

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009**

**Item No:**

**Report of: Head of City Works**

**Title of Report: Review of Public Conveniences**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** Provide a recommendation for delivering required savings and to utilise facilities available within the city.

**Key decision? No**

**Executive lead member: Cllr John Tanner, Cleaner, Greener Oxford Board Member**

**Report approved by:**

**Board Member: Councillor John Tanner**

**Executive Director: Tim Sadler**

**Finance: Paul Jametta**

**Legal: Lindsay Cane**

**Policy Framework: Oxford City Council Corporate Plan: Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life; 2009/10 Budget**

**Recommendations: That the City Executive Board agrees:**

- To agree draft proposals for consultation with residents and users about Oxford City Council's provision of public toilets, with the aim of providing a more cost-effective and higher class service.
- That a further report be submitted to the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 CEB for a final decision on specific toilet closures, the refurbishment of the Gloucester Green toilet and a pilot of the Community Toilet Scheme, subject to the results of the consultation.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Activity Based Costing exercise carried out as part of last year's budget process identified public conveniences as a potential area for savings. This review has focused on providing a smaller number of better quality public toilets to achieve the budgeted saving.
- 1.2 There are currently 27 public conveniences open across the city; of these 23 are operated and maintained by City Works (6 in the City Centre, 13 outside the City Centre, and 4 in cemeteries). There are also 3 public toilets which are currently maintained by the Parks department. Additionally, the toilet facilities in the Town Hall are open to the public. A full list of all facilities is available in Appendix A.
- 1.3 Some of the Council's Public Convenience facilities are not Disability Discrimination Act compliant and thus require significant investment. Some are underused, abused and neglected. Public conveniences often attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour ranging from very minor (litter and graffiti tagging) to major (sexual behaviour, graffiti, drug taking and rough sleeping).
- 1.4 The costs of repair/cleaning can be very high – maintenance costs for 2007/08 were £74,550. Cleaning costs in the same period (including staff, vehicles and consumables) were £231,750.
- 1.5 Customers are often critical of public conveniences, particularly where usage is heavy and consumables run out; however, the majority of our complaints are that conveniences are not open for long enough. This could be improved by having an automatic public convenience or providing 24-hour facilities, and also by a Community Toilet Scheme that reflects Oxford's night-time economy.

## 2. Financial issues

- 2.1 As part of the 2009/10 budget process, City Works is required to make a £25,000 saving from its public convenience budget, with an ongoing saving of £50,000 per year thereafter.
- 2.2 The controllable budget for public conveniences 2009/10 (including the above saving) is £385,456 broken down as follows: -

Staff Costs (3 City Centre and 4 Outside)	174,462
Consumables (cleaning materials, etc)	23,651
Vehicles, Fuel and Associated costs	25,578
Maintenance and Running Costs.	161,765
	<hr/>
	<b>£ 385,456</b>

To achieve the target savings level, staffing and maintenance costs will have to be reduced. This can only be achieved by reducing the number of public conveniences to be cleaned and maintained.

- 2.3 We plan to achieve this saving by reducing the full time equivalent staffing level dedicated to the maintenance of public conveniences from seven to five (with correlating reduction in vehicles) through the strategic closure of toilet facilities.

## 3. Options – Oxford City Council will be conducting a public consultation on the following options for the City's Public Convenience facilities:

### **3.1 Strategic closure of some Public Conveniences in the City**

- 3.1.1 The usage, quality and maintenance/vandalism levels of all facilities are currently being evaluated (See Appendix A)
- 3.1.2 Using this information and the mapping, the facilities that may be closed to meet the saving can be identified using the following criteria:
  - a) Whether there is an alternative provision within a reasonable walking distance including the potential Community Toilet Scheme
  - b) Whether the facility services a major transport and/or tourist need.
  - c) The cost of cleaning and maintaining the facility.
  - d) The relative usage of the facility.
- 3.1.3 In the City Centre, we propose to consult on the possible closure of the following public conveniences: Castle Street, Magdalen Street (ladies only) and St. Giles (gents only, already temporarily closed).
- 3.1.4 Outside the City Centre, we propose to consult on the possible closure of public conveniences in Littlemore, Woodstock Road (gents only), South Parade (ladies only), Barnes Road, and Knight's Road, as well as winter closure of the Abingdon Road and Wolvercote public conveniences. We will also consult on the possible closure of the Headington Hill disabled toilet as the gents and ladies are already closed.
- 3.1.5 There will be a small cost involved in the closure of the facilities, to cover signage, blocking entrances and disconnecting utilities (estimated to be around £100-£200 per site). There may also be a small cost to continuing to monitor closed sites that have not been demolished.
- 3.1.6 There may be advantages to demolishing closed sites that cannot be resold, including eliminating the possibility of anti-social behaviour and removing the need to monitor the sites in the longer term. However, there would be a more substantial one-time cost to the Council to demolish toilet facilities.
- 3.1.7 It is proposed that public conveniences would remain open at Market Street, Gloucester Green, the Town Hall, Oxpens, Bury Knowle, Speedwell Street, St Clements, Westgate, Cowley Road, and Diamond Place, as well as in the cemeteries.
- 3.1.8 A capital receipt could be generated by selling/redeveloping closed facilities and bids could be made for capital towards refurbishing and improving the remaining facilities or investment in automatic public conveniences. A survey is currently being conducted into potential resale value of sites.

### **3.2 Refurbish and charge for improved facilities.**

- 3.2.1 Existing facilities are currently being evaluated for their potential to be refurbished (See Appendix A). Costs for doing small refurbishments (e.g., painting) could be covered by existing budgets.
- 3.2.2 We propose to refurbish the facilities at Gloucester Green to provide a world-class facility that will be convenient for both residents and tourists. This could include a "Changing Rooms" facility for people with complex needs. Costs for creating a world-class facility at Gloucester Green are likely to be between £250,000 and £500,000.

- 3.2.3 The cost of the refurbishment at this facility would be financed from the sale of closed toilet facilities or revenue savings exceeding the target being available to fund prudential borrowing. This revenue may not be immediate since the timescale for selling existing properties is not known.
- 3.2.4 We would also consider an 'Invest to Save' bid to greatly improve these facilities into world-class standard.
- 3.2.5 Once the facilities are up to a higher standard we could consider charging for use (between 20p and 50p).
- 3.2.6 In previous consultations, members of the public have said that they would be happy to pay a small price for improved facilities. Nevertheless, there is potential for negative public reaction to charges for facilities, particularly affecting vulnerable people e.g. the elderly, and charges have to be balanced against the cost of collection.

### **3.3 Automatic Public Conveniences**

- 3.3.1 Several local authorities have already used automated public conveniences, which are loaned and maintained by private contractors. The cost of these automated facilities is high and usually requires a long-term contract with the providers.
- 3.3.2 These facilities are stand-alone automatic toilets available on a 24-hour basis and could overcome previous concerns about the current limited opening hours of our public conveniences.
- 3.3.3 These types of facility would only be considered as part of our overall public toilet provision.
- 3.3.4 We have had interest from an external provider in providing public conveniences for free in return for advertising space (with a suggestion of 1 toilet for 15 Council Information Panels). We will research further into these options.
- 3.3.5 There is already a large amount of advertising around the City and an increase may be unpopular with City residents and may conflict with existing arrangements.

### **3.4 Community Toilet Scheme**

- 3.4.1 In order to provide quality facilities at low cost several other local authorities (including Richmond, Kingston-Upon-Thames, Camden, Lewisham, Sheffield, Waltham Forest and Chester) have successfully introduced Community Toilet Schemes whereby local businesses receive incentives in order to freely open their toilet facilities to the public.
- 3.4.2 As an example of the success of the CTS, Richmond have got 75 businesses involved, and have been able to close 8 out of 12 Council facilities. Their cost overall has been greatly reduced by doing this, in spite of offering £600 incentives to each business.
- 3.4.3 The businesses provide their facilities during their normal opening hours with no requirement to make a purchase of their goods or services. They are wholly responsible for the maintenance costs of their facilities.
- 3.4.4 The Council is responsible for providing signage as well as regular monitoring of the facilities. Some schemes also offer small incentives

for businesses to take part (e.g. We could offer free advertising in leaflets, Oxford in Bloom entry or other services).

- 3.4.5 The benefits of this scheme are accessible, high-quality facilities for the public at a low cost to the Council. The opening times of these facilities could be flexible and reflect the Oxford's night-time economy. For the businesses involved, hopefully increased footfalls would result in increased trade.
- 3.4.6 With facilities provided in businesses, there would hopefully be a reduction in anti-social behaviour within facilities. However, there is some possibility that anti-social behaviour may move from the public conveniences onto the streets if existing facilities are closed.

#### **4. Proposals**

- 4.1 We propose to begin a two-month public consultation process focused on potential closures and improvements to existing public conveniences in the City Centre area. This consultation will include a survey using the Citizen's Panel, asking for opinions on their current experience of the Council's public toilets as well as thoughts on the options in section 3 above. We will also seek the opinions of tourists in the area via a survey card in the Tourist Information Office. More in-depth consultations will take place on specific toilet closures in the relevant local areas, as well as the Area Committees in August.
- 4.2 In addition we will work with Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership and Oxford City Council media and communications group.
- 4.3 Timeline:
- July - August 2009: Carry out Citizen's Panel and Tourist Information Centre consultations. Carry out local consultations on specific toilet closures.
  - August 2009 - Evaluate results of the consultation process.
  - September 2009: Report to the CEB on results of the public consultation and make recommendations for the future of public conveniences in Oxford.
  - October 2009: Commence implementation of the approved programme (including toilet closures).

#### **5. Equalities issues**

- 5.1 There are minimal implications contained within the attached documents that are prejudicial against any individual or group. Social inclusion, including the needs of the elderly, the disabled and those with small children, will in particular be reflected in the decision-making and will feature in the consultation process.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There would be a small reduction in annual carbon footprint with any toilet closures that result in the loss of a regular cleaning vehicle. This would be off-set by a small one-off increase in carbon footprint by building an improved toilet facility.

#### **7. Legal issues**

7.1 Any legal issues arising out of the creation and implementation of the Community Toilet scheme will be dealt with in association with the Council's Legal Services.

## **8. Risk Management**

8.1 There are no major risks to manage within the proposal to consult on Oxford City Council's public toilet provision. See Appendix C for the Risk Register associated with the various proposals outlined in Section 3 of this report. Any other risks identified during the consultation period will be fully evaluated in the report to the 9<sup>th</sup> September CEB.

## **Recommendations**

That the City Executive Board agrees :

- **To agree draft proposals for consultation with residents and users about Oxford City Council's provision of public toilets, with the aim of providing a more cost-effective and higher class service.**
- **That a further report be submitted to the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 CEB for a final decision on specific toilet closures, the refurbishment of the Gloucester Green toilet and a pilot of the Community Toilet Scheme, subject to the results of the consultation.**

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### **Appendices:**

1. Appendix A: Details of Existing Facilities (including usage & quality issues).
2. Appendix B: Map of Public Conveniences in Oxford City.
3. Appendix C: Risk Register