

PUBLIC CONVENIENCE INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Summary: This report outlines proposals in relation to continuing to improve the standard and quality of the District Council's public conveniences as a key element of the district's local infrastructure whilst also proposing a more strategic approach to this service area. The report presents a number of options to improve the public convenience service following on from the previous investment programme and makes a number of recommendations for the next phase of capital works to provide new inclusive, replacement and remodelled facilities in key locations within the District. It also provides a framework for the consideration of a Public Convenience Strategy to help shape the future direction of this important provision.

Options considered:

Do nothing.

Explore transfer of public convenience provision to town and parish councils.

Continue the investment programme to make improvements to the quality of the public convenience portfolio.

Adopting a more strategic approach to the management and improvement of these assets.

Conclusions: In conclusion it is recommended that the Cabinet adopt the principles set out in the draft strategy document contained within Appendix A. To further support the Strategy, it is recommended that the capital improvement programme continues to enable the Council to provide quality facilities to residents and visitors alike whilst also focusing on wider accessibility.

Recommendations: It is recommended that Cabinet resolve to;

- **Adopt the principles contained within the draft Strategy document contained within Appendix A;**
- **Approve a provisional budget of £30k to support with the evidence gathering recommended within the Strategy, to be funded from the Invest to Save reserve;**
- **Task the Overview and Scrutiny committee with further developing and embedding the draft strategy and**

considering the further work in relation to evidence collection and engagement proposed and that Cabinet agree the scope of this work; and

- Recommend to Full Council that further capital provision of £500,000 is allocated from capital receipts (to include any potential grant funding) to undertake improvements to facilities in Sheringham and North Walsham, to include provision of Changing Places facilities. These facilities will be delivered by the end of the 2022 calendar year.

Reasons for Recommendations: To provide a more strategic approach to the management and investment off these important assets whilst continuing the capital investment improvement plan.

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)

Cabinet Member(s)	Ward(s) affected
Cllr Eric Seward	Sheringham, North Walsham

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report follows on from the previous report brought to Cabinet in September 2018 which secured initial capital funding of £600,000 for investment in the Council's public convenience facilities. This has since been supplemented by further provision of £137,000 to give a total project budget of £737,000.

1.2 Works completed and scheduled to date include;

- Refurbishment and re-modelling of the following facilities;
 - Lushers Passage, Sheringham
 - Coast Road, Bacton
 - Coast Road, Walcott
- Significant upgrading, remodelling and provision of Changing Places facilities at the following locations;
 - North Norfolk Information Centre, Cromer (completed December 2019)
 - Stearmans Yard, Wells-next-the-Sea (scheduled for completion by the end of the current financial year)

- Queens Road, Fakenham (scheduled for completion by the end of the current financial year)

- 1.3 At its meeting of October 2017 the Cabinet stated that it would wish to try to provide a Changing Place facility in each of the District's seven principal towns – either directly or in partnership with a private provider or the third sector, so as to meet this specialist need and increase the attraction of the District to all visitors.
- 1.4 The subsequent report in September 2018 outlined the Council's intent in wishing to provide good quality public toilet facilities in locations across the District, recognising that such facilities are key local infrastructure and support the District's thriving tourism economy; building on the District's reputation as being a first class visitor destination.
- 1.5 This first phase of investment will, by the end of the financial year, see the completion and delivery of three new Changing places facilities within the district, being located in Cromer, Wells-next-the-Sea and Fakenham.
- 1.6 This reports looks to secure further capital funding to continue with the programme of public convenience improvements across the district and to support Cabinet's aspirations to provide further Changing Places facilities.

