

Agenda Item No. 6

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27th January 2010

WORK PROGRAMME ITEM – STUDY INTO WHETHER THERE IS ADEQUATE PROVISION OF PUBLIC TOILETS IN THE DISTRICT

Portfolio Area: Communities
Report Presented by: Steve Bore, Scrutiny