

SCRUTINY PANEL - ENVIRONMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel - Environment & Quality of Life held on Thursday, 26 May 2022 in the remotely via Zoom at 1.00 pm

Committee Mr H Blathwayt Dr V Holliday

Members Present:

Mr J Rest Mr A Varley
Ms L Withington

Officers in Attendance:

Corporate Programme & Project Manager (CPPM), Estates and Asset Strategy Manager (EASM), Assistant Director for Organisational Resources (ADOR), Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS) and Assets and Property Programme Manager (APPM)

35 APOLOGIES

None.

36 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 21st April 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr A Varley declared a non-pecuniary interest in reference to item 6 on Parish and Town Council comments, and stated that he was the Vice Chair of Horning Parish Council, who had shared comments on the NNDC's public conveniences.

38 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

39 PUBLIC CONVENIENCE DESIGN, MAINTENANCE, AND COST-SAVING INITIATIVES

The DSGOS introduced the item and informed Members that whilst Property Services had not been asked to prepare a report for the agenda, this item should be taken as an opportunity for Members to ask questions relating to issues and potential proposals raised at previous meetings.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman referred to maintenance costs and noted a suggestion from a previous meeting regarding the potential for standardisation of equipment to reduce costs. The APPM replied that the Council had 38 public conveniences of various ages and condition, with efforts made over the past five years to standardise equipment as much as possible. He added that standardisation of equipment such as toilet cisterns, taps, and lighting etc. made maintenance easier, quicker and cheaper. It was noted that the new toilet and changing places designs would again seek to utilise as much

standardised equipment as possible, with cheap easily replaceable parts. The APPM stated that much of this work could be done during the off-season, allowing the Council to move from reactive to planned maintenance, which was a proven dividend of the standardisation of equipment.

- ii. Cllr V Holliday referred to automatic opening and locking systems, and asked for the Property Service Team's opinion. The APPM replied that timed automatic locking systems had previously been used at the Vicarage Street public convenience, where it had caused several issues. As a result, the system had been removed and returned to a standard locking system. It was noted that the costs of implementing any changes locking systems would have to be weighed against the existing costs charged by Serco to open and close the facilities. It was noted that this could be considered if it would generate a significant saving, but cost analysis would be required.
- iii. Cllr L Withington stated that a key issue for Sheringham and Holt was a lack of disabled facilities, and asked whether it was possible that one block with disabled facilities be kept open later via an automatic locking system to allow extended access. The APPM replied that most disabled toilets were operated by a radar access key, however anti-social behaviour had led to these toilets being locked overnight to avoid damage. He added that there had been vandalism to facilities in Sheringham, and it was difficult to find a balance between access and security. Cllr L Withington stated that whilst she did not expect 24 hour access, it would be helpful to extend summer and winter opening times by a few hours to improve accessibility. The APPM noted that facilities could be kept open for extended hours during specific events, which could be explored further, but the risk of vandalism had to be considered.
- iv. Cllr A Varley referred to issues with caravan and campervan owners placing waste into public toilets causing drainage issues, and asked what measures could be put in place to mitigate this. The APPM replied that there had been an increase in campervan activity during the past two years, with issues reported in Walcott, Bacton, Weybourne and other locations. He added that these issues were difficult to police, as car parks were not routinely monitored after 18.00, and there were little further powers available to the Council. It was noted that some campervan groups had expressed disappointment that facilities were not provided to dispose of waste. Cllr A Varley asked whether providing the necessary facilities to dispose of this waste was a feasible option, taking into account the cost implications. The ADOR replied that the matter had been discussed previously, and a communications plan was being established to deter people from disposing of this waste in public toilets. He added that if the Council's existing Policy were to change to provide waste disposal facilities, then there would be considerable associated costs for installation and maintenance. The Chairman noted that boat owners had to pay to dispose of waste and suggested that campervan and caravan owners should do the same. Cllr V Holliday stated there was a particular issue in the Salthouse area, and the Environmental Protection Team were investigating whether campsites could provide this service to members of the public for a nominal fee. The ADOR replied that he had discussed this with officers, and unfortunately there appeared to be little appetite to provide this solution amongst commercial campsite owners, even with the option of fees. The Chairman asked whether it was feasible for the Council to provide this service commercially, and it was suggested that it was unlikely that fees would cover the associated costs. It was noted that policing payments would also be difficult and have further

associated costs that could make the proposal unviable. Cllr J Rest asked whether consideration could be given to providing this service at recycling centres, to which the ADOR replied that these sites were operated by NCC, but the option could be explored.