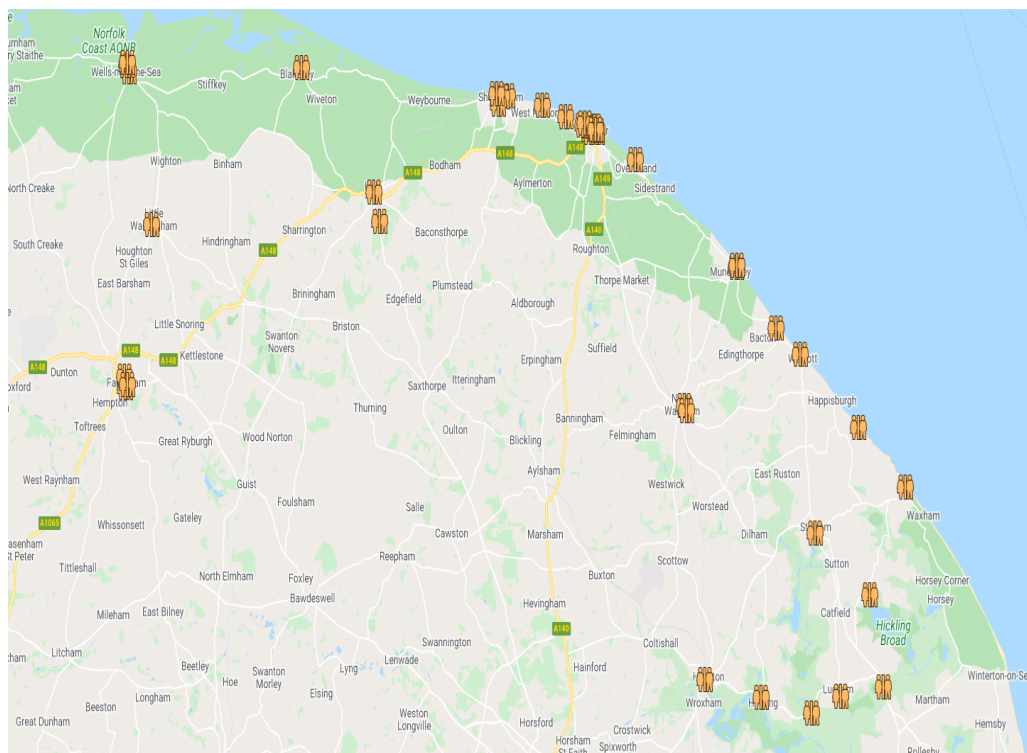
2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has consistently supported the provision of public toilets in the district, acknowledging the elderly demographic of the area, support for the tourism industry and the increasing demand for accessible facilities. Even though the provision of public conveniences is a non-statutory function for local authorities, the Council currently operates 38 public conveniences across the district at key resort and town centre locations including the Broads. Of these, 35 are sited on Council owned property with 3 being on private land leased to the Council. These three are at East Runton, Pauls Lane, Overstrand and Hickling Staithe.
- 2.2 Whilst the Council sees the provision as important, even key to providing infrastructure to support our tourism, leisure and cultural activities, the cost to the Council is significant with the 2021/22 net budget being nearly £730,000. As a discretionary service this leaves the Council with a choice about its provision in the context of decreasing central government funding and budgetary pressures.
- 2.3 The provision of public toilet facilities in North Norfolk spans many decades with facilities in the Broad's villages, seaside resorts and several key market towns and has traditionally been widespread, supporting users of small independent shops as well as busy tourism locations. Many people feel that toilet provision is key to supporting and promoting outdoor activities such as walking, boating and other sporting recreation in a significantly rural area where other provision may be limited.
- 2.4 Many of the facilities are located in key locations such as car parks or high streets and have become an expected provision by many tourists and residents, particularly North Norfolk's aging population. This provision of public toilets, over some 60+ years, has resulted in an array of assets, many

that no longer reflect current public expectation of service provision. Small buildings struggle to comply with current Disabled Disability Act (DDA) standards and despite ongoing refurbishments to update outdated sanitary wear and plumbing, high usage and vandalism makes ongoing maintenance frequent and costly.

