

To: City Executive Board

Date: 14th October 2009

Item No: 8

Report of: Head of City Works

Title of Report: Review of Public Conveniences

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: Provide a recommendation for delivering savings required by the 2009-11 budget and to seek to provide and improved service.

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 approve the closure of some public toilet facilities in Oxford and to meet the cost of their decommissioning from existing City Works budgets**
- **To approve implementation of a Community Toilet Scheme over the whole of Oxford, commencing in the City Centre**
- **To agree in principle to the redevelopment of Gloucester Green toilets to a standard which reflects Oxford's status as a world-class city and request that a Business Case be prepared**

1. Background

- 1.1 Officers have been tasked with identifying savings of £50,000 per year from the public toilets budget.
- 1.2 In order to make an informed decision on future toilet public consultation was undertaken during August and September. A copy of the survey used in the consultation is included at Appendix A. All reports on the consultation results are available in the appendices.
- 1.3 This consultation involved the Talkback Panel (425 responses – see Appendix B), an online questionnaire (133 responses – see Appendix C), a survey in the Tourist Information Centre (13 responses – see Appendix D) and consultation at each of the Area Committees (see Appendix E). An invitation to the online survey was sent out to a large number of interested groups (see report for details).
- 1.4 This report details the closures that are proposed and identifies ideas for the longer term to improve the public toilets in Oxford whilst continuing to make the required saving, focusing on improved signage and the implementation of a Community Toilet Scheme.
- 1.5 This report also outlines some of the long-term proposals that we plan to make for the expansion and refurbishment of the existing Gloucester Green facility to provide better facilities for residents and visitors.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The study of potential closures identified the following key issues that affect both short-term decisions regarding potential closures and the longer-term strategy for providing good public conveniences in Oxford.
 - In the City Centre there is a relatively large number of toilets in close proximity to each other.
 - However, public awareness of nearby facilities is low
 - There is a wish for longer opening hours, but this is potentially costly due to the costs of locking and unlocking.
 - There is the potential to automate locking and unlocking to reduce costs.
 - There are lower costs and fewer issues with “Direct Access” toilets such as those at Diamond Place, Summertown and Bury Knowle, Headington.
 - Community toilet schemes have been successful elsewhere in providing a range of facilities at a lower overall cost.
 - Charging may be acceptable at good quality facilities. It reduces abuse of the facilities but needs to be cost effective in terms of receiving and handling cash.
 - We need to be aware of the changing times in terms of demand and both social and legal requirements. We must consider the location of facilities and the requirements of people with disabilities, the elderly and those with small children.

3. Overview of Results of the Consultation

- 3.1 People are generally against closing public toilets and would rather see more facilities open that are of a reasonable standard than fewer facilities of a high standard.
- 3.2 However, a repeated concern during the consultation was that Oxford's toilets are not up to standard for a world-class tourist city and that their quality should be improved.
- 3.3 Around 45% people believe that there are too few public toilets in Oxford but were also surprised to learn the number of facilities the Council currently provides.
- 3.4 Large numbers of respondents pointed out the need for better signage. Presently it is very poor and as a result people are unaware of where public facilities are located.
- 3.5 Of the suggested options, Automatic Public Conveniences are the least popular option with the public, whereas the Community Toilet Scheme has a good level of support.
- 3.6 In terms of priorities, having clean and tidy facilities that are easy to find and close to public spaces is more important than having toilets that are modern and comfortable and free of charge.
- 3.7 Around 75% of people are happy to pay at least 20p to use public toilets.

4. Refurbishments to the Gloucester Green toilets

- 4.1 Throughout the consultation it was apparent that Oxford residents feel the public toilet facilities do not reflect Oxford's status as a prime tourist destination and world-famous university city.
- 4.2 The Gloucester Green facilities are very well used and currently not able to cope with the demand of its location at a prominent entry point to the city.
- 4.3 We recommend refurbishment of these central facilities to a high standard, which would include more accessible 24hr facilities.
- 4.4 This redevelopment could also include a Changing Places cubicle for people with complex needs.
- 4.5 Disabled facilities would remain free to RADAR key holders, and there would be a charge of 20p for most of the remaining cubicles.
- 4.6 An early draft design for the refurbishment is in Appendices H & I.
- 4.7 The likely cost of refurbishment will be in the region of £300,000. The funding for this redevelopment could be provided through an 'invest to save' bid, efficiency savings, revenue from charging and receipts from the sales of decommissioned toilet sites.

