

ENVIRONMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE SCRUTINY PANEL: PUBLIC CONVENIENCE STRATEGY REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Summary** The Council has sought to prepare a Public Convenience Strategy aimed at providing a clear path to future management of this non-statutory function that is felt to be essential for both visitors and the local population. Public toilets are crucial to tourism and town centre economies but are facing ever increasing costs to provide.
- Options considered** The panel has reviewed in-depth over the past 6 months, the Draft Public Convenience Strategy and sought expertise and guidance from both officers and external consultants regarding a range of options and ideas. The group also sought opinions from local Town and Parish Councils.
- Conclusion** In general the panel supports the provision of a Strategy to ensure a holistic approach to the future management of the Council's extensive portfolio of 38 public conveniences across the District. The following recommendations are made regarding the Draft Public Toilet Provision Strategy Document.
- The Panel reviewed current provision, sought to identify options for the future and reviewed means of obtaining and achieving customer expectation.
- Recommendations** **The working group has made fourteen recommendations which are listed throughout the report and summarised in Appendix 3 on page 10 of the report.**
- Reasons for Recommendations** To ensure that the Council's public conveniences are managed and maintained efficiently and effectively to a high standard for public use by residents and visitors.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

Public Conveniences Strategy

Cabinet Member(s): Ward(s) affected: All

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the delivery of a report to Cabinet on the Council's public toilet provision and its current challenges, Cabinet requested the provision of a Public Convenience Strategy to satisfy the following Corporate Delivery objective:

Corporate Plan Theme: Financial Sustainability and Growth

Objective 1: Continuously reviewing our service delivery arrangements, fees and charges to ensure that we deliver value for money

The Over view & Scrutiny Working Panel were requested to review the Public Convenience Strategy in December 2021 and offer its comments and recommendations.

2. Findings and recommendations

- 2.1 At the first meeting it was agreed to look at the four elements of the document pertaining to the four areas given in the diagram below.



2.2 Quality of Provision

The panel supports greater analysis of customer complaints to inform improvements.

The panel felt that as part of ongoing provision a 'standard' of cleansing should be agreed as part of the SERCO cleansing contract thus ensuring cohesive approach and clear expectation of performance.

The Panel actively supported the installation of new changing places facilities.

The Panel was pleased to be assured that Property Services are taking steps to standardise equipment use across the portfolio and to review and embrace environmentally friendly solutions on a regular basis.

2.3 Auditing Current Facilities

It was felt that whilst the Council holds various types of financial and operational information on our assets, there is not one comprehensive audit of our facilities to best inform change. The counters that were installed in 2018 have provided an insight into use but there are other elements that could be included in such an audit. Many of the desirable features, from both a customer service and asset management point of view, are illustrated in the British Toilet Association best practice guidelines and Appendix 1 gives details of key elements we believe should be included in the initial audit suggested as point 2 in the Action Plan, but this is not exhaustive and could be tailored to the needs of the service area.

Also as part of the audit some assessment of site suitability should be undertaken to identify where provision is hampered by site location or accessibility.

2.4 Current Opinion

The Panel sought feedback from Town and Parish Councils on the current public convenience provision. Feedback was mixed and highlighted some key areas for focus. It is anticipated the audit will help to consolidate and evidence required changes/improvements.

QUALITY OF PROVISION RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To recommend that an external audit of the Council's public conveniences is undertaken to review factors including: lighting, signage, cleanliness, site position, energy efficiency etc.**
- **To recommend that a review of the outcomes of the external audit alongside current structural surveys is undertaken during winter 2022-23 to develop an action plan for the facilities in 2023-24 and annually thereafter, actioned by Property Services, Estates and the Environmental Services (cleansing).**
- **To recommend that a simple customer feedback system is created and promoted to obtain and maintain ongoing feedback to support and evidence need for future changes or address any issues.**
- **To recommend that the Strategy is reviewed and updated at least every 4 years, and that an annual review of the service provision and customer feedback is undertaken by Property Services and cleansing providers, and considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Panel.**
- **To recommend that a cleansing standard is established (or evidence requested) and approved to ensure appropriate levels of cleansing is achieved and monitored in all facilities across the District. (Example Appendix 2)**

2.5 Location

The Panel felt that some public toilets did not function well because of their location. It was felt that greater effort should be made to review /rate each assets location as part of the audit undertaken. Facilities should be easy to locate, feel safe to use and be in key locations.

The Panel acknowledged alternative options are not always available but that facilities should be subject to consideration prior to installing new-build facilities.

2.6 Decision Matrix

The panel reviewed and 'tested' the decision matrix and felt, as a tool for Officer and Members to determine need, it was not without merit and should be used as part of the assessment of provision in future.

LOCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To recommend that the decision making matrix be used and refined to determine future need.**
- **To recommend that location suitability be assessed as part of the PC external audit/review.**
- **To recommend that consideration be given to extend and enable out of hours accessibility of disabled toilets in major tourism locations, through security improvements.**

2.7 Costs & Opportunities

The panel acknowledged that building, repairs and maintenance are equally suffering from current rising prices so reducing annual spend was unlikely without reduced provision. The suggestion of standardising equipment and spares and new build design may help reduce costs.

The panel discussed experience of other coastal locations to only provide banks of self-contained units which prevent wasted building, fitting and cleaning of internal lobbies which also may reduce opportunity for vandalism. Individual units could be opened to reflect need (ie close some units during winter) to again reduce costs and vandalism.

Automatic opening and closing systems was also briefly discussed as a means to reduce costs but this had been tried at North Walsham and was found to be very problematic with issues of people being locked in as well as breakdowns and failures.

COSTS AND OPPORTUNITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To recommended that a standard design 'type' be adopted that is flexible enough to fit most locations where new build may be an option. The use of single self-contained WC cubicles would eliminate wasted lobby areas, address equality and diversity needs and allow partial closures during quieter months or maintenance works.**
- **To recommend that design and cost-benefit analysis of self-contained cubicle facilities are undertaken for all new public conveniences or major refurbishments (where possible) to offer single sex and gender neutral facilities in line with current legislation.**
- **To recommend that all opportunities are regularly explored to improve the financial sustainability and continuation of public conveniences across the District such as service costs and maintenance, to include new technology, advertisement and commercial opportunities.**

2.8 Environment and Future proofing

The Panel is supportive of these facilities using green technology and solutions to reduce carbon footprint. The panel was pleased to learn a carbon-neutral facility is being designed and costed for installation in North Walsham.

The Panel discussed the issues caused by campervans emptying their waste in public facilities – a situation acutely felt at Weybourne where such practices has swamped the eco facility. It was mentioned that Emily Capps had sought solutions with camp sites in the area with little positive result. The Panel wondered if County Council managed waste disposal sites could accommodate such waste.

ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE PROOFING RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To recommended that when a new build or major refurbishment is required that the decision matrix is used to determine if the facility is of an appropriate size (i.e. numbers of cubicles) and in a desirable location (see audit/review results).**
- **To recommended that any major refurbishments or new builds include costings for green/renewable technology to reduce environmental impact (energy efficiency, water use, carbon reduction) and cost efficiencies so that Members can select the most appropriate course of action for each location.**
- **To recommend the investigation of the potential for installation of campervan waste disposal facilities at existing suitable public convenience sites and County run public recycling centres with subsequent advertisement.**

3. Implications and Risks

It is felt the inclusion of the recommendations made would have positive implications for the Strategy and reduce risk by clarifying overall objectives.

4. Financial Implications and Risks

It is understood a budget has already been agreed for the audit process. There may be financial implications regarding setting cleansing standards. Otherwise there are no additional financial implications to the recommendations made.

5. Sustainability

Sustainability options and future proofing of facilities are discussed in this report.

6. Equality and Diversity

The public conveniences provision and this Strategy does support equality and diversity and recommends these are considered and embraced in future provision.

7. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

Crime and Disorder considerations should form part of the audit report. Public toilet designs are always reviewed by the Police to highlight any design concerns.

Appendix 1

External audit of current public toilet facilities

An audit of facilities should look at assessing the following features of 'good, quality toilet provision'. The review should take into account an assessment of each facility and offer recommendations for improvements. The audit should be made from the customer perspective and an understanding of expectation and knowledge of public toilet use is expected.

It may be possible to solicit public opinion as part of this process.

The check list can be used to help ensure new facilities meet these standards.

1. Signage & Communication
2. Décor and Maintenance
3. Fixtures and Fittings
4. Cleanliness & Hygiene
5. General comfort and customer care
6. Accessibility
7. Additional facilities
8. Opening hours
9. Security
10. Energy efficiencies and green technology
11. Location

The following list is not exhaustible and some answers can easily be provided in house.

Ideally costed recommendations for change should be provided as part of this review.

Public Convenience Provision Audit

Facility	
Location (address)	
Day and Date audited	
Opening hours	

	Criteria	Score 1-5¹
1) Signage and communication		
1.1	Is the facility well signposted from key areas such as, main pedestrian routes and town centres?	
1.2	Has the facility got an identifiable name?	
1.3	Are the opening times and other key information clearly displayed? Including contact details and ownership including cleansing?	
1.4	Is any other information provided? (ie health promotion)	
1.5	Are there 'No Smoking' signs?	
2) Décor and Maintenance		
2.1	Is the external décor clean and tidy/ well maintained?	