- v. The CPPM referred to standardisation of building design and sought confirmation that all schemes were designed by architects. The APPM confirmed that designs were developed by architects with input on public safety from the Police, and suites of cubicles now being developed where possible. He added that it was difficult given the age and existing layout of some facilities to implement this approach in all locations. It was noted that despite subtle design differences dependent on location, efforts were being made to standardise the internals and equipment of all facilities.
- vi. The DSGOS noted that LED lighting had been installed across several of the Council's public conveniences, and asked whether further green initiatives had been considered, such as solar panels or water recycling. The APPM replied that a £200k bid had been approved to improve energy efficiency as part of planned maintenance. He added that options such as rain water harvesting could be explored, whilst solar panels were already planned for a new facility at Vicarage Street, in an effort to achieve a zero-carbon standard. It was noted that achieving this would be challenging, but green technology would be a scored aspect of the tendering process. The ADOR noted that all maintenance tasks would seek to reduce each facility's carbon footprint, though this would take time and considerable funding.
- vii. The EASM informed Members that as part of the Net Zero Strategy a project broad had been established to consider how the NNDC estate could achieve net zero, and consultants would soon be appointed to accomplish this.
- viii. The Chairman referred to the possibility of installing more gender neutral cubicles, and noted that significant space was lost on lobby areas. The APPM replied that two blocks had been built to this specification on Sheringham East and Cromer West Promenades, which enabled a reduction of facilities over winter to reduce costs. He added that creating more of these facilities would depend on the footprint of existing locations. The ADOR noted that individual cubicles could potentially lead to higher costs if more equipment was required, but this could be considered as part of any proposal. The CPPM suggested that closing some cubicles would help to generate savings over the winter season, which was not an option for shared lobby facilities. The Chairman suggested that where there was potential for this type of facility, it should be explored with a cost-benefit analysis.
- ix. The DSGOS asked whether there were any public convenience locations with specific issues, and any that potentially required additional funding. The APPM replied that provision in West Runton was fairly basic with no electricity or hot water. Holt Country park was reported to be in a similar situation, though it did have a generator and potential funding for a mains power supply. The APPM noted that the lack of drainage infrastructure in Weybourne meant that the evaporating toilet struggled to cope with demand, and temporary measures had been taken to supplement the existing provision. Finally Beach Road Wells and Stalham public conveniences were reported to be functional, but in need of investment.
- x. The EASM referred to the cost of cubicle designs and suggested that future

proposals could assess the cost of this design against a more traditional shared lobby with a cost consultant. The Chairman requested that this be noted as a potential recommendation. The APPM noted that this approach would only be applicable where existing facilities were due to be fully demolished or relocated. Cllr L Withington stated that How Hill had developed attractive single cubicles, though they had substantial footprint available to achieve this.

- xi. Cllr J Rest suggested that consideration should be given to including a commercial unit as part of any newly built facility, in order generate income and help improve security.
- xii. Cllr V Holliday suggested that campervan waste disposal at recycling centres should be considered as a potential recommendation. Cllr A Varley added that it would be prudent to investigate any actions taken by other authorities to address this issue. The Chairman noted that this service was widely available for a fee in boat yards across the Broads Authority's district.
- xiii. The APPM noted that campervan waste disposal was an issue, alongside matters such as vandalism and antisocial behaviour. He added that in some cases increased CCTV outside facilities and reduced opening hours in winter may help to mitigate issues. On disabled facilities, it was noted that radar keys had allowed toilets to be slept-in overnight, hence the need to lock facilities in the evening.
- xiv. The ADOR stated that all proposals discussed would require some level of investment, and a political decision would need to be made on how much to invest into the service.

