilet cubicles, and asked whether there was a standard size that had to be adhered to. The PPM replied that this information was available from the 'Loo of the Year Awards' website, though it was expected any sizing guidance would be best practice only. Cllr J Rest suggested that in order to make the most of available space and increase cubicle numbers, it could be worth considering toilets with combined basins that recycled grey water. Cllr H Blathwayt noted that other grey water recycling systems were available, and these should be investigated for any new projects, subject to costs. The ESM noted potential concerns that these systems could lead to excess water spillage, but accepted that recycling of grey water or harvesting rainwater could provide environmental benefits. The PPM noted that at present, there was no requirement for sustainability to be considered during development of new facilities, and whilst any requirements could raise costs it was possible this could save money in the long-term.
- viii. Cllr H Blathwayt suggested that there was a balance to be struck with making toilets presentable, but also utilitarian enough to stand up to heavy usage. It was noted that some of the Council's older facilities still had stainless steel fittings that were unappealing to users. The PPM suggested that it was possible for some locations to be more utilitarian than others, in areas where they may be more susceptible to damage.
- ix. Cllr H Blathwayt summarised potential standards that included cleanliness, fixtures and fittings, clear signage, disabled accessibility, appropriate location and lighting. The PPM noted that opening times were also important, and new facilities had already been agreed for North Walsham and Sheringham with no specific set standards. Cllr H Blathwayt stated it was there important to agree standards as soon as possible. The PPM noted that external lighting and signposting were also important to ensure that facilities were safe and easy to find. She added that LED lighting had become mainstream, and could be expected as standard for any new facilities.
- x. The ESM suggested that it could be useful to gather external opinions of the Council's facilities, and suggest that representatives of Healthmatic could be invited to attend a future meeting to provide this. The PPM stated that funding had been allocated for any survey work required, as the Council did

not hold data on how its public conveniences were perceived across the District.

- xi. In response to a question from Cllr J Rest, Members were informed that a map of the Council's public conveniences was available on the NNDC Website.
- xii. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that he supported inviting a representative from Healthmatic to attend a future meeting to discuss standards.
- xiii. Cllr V Holliday noted that the Cley community public convenience had an automatic locking system that worked well and had not caused any problems. Cllr J Rest raised concerns that the potential malfunctions made the automatic locking systems high risk, and the rurality of the District should be taken into account when resolving issues. He added that it would be useful to know how many other Councils used these systems. The ESM suggested that these issues could be raised with Healthmatic, alongside other standards enquiries. The PPM noted that any survey work over £10k would require the procurement process to be followed.
- xiv. The DSGOS noted the comments made about various locations having different standards, and asked whether the Council's public conveniences had been categorised by location, in the same way as the Council's car parks. The PPM replied that this was not included in the scoring matrix at present, but could be added with Members supportive of the proposal.
- xv. Cllr J Rest referred to signage and asked whether NNDC would be able to undertake this work, or whether it would require approval from NCC. The PPM replied that any large signage would require NCC approval, though this had not been a difficult process during the Deep History Coast Project.
- xvi. Cllr V Holliday suggested that it could be useful to ask Parish Councils for their impressions of the Council's public conveniences, and note any concerns raised.
- xvii. Cllr H Blathwayt summarised potential standards subject to variation following consultation with external surveyors, which included cleanliness, location specific fixtures and fittings, clear signage, disabled access, appropriate location and internal/external lighting.

## **ACTIONS**

- 1. PPM to include location categories on scoring Matrix, to help to determine standards for varying locational requirements.**
- 2. DSGOS to contact Parish Councils on perception of public conveniences.**

## **16 AGREE ITEMS FOR MARCH AGENDA**

The DSGOS suggested that in addition to inviting a Healthmatic representative, location and asset values were due to be considered at the next meeting. He added that the asset register had already been prepared at the request of the Governance, Risk and Audit Committee. The DSGOS asked whether it was possible to quantify potential savings if any public conveniences were closed, to which the ESM replied that each facility would have a specific rate as part of the cleansing contract, and he

would seek to confirm whether removal of a facility would generate an equivalent saving. Cllr J Rest requested that costs of cleaning new changing places facilities also be explored.

#### **ACTIONS**

- 1. ESM to request attendance of Healthmatic representative for March meeting.**
- 2. ESM to review potential savings for removal of public conveniences from cleansing contract**
- 3. ESM to determine costs of cleansing new changing places facilities.**

**17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**18 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The meeting ended at 11.33 am.

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Chairman