¹ 1 is not existent, 2 is some provision or provision is poor, 3 is acceptable provision, 4 is good but could easily be improved further, 5 is excellent. Where an answer is Yes or NO. If the response is NO =1 and if YES - then rate the quality/quantity of provision. (eg: Yes there is some natural light but overgrown bushes outside means the overall light provided naturally is poor – 2)

2.2	Is the internal décor clean and tidy/ well maintained?	
2.3	Is the facility well lit in all areas?	
2.4	Is lighting low energy, vandal resistant, flush fitting?	
2.5	Is safety flooring fitted?	
2.6	Is there good ventilation?	
2.7	Do the windows open?	
2.8	Are there any areas poorly maintained or showing signs of degradation?	
3) Fixtures and fittings		
3.1	Does the facility provide a family room?	
3.2	Are baby change facilities accessible and in good condition?	
3.3	Are the hand drying units energy efficient?	
3.4	Is at least one ambient cubicle provided?	
3.5	Do urinals have flush control systems to reduce water consumption?	
3.6	Is there suitable/sufficient sanitary and nappy waste disposal facilities?	
3.7	Is the facility decorated to the corporate colours/style?	
3.8	Do cubicle door open inwards?	
3.8	Are locks easy to open and close?	
3.9	Are handbag /coat hooks provided on backs of doors?	
4) Cleanliness		
4.1	On a scale of 1 – 10 how would you rate the standard of cleanliness during your visit?	
4.2	How often is the facility cleaned (Serco)?	
4.3	Are the facilities monitored at peak times?	
4.4	Are there any signs of graffiti?	
4.5	Is there evidence to suggest wilful damage?	
4.6	Are the soap dispensers' hands free?	
4.7	Are the toilet roll dispensers fit for purpose? Maintained (ie not run out)?	
4.8	Is there an electric air ventilation system?	
4.9	Are there air freshening units in busy toilets?	
4.10	If waste bins are provided are they overflowing?	
5) General comfort and customer care		
5.1)	How often are the toilets inspected by senior providers.. For hygiene? For maintenance?	
5.2	Is hot water available for washing?	
5.3	Are bags and disposal units provided in women's cubicles?	
5.4	Are vending machines provided? (eg: nappies, sanitary products)	
5.5	Are the cubicles easy to access/use/ exit safely and comfortably	
6) Accessible toilets and changing places		
6.1)	Do entrance doors open outwards?	
6.2)	Are doors of a contrasting colour?	
6.3)	Is an extractor fan fitted/working?	
6.4)	Are grab rails fitted adjacent to WC?	
6.5)	Are hand basins close enough/ accessible from the WC?	
6.6)	Are coat hooks and mirrors fitted at the correct height?	
6.7)	Are details given on where a radar key can be purchased?	
6.8)	Are emergency alarm cords or buttons within reach at both floor and waist level?	
6.9)	How is help provided when alarm cord pulled?	
6.10)	Is all the changing places equipment in good, clean order and working?	
6.11)	Is there signs of deterioration/misuse or damage?	
6.12)	Is the access easy to enter and exit the facility for an incumbent user?	

6.13)	Are all access ways ramped or level?	
7) Baby change facilities		
7.1)	Does the facility have a wide door for double buggy access?	
7.2)	Is the baby change unit; clean, sturdy,	
7.3)	Are the straps clean, useable and safe?	
7.4)	Are the lights bright and the water warm?	
7.5)	Is a toddler toilet seat fitted?	
7.6)	Is the room decorated to provide a child friendly environment?	
8) Opening Hours		
8.1)	What are the opening hours	
8.2)	BTA recommends at least 12 hours per day – does this facility comply?	
8.3)	Is a 24 hour facility available in each locality?	
8.4)	Is provision made for longer openings at peak periods?	
9) Security		
9.1)	Is the lighting provided ensure ALL the external areas are well lit?	
9.2)	Is the facility subject to antisocial behaviour? (ie: 4 or more incidents in 12 month period)	
9.3)	Are security/attendance visits undertaken daily?	
9.4)	Are CCTV cameras in operation on external areas or lobbies on high risk facilities?	
9.5)	Are prosecution warning signs clearly visible?	
10) Energy efficiencies – are any of the following installed?		
10.1	PIR sensor lights?	
10.2	Infra-red flushing systems	
10.3	Solar powered lighting	
10.4	Solar powered heating?	
10.5	Non-concussive taps installed?	
10.6	Toilet cistern reduction systems?	
10.7	Is there good natural light?	
10.8	Recycled products	
10.9	Are the cleansing chemicals environmentally friendly products?	
11) Location		
11.1	Is the location well situated for users?	
11.2	Is parking or a transport hub located close by?	
11.3	Is the site (within NNDC ownership) well maintained?	
	TOTAL SCORE	

Appendix 2

Below is an example of a cleansing routine.² Cleaning methodologies including chemical use, equipment use and method to be used for different elements and situations should form part of the cleansing operatives training. Regular checks should be made by supervisors to ensure acceptable standards are met.