- 2.5 Servicing remote and diverse facilities has its challenges, as does the operational issues of a managing facilities over a district spreading some 360 square miles (960 sq/km) and these costs are easy to evidence but, in several cases, where the Council has sought to rationalise or reduce provision, there has been very strong opposition to such proposals.
- 2.6 Maintenance of the provision, such as minor repairs and emergency response, is generally undertaken in-house as part of the Council's Asset Management programme by the Property Services Team. The small team of maintenance operatives is able to undertake works seven days a week when necessary which is very important during peak holiday periods when blockages and breakages can be frequent. Major refurbishments are contracted out but managed by the same team. On a day to day basis, NNDC manages a cleansing contract with Serco to undertake regular cleaning and reporting of maintenance issues.

Figure 1 – location of Council operated public conveniences



3. Public Convenience Strategy

- 3.1 A draft Strategy document is presented within Appendix A for further discussion and consideration. This Strategy provides a framework within which to make objective, informed decisions about the future direction of the service and the stock and makes a number of recommendations regarding further engagement with the public and collection of evidence to support decision making.

- 3.2 It provides the basis of a vision for service delivery and improvement, assesses the current situation and ambitions for the future in terms of service development and delivery and then considers a high level implementation plan. The Strategy also contains a high level assessment of provision across the District and indicates areas where provision is low and two of these areas (Sheringham and North Walsham) are recommended for further improvement works below.
- 3.3 There are also a number of recommendations included in terms of gathering and improving various sources of evidence and information to help better inform decision making. It is recommended that a provisional budget of £30k is allocated from the Invest to Save reserve to support with this work given the current workload of the Property team.
- 3.4 It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny committee are tasked with further developing and embedding the draft strategy and considering the further work required in relation to evidence collection and engagement proposed and that Cabinet agree the scope of this work.