AGREED

To give consideration to including final recommendations relating to:

- 1. Undertake design and cost-benefit analysis of gender neutral cubicle facilities for all new public conveniences.**
- 2. Request installation of campervan waste disposal facilities at County run public recycling centres.**

40 PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS

The DSGOS reminded Members that they had requested comments from Parish and Town Councils on NNDC's public conveniences, and a summary of responses had been provided for consideration. It was noted that there had been a range of positive and negative comments, though facilities in Holt had been raised as a particular concern.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr J Rest noted that facilities in Walsingham were not supported by car parking revenue and it was therefore difficult to justify further investment beyond existing maintenance. The Chairman noted that this was likely the case across a number of areas, and there were many locations with commercial options available. Cllr V Holliday noted that the Walsingham facilities were of a reasonable standard and did not require any significant

further investment.

- ii. The DSGOS noted previous discussion of the potential for relocation of Stalham facilities, which the Town Council appeared to support in principle.

AGREED

To note the comments from Parish and Town Councils.

41 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Cllr V Holliday and seconded by Cllr A Varley to exclude the press and the public to avoid disclosure of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), when discussing the public convenience asset register.

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act.

42 REVIEW OF ASSET REGISTER

The DSGOS introduced the item and informed Members that the register was an opportunity to ask questions of the EASM on the value or availability of land in relation to the Council's public conveniences.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman referred to the Stalham facility and noted that the present site was not ideal, with an alternative location a possible option. He asked for clarification of the value of the existing facility. The value was discussed with potential other locations and existing land considered. The EASM replied that relocation could be explored but this would require significant investment that sale of the existing facility would not cover. She added that location of mains water and electrical services would require further consideration, as well as the potential loss of income from repurposing an existing asset. It was noted that land had recently been purchased in North Walsham, which had shown that town centre locations warranted a relatively high purchase price. In response to a follow-up question from the Chairman, the EASM confirmed that neither NNDC or the Town Council owned much land beyond existing amenity land on housing estates, though a search could be carried out. The Chairman suggested that the preferred location for Stalham appeared to be near the bus stop. The CPPM noted that usage counter data had been gathered for the Stalham, which had shown considerably higher usage by men. She added that the strategy needed to consider why this was the case in order to help determine what more could be done to improve facilities, beyond repositioning.
- ii. The DSGOS referred to listed values, and asked whether these were sales values, insurance values or something else. The EASM replied that the prices were calculated using depreciation and sales values would likely be different dependent on the available use of the land. In response to a follow-

up question, it was noted that the size and location of the land available at the current Stalham facility may limit its use. The EASM stated that any suitable locations could be considered for conversion to commercial use.

- iii. Cllr J Rest noted that Highfields Road facility was underused, and suggested that it could be considered for future potential repurposing.
- iv. The CPPM reminded Members that a funding allocation had been set aside for assessment work, which could be utilised to survey all existing facilities to better understand the current level of provision from an external perspective. Cllr L Withington suggested that surveying facilities would be helpful to better understand the level of provision and determine which facilities should be treated as a priority.
- v. The DSGOS noted that comments raised by the Panel would be summarised and presented at the next meeting to form potential recommendations, with the various conditions, equipment and age of current stock taken into account. The CPPM noted that in order to do this, it would be beneficial to commission a funded survey of the existing provision so that any decisions would be evidence-based.
- vi. The Panel agreed that they were supportive of recommending survey work be undertaken, though the specifics of this would need to be agreed in advance. It was agreed that this could form part of the final recommendations discussed at the next meeting, that would likely take place on 30th June.

AGREED

Final recommendations to be discussed and agreed at June meeting.

The meeting ended at 2.21 pm.

Chairman