An example of instructions for Cleaning Public Toilets

DAILY

Step 1) Use the correct COSHH approved cleaning products including, cleaning chemicals, cleaning tools, dispenser refills, personal protection and safety signs.

Step 2) Initial Inspection

- Place safety signs to prevent visitor entry
- Wear the correct protective clothing including gloves and goggles.
- Report any misuse, vandalism or malfunctioning equipment

Step 3) Clean toilets and urinals

- Pour a generous amount of cleaning solution into the toilet bowl and allow to soak for approx 10 minutes.
- Using a toilet mop swab inside the toilet bowl thoroughly and flush.
- Using a damp microfiber cloth soaked in cleaning solution wipe the exterior including seats and handles.
- Repeat the above for urinals

Step 4) Sweep floors and remove litter

- Remove bin liner and sanitize the bin
 - Replace bin liner
 - Remove bin liners and replace for feminine care receptacles.
- These are to be placed in a separate offensive waste stream.

Step 5) Clean cubicles, sinks, mirrors and all surfaces – pay extra attention to key surfaces such as push plates and taps, flush mechanisms

- Work from top to bottom
- Use glass cleaning solution for mirrors

Step 6) Refill dispensers

- Refill toilet paper
- Refill hand soap dispensers
- Check metered air fresheners if necessary replace cartridges

Step 7) Mop floor

- Prepare buckets with water and cleaning solution
- Rinse the mop in between different areas

Step 8) Final Inspection

- Check everything is in working condition
- Restroom should be free from litter and odour
- Remove safety sign

WEEKLY

Step 9) Clean/dust high level surfaces as appropriate

MONTHLY

Step 10) Clean external windows inside and out, clean associated signage (opening times etc)

Further example of cleaning manual

[Microsoft Word - HCC Care Cleaning Manual June 2018 final \(HF000016796843\).doc \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

² [A Step By Step Guide on How to Clean Public Toilets \(thenugroup.co.uk\)](#)

Appendix 3

Recommendations Summary

1. To recommend that an external audit of the Council's public conveniences is undertaken to review factors including: lighting, signage, cleanliness, site position, energy efficiency etc.
2. To recommend that a review of the outcomes of the external audit alongside current structural surveys is undertaken during winter 2022-23 to develop an action plan for the facilities in 2023-24 and annually thereafter, actioned by Property Services, Estates and the Environmental Health (Cleansing).
3. To recommend that a simple customer feedback system is created and promoted to obtain and maintain ongoing feedback to support and evidence need for future changes or address any issues.
4. To recommend that the Strategy is reviewed and updated at least every 4 years, and that an annual review of the service provision and customer feedback is undertaken by Property Services and cleansing providers, and considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Panel.
5. To recommend that a cleansing 'standard' is established, embedded and reported on to ensure cross facility standards are maintained across the District.
6. To recommend that the decision making matrix be used and refined to determine future need.
7. To recommend that location suitability be assessed as part of the PC external audit/review.
8. To recommend that consideration be given to extend and enable out of hours accessibility of disabled toilets in major tourism locations, through security improvements.
9. To recommend that a standard design 'type' be adopted that is flexible enough to fit most locations where new build may be an option. The use of single self-contained WC cubicles would eliminate wasted lobby areas, address equality and diversity needs and allow partial closures during quieter months or maintenance works.
10. To recommend that design and cost-benefit analysis of self-contained cubicle facilities are undertaken for all new public conveniences or major refurbishments (where possible) to offer single sex and gender neutral facilities in line with current legislation.
11. To recommend that all opportunities are regularly explored to improve the financial sustainability and continuation of public conveniences across the District such as service costs and maintenance, to include new technology, advertisement and commercial opportunities.
12. To recommend that when a new build or major refurbishment is required that the decision matrix is used to determine if the facility is of an appropriate size (ie numbers of cubicles) and in a desirable location (see audit/review results).
13. To recommend that any major refurbishments or new builds include costings for green/renewable technology to reduce environmental impact (energy efficiency, water use, carbon reduction) and cost efficiencies so that Members can select the most appropriate course of action for each location.
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