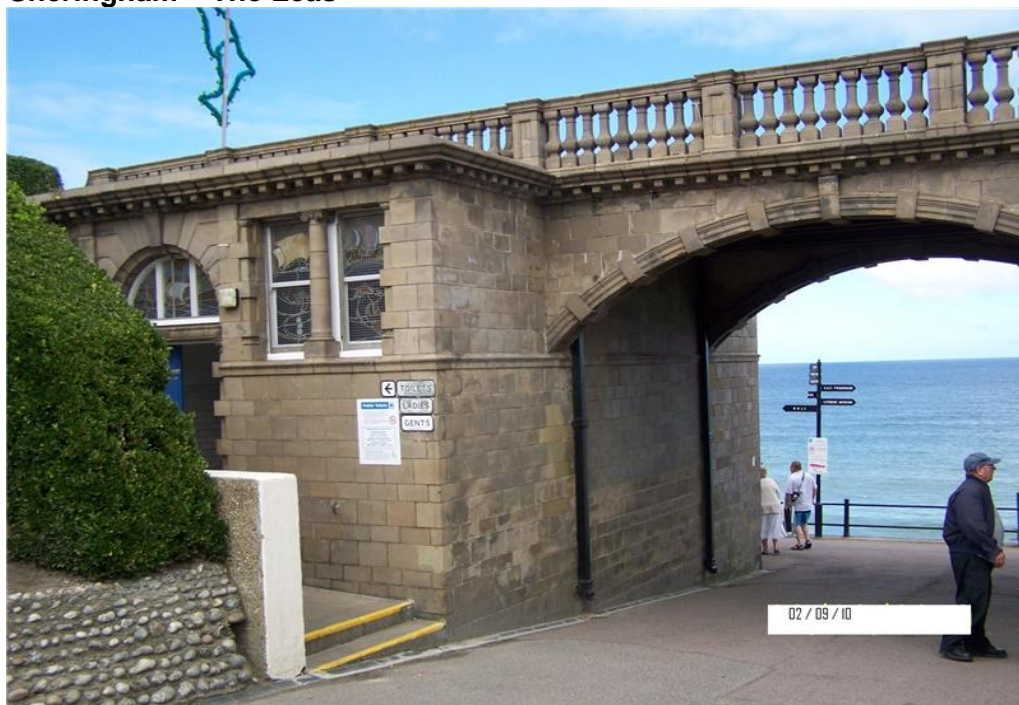
4. Changing Places provision

- 4.1 Where previously the Council have sought to keep DDA compliant facilities available through the RADAR key system, more recently there has been a drive for public provision of more inclusive [Changing Places facilities](#).
- 4.2 The Changing Places Consortium campaigns for public toilets, for people with significant/or complex health conditions, that are spacious and clean, with suitable equipment including a changing bench (adult sized), mobile hoist, space for up to two carers and centrally placed toilet and screen.
- 4.3 According to the consortium, there are as many as 250,000 people nationwide who would benefit from this type of facility. Anecdotally, it would seem many people organise their holidays and trips out around the provision of such facilities.
- 4.4 As outlined above, the Council has an aspiration to provide one of these facilities in each resort and market town if possible, the first was opened as part of the Cromer NNIC refurbishment at the end of 2019. On 29 July the government announced funding proposals for a £30m Changing Places Toilet (CPTs) investment programme, the prospectus for which can be accessed [here](#).
- 4.5 Local authorities (district councils and unitary authorities) were invited to lodge Expressions of Interest (EOIs) in this programme by 26th September 2021 to receive funding. Every local authority that opted in to this programme was able to receive capital funding equivalent to the average cost of installing at least one Changing Places toilet in their area (based on cost average assumption of £40k).
- 4.6 Whilst the outcome of this funding submission has not yet been confirmed for the purposes of agreeing this capital request it has been assumed that a minimum of £40k will be forthcoming from this application process. Should the wider bid be successful there will be an opportunity for further development and improvement of other facilities.

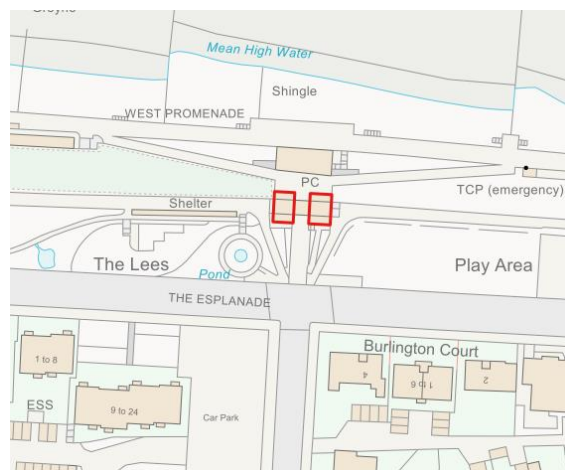
5. Additional work proposals

- 5.1 It is recommended that the next phase of works focuses on facilities in Sheringham (the Leas) and North Walsham (exact location to be agreed but to replace the current Vicarage Street facilities), to include overall modernisation, improvement and provision of Changing Places facilities. These facilities will be delivered by the end of the 2022 calendar year.

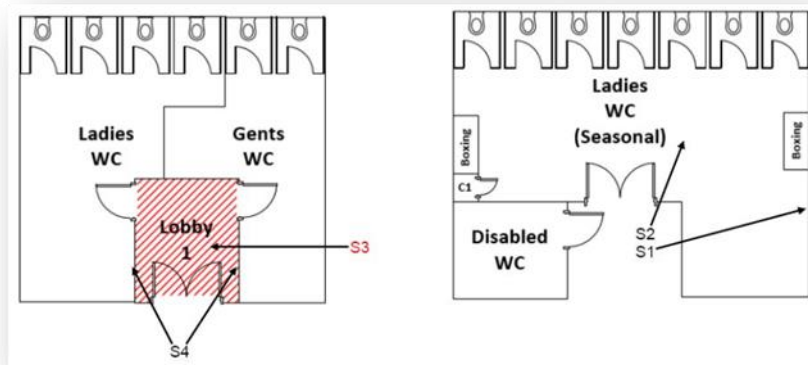
Sheringham – The Leas



- 5.2 These unique toilets are located in the busy and popular area known as Sheringham Leas. Overlooking the west promenade and beaches the two separate blocks are spanned by a pedestrian bridge linking two amenity areas. Their Palladian style include stained glass windows and fully tiled interiors, although it would be fair to say this once decadent facility is now faded. The west block is used year round with the additional east section providing additional seasonal ladies toilets and the accessible toilet.