5. Toilets to remain open

- 5.1 In addition to Gloucester Green, it is proposed to retain the following toilets which will be cleaned and maintained by City Works:
 - Magdalen Street East –The consultation results indicate that this is a well-used facility and its closure was opposed by tourist guides, members of the public and Area Committees.
 - Westgate Centre

- Market Street
- Cowley Road
- St Clements
- Oxpens
- Bury Knowle
- Diamond Place
- Speedwell Street
- Botley Cemetery
- Wolvercote Cemetery
- Headington Cemetery
- Rose Hill Cemetery
- Wolvercote (open from May-end of Sept)
- Abingdon Road (open from May-end of Sept)

Other toilets provided by the City Council include:

- Town Hall
- Florence Park
- Cutteslowe Park

5.2 The toilet facilities listed above will remain free of charge.

5.3 The consultation highlighted the need for better signposting to show where toilet facilities are in Oxford; it is proposed to provide additional signposting and an improved webpage will be launched highlighting where toilets are in Oxford, their opening times and access arrangements.

6 Strategic closure of some Public Conveniences

6.1 The required budget saving will be achieved by the closure of 7 toilets and partial closure of a further 2 toilets. This will allow one cleaning vehicle (saving of £5,000 per year) to be removed and two cleaners to be redeployed to take the place of agency workers (saving £44,000 per year). Additionally, maintenance costs of the toilets will be lower and achieve a further saving of £10,000 per year.

6.2 Having reviewed each toilet facility for its usage (Appendix J), proximity to alternatives, cost of cleaning and maintaining and resale potential, as well as considering public opinion of the facilities, the closure of the following facilities is recommended to members;

Public Toilet	Main Reasons for Closure
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Castle Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ladies has exceptionally low usage. • Very low rating in consultation – viewed as unsafe and unpleasant. • Close to other Council facilities at the Westgate Centre. • Good potential for Community Toilets Scheme to succeed in this area. • Anti-social behaviour prevalent.
Littlemore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low usage figures in residential area. • 2 letters received in consultation in opposition to its closure – from Parish Council and Church. • Looking into possibilities of transfer to local community groups.
Woodstock Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very close to good Council facilities at Diamond Place. • Need substantial refurbishment if it were retained as, for example, there are currently no hand-basins. • During consultation some opposition to the closure was expressed by Taxi drivers and visitors to Alexandra Park.
South Parade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very close to good Council facilities at Diamond Place. • Would need substantial refurbishment as, for example, there are currently no hand-basins. • During consultation there was some opposition to the closure on behalf of Taxi drivers and visitors to Alexandra Park who use this site.
Barns Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low usage. • Next door to Templar's Square shopping centre, which has facilities free for public use. (Opening hours for Templar's Square are Mon-Sat 8am – 6pm, Sun 8am – 4pm). • No specific opposition to its closure during consultation.
Abingdon Road seasonal opening only (from May – end of Sept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low usage (usage figures taken from mid-winter) • Higher usage in summer by Hinksey Park users.
Wolvercote seasonal opening only (from May – end of Sept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low usage (usage figs were from height of summer). • Anti-social behaviour known to be a problem here. • During consultation, there has been public support for this to be kept open year-round for users of Port Meadow as there are no nearby alternatives.
Headington Hill Park Disabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reportedly very low usage. (Unable to install counters due to structure of building – in consultation, only 12 out of 558 people had visited in past 12 months). • Possibility of high re-sale value. • Limited opposition to closure during consultation.
Knight's Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low usage. • High maintenance costs due to vandalism. • Anti-social behaviour. • Considering opening the Blackbird Leys Community

6.3 We believe that this is this lowest number of the most appropriate closures that will deliver the saving required by Council in the budget. The facilities recommended for closure are across the city and work will have to be re-scheduled to adapt to the revised lower work level. This re-scheduling will enable the saving of 2 staff posts and one vehicle however, the workload and resource level are finely balanced and any increase in that workload would reduce the saving to one post only.

7. Property Implications

- 7.1 The total cost of closing and decommissioning these facilities is estimated to be circa £20,000, excluding demolition costs.
- 7.2 The scope of decommissioning will include security works to the properties, draining down and capping off water systems and drains, and making safe utilities where applicable.
- 7.3 Where at all practicable the facilities listed for closure in this report will be demolished and the sites marketed to raise a capital receipt.
- 7.4 Given the nature of the properties and locations, it is difficult to arrive at definitive valuations for the premises. Previous asset valuations for accounting purposes have used a Depreciated Replacement Cost (DRC) approach to valuation, which is based on the cost of rebuilding the facility. This is clearly inappropriate in the case of an open market value disposal.
- 7.5 The most likely and appropriate route of disposal would be by way of public auction, therefore the valuation approach taken provides for a range of values per site, based on comparable evidence in Oxford, and evidence of similar disposals by public auction. It is considered that the likely receipts from disposals may be >£50k, therefore we estimate that a capital figure of £50k will be secured in 2010/2011.

8. Community Toilet Scheme

- 8.1 Of the options included in the consultation, the Community Toilets Scheme gained a lot of support with a large majority calling it an 'excellent' idea.
- 8.2 As the first part of this scheme, public buildings occupied by the County and City Councils will be asked to join the scheme, including Community Centres.
- 8.3 Private businesses will be contacted individually to see if they are interested in becoming involved. Their facilities will be inspected initially to ensure suitability and then they will be offered incentives in the form of free advertising (for example via links on the website) and promotion in Your Oxford. Other benefits for their involvement would be expected to be increased footfall at their premises and a possible rise in trade as a result.
- 8.4 Successful partnership with businesses will raise the Council's profile within the local community and provide residents and visitors with more choice. Also a higher number of good quality toilets will be available in the City.

- 8.5 By selecting a range of businesses with varied customer profiles, facilities and opening hours, Oxford will be able to provide toilets that match the public demand.
- 8.6 Participation in the scheme will be entirely voluntary and premises retain the right to refuse entry in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.7 Additional signage will be provided on streets, bus stops, on new maps for use in the Tourist Centre, and on a website map which will include links to the businesses involved.
- 8.8 Officers will monitor the success of the scheme and obtain feedback from businesses on the condition of their toilets and any increase in trade. We will also track any complaints from the public, and create a report on the success or failure of the scheme. Additionally any comments can be logged on the Council's website.
- 8.9 The initial cost of implementing the Community Toilet Scheme (including signage, printed material, and promotion) is expected to be in the region of £5,000.

9. Benchmarking our toilets against other authorities

	Oxford	Council A	Council B	Council C (outsourced to private sector)	Council D (outsourced to private sector)	Council E
Total Cost	£385,000	£350,000	£400,000	£268,000	£72,000	£507,860
Total no. of toilets	25	29	22	17	8	20
Population per toilet	6,280	6,082	24,295	4,912	1,500	7,199
Disabled facilities	18	29	16	16	8	18
Attended	2	0	2	0	0	3
Number of cleaners (not including attendants)	5	5	2	unknown	2	9
Automatic Public Toilets	0	3	7	0	1	0
Provision in 2000	29	37	38	18	8	20
Cost per location	£15,400	£8,974	£18,181	£15,765	£9,000	£25,393
Community Toilet Scheme members	n/a	n/a	12	n/a	n/a	n/a

- 9.1 Members requested that benchmarking data be included in this report. Information has so far been gathered from these five councils who have similarities with Oxford.

10. Financial Implications

10.1 Business Case (Costs and Benefits)

Costs	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<u>Revenue</u>				
Revenue savings - Vehicles	£ 2,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000
Revenue savings - Staff	£ 20,000	£ 44,000	£ 44,000	£ 44,000
Revenue savings - Maintenance	£ 5,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
Decommissioning costs	£ (20,000)	£	£	£
Community Toilet Scheme costs	£ (5,000)	£ (2,000)	£ (2,000)	£ (2,000)
Gloucester Green revenue/income (20p usage)	£	£ 12,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000
Net Revenue Savings (rev. benefits minus rev. costs)	£ 2,000	£ 69,000	£ 82,000	£ 82,000
<u>Capital</u>				
Gloucester Green refurbishment	£	£(300,000)	£	£
Disposals - capital receipts	£	£ 50,000	£	£
Total capital funding required (for costs not met by the Service)	£	£(250,000)	£	£

11. Timeline

- End of October – commence closure of toilets – including removal of two posts and vehicle in order to make savings target.
- End of October – commence implementation of Community Toilets Scheme.
- February - Subject to business case, agree recommendation for Gloucester Green refurbishment at future CEB.

12. Equalities Impact

A detailed Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. This highlights that there are potential areas of discrimination against two equality groups; age (both young and old) and people with disabilities. It is proposed to consult and involve stakeholders from these groups in the recommendations as well as implementing mitigating steps identified in the EIA. The Equalities Impact Assessment is available in Appendix G.

13. Climate Change/environmental Implications

- 13.1 This paper outlines closures of public conveniences that if implemented would reduce Oxford City Council's operational carbon emissions by an estimated 28 tonnes of CO₂. In addition reduction in vehicle mileage to service these facilities would be a further carbon reduction (which could be quantified based on known or estimated mileage data and vehicle type).
- 13.2 The refurbishment of Gloucester Green toilets would present opportunities to reduce water use and to reduce carbon emissions by taking advantage of more energy efficient technologies for lighting, ventilation and hand drying. It may be that the Salix carbon reduction revolving loan fund administered by the Environmental Development department could be used to fund or part- fund some of these measures. Discussion should take place with Energy and Climate Change officers in the Environmental Development department before finalising the specification for the Gloucester Green upgrade.

14. Legal issues

Any legal issues (including Terms and Conditions for the Community Toilets Scheme) will be dealt with in association with the Council's Legal Services.

15. Risks and mitigations

See Appendix F.

16. Summary

Following inspection of toilet facilities across Oxford by the City Council and industry specialists, as well as through public consultation, it is clear that the public conveniences of Oxford vary greatly in terms of the facilities available; their quality, location, opening hours, and level of maintenance.

To deal with the immediate priority of making savings in the most economically effective way, we recommend closing a certain number of facilities, thereby reducing staffing needs and associated vehicle costs. Careful consideration has been given to usage figures, public opinions during consultation, the availability of nearby alternative facilities, the suitability of sites for refurbishment and the impact on equalities. In considering staffing reduction, Officers have paid particular attention to reducing staffing only where significant gains can be made without detriment to the level of service.

The closures proposed will achieve the savings required, However, there is considerable scope to mitigate the impact of closures through the community toilets scheme and better sign posting of the many facilities remaining.. Further opportunities will be taken as they arise to further improve services and reduce costs based on the work which led up to this report.

17. Recommendations

That the City Executive Board agrees :

- **To approve closure of specific toilet facilities in Oxford and the cost of their decommissioning to be met from existing City Works budgets**
- **To approve implementation of a Community Toilet Scheme over the whole of Oxford**
- **To agree in principle to the redevelopment of Gloucester Green toilets to a standard which reflects Oxford's status as a world-class city and request that a Business Case be drafted**

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Appendices:

1. Appendix A - Survey used in Talkback survey and online survey
2. Appendix B - Report on results of Talkback Survey
3. Appendix C -Report on results of Online survey
4. Appendix D - Report on results of Tourist Information Centre survey
5. Appendix E - Area Committee Comments
6. Appendix F - Risk Register
7. Appendix G - Equalities Impact Assessment
8. Appendix H – Draft plans for Gloucester Green Downstairs
9. Appendix I – Draft plans for Gloucester Green Upstairs
10. Appendix J - Usage Figures for Existing Toilets