- 5.3 Alternative uses for this prominent site have been explored but dismissed given the challenge of finding a suitable, alternative site for new facilities.



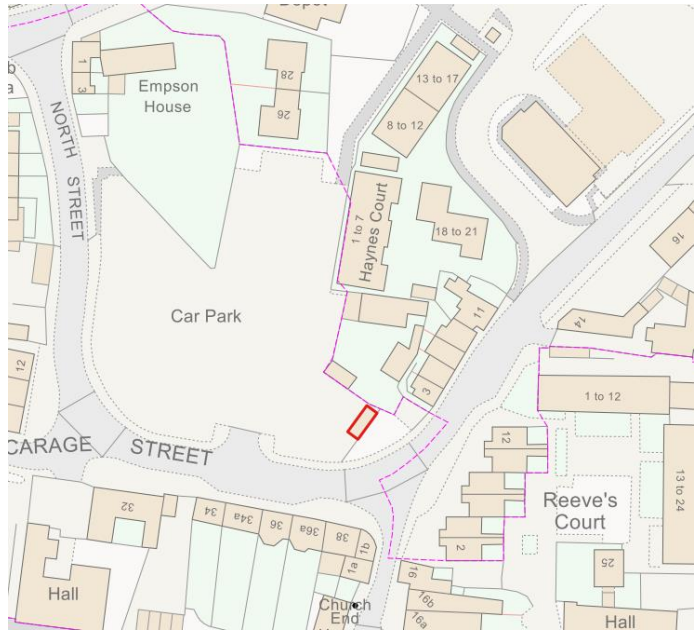
5.4 This premises have the highest running costs of any public convenience in NNDCs portfolio, often due to failure of Victorian drains, with average yearly spend of nearly £12,000.

- **North Walsham - Vicarage Street replacement**



5.5 This public convenience is located on Vicarage Street car park in North Walsham close to a popular thoroughfare between the town and Sainsburys store. The car park also has the town's only public coach park, although this is seldom used for coach parking. The modular block is unique to NNDC having been acquired (second hand) from a London borough in 2012. The individual pods are fitted out in stainless steel to reduce vandalism. It has one accessible toilet with ramped access.

- 5.6 It has an average spend of just over £6k per annum. It should be noted that, while this investment is to re-provide these facilities, the exact location of this re-provision is yet to be agreed.



6. Corporate Plan Objectives

- 6.1 There are two elements of the Corporate Plan supported by this report, the first directly supports Objective 7 under the 'Quality of Life' theme which includes the following;

Public convenience investment programme to include a Changing Places facility in each of our seven principal settlements

7.1. Maintain the quality and accessibility of public conveniences, ensuring they are suitable to the needs of the community and visitors to the area.

- 6.2 The second comes under Objective 1 of the 'Financial Sustainability and Growth' theme which includes the following;

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

1.2 Develop a public convenience policy to identify ways in which the current £600k a year spend on the provision of public conveniences (to serve users of town centres, recreational and visitor attractions) can be funded, so that good quality provision can be maintained whilst providing council tax payers with value for money.

- 6.3 Agreeing to the proposals outlined within this report will add a further two Changing Places facilities within the District which will then take the total provision to six facilities including the new development at the Reef in Sheringham.
- 6.4 Further to this adoption of the Strategy will help to provide a framework for consideration of future investment and operation of the facilities.

7. Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 7.1 While this continued improvement programme represents a significant amount to invest in a non-statutory service there is an expectation from residents and visitors alike that there is good provision of public conveniences across the District.

7.2 However, this level of investment will see a significant improvement to the highlighted facilities, one of which is the costliest from an operational perspective across the entire portfolio. The investment will have a beneficial impact in terms of ongoing revenue costs and reactive works, which are far costlier by their very nature than planned works and the improved facilities will be more efficient to operate.

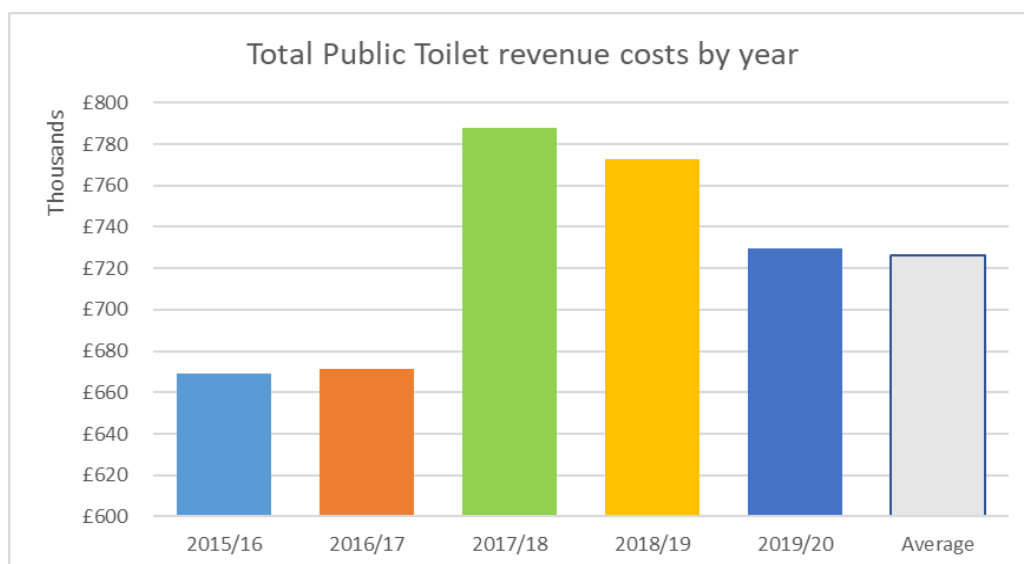
6.3 There is a risk that if the Council does not invest in these assets that the buildings and facilities will continue to deteriorate leading to increased responsive maintenance costs, undermining the Council's reputation and ambition as a quality tourism destination of choice.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

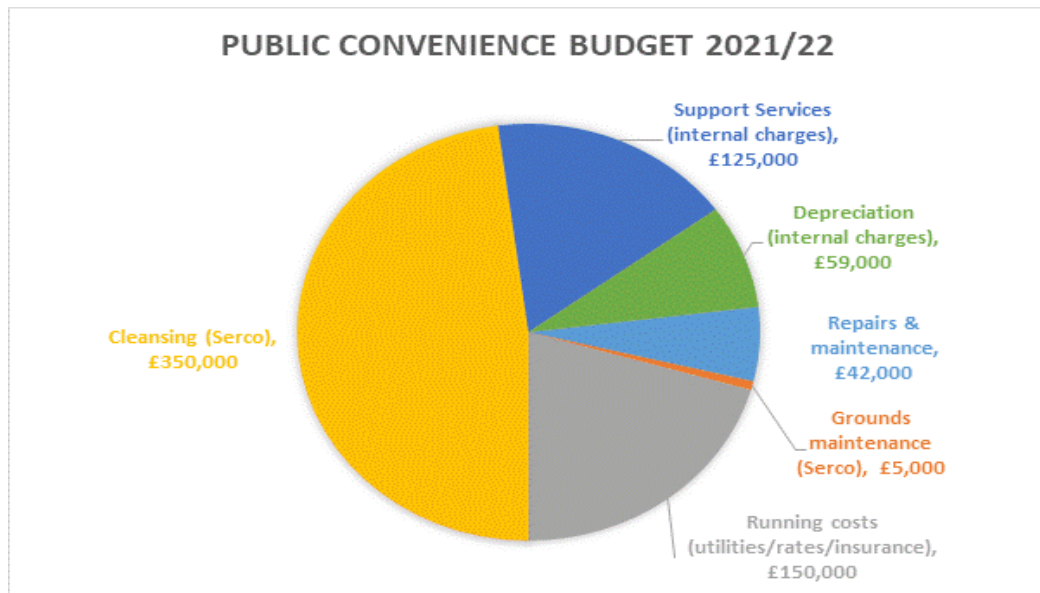
8.1 The cost of operating the Council's public toilets is split across revenue budgets managed by Property Services; which cover general maintenance and running costs including repairs and utilities and a separate budget, forming part of the waste contract, which is assigned for daily cleansing. In addition, there have been several capital investment programmes approved for refurbishments over previous years.

8.2 The graph below shows revenue expenditure over the last 5 years. This averages £726k per year. It should be noted that these costs include depreciation and internal service support (MU) recharges.

Graph 1 - Revenue costs per year



8.3 The following diagram shows the high level breakdown of the 2021/22 budget for the annual operation of the Council's public conveniences.



- 8.4 This year's budget totals £731k, of which direct costs represent 75% of the budget while indirect costs (depreciation and support service charges) account for the remaining 25%. As can be clearly seen, the largest element of expenditure is the cleansing contract undertaken by Serco and represents almost half of the entire budget.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are not considered to be any legal implications as a direct result of this report of these proposals at the current time.

10. Risks

- 10.1 A detailed risk register will be completed as part of the project governance proposals along with the necessary project documentation which will be discussed and agreed with the Corporate Delivery Unit (CDU).
- 10.2 In terms of the general risks associated with not progressing with the proposals as outlined, there is a significant risk that, without an overall Strategy, decisions regarding the future investment and operation of the service provision will be made in an ad hoc and un-coordinated way.
- 10.3 Failure to invest in these facilities will see revenue costs continue to increase as the facilities age and become less fit for purpose. The Council would also be failing to deliver on two of the objectives outlined within the Corporate Plan.
11. Reputationally there is a risk that poor facilities attract negative comments and press coverage in an area which the Council has highlighted as representing key infrastructure for the District.

12. Sustainability

- 12.1 The sustainability of the facilities in terms of their operation, cleansing and fit out will be considered as part of the works specification for the improvement and will be undertaken by the Property Services team in conjunction with key officers and architects.

13. Climate / Carbon impact

- 13.1 The Property team will engage with the Climate and Environmental Policy Manager to ensure that any opportunity to improve the carbon impact of these facilities is taken as part of these improvement works.

14. Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 The inclusion of two further Changing Places facilities as part of these improvement works impacts positively in terms of equality and diversity and these aspects will be further considered as part of the overall design of the general improvement works as well for each facility.

15. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

- 15.1 As with other similar improvement schemes as part of the design process the Council will engage with the police to ensure they have no concerns in relation to anti-social behaviour.

16. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 16.1 In conclusion it is recommended that the Cabinet adopt the principles set out in the draft strategy document contained within Appendix A. To further support the Strategy, it is recommended that the capital improvement programme continues to enable the Council to provide quality facilities to residents and visitors alike whilst also focusing on wider accessibility.

It is recommended that Cabinet resolve to;

- **Adopt the principles contained within the draft Strategy document contained within Appendix A;**
- **Approve a provisional budget of £30k to support with the evidence gathering recommended within the Strategy, to be funded from the Invest to Save reserve;**
- **Task the Overview and Scrutiny committee with further developing and embedding the draft strategy and considering the further work in relation to evidence collection and engagement proposed and that Cabinet agree the scope of this work; and**
- **Recommend to Full Council that further capital provision of £500,000 is allocated from capital receipts (to include any potential grant funding) to undertake improvements to facilities in Sheringham and North Walsham, to include provision of Changing Places facilities. These facilities will be delivered by the end of the 2022 calendar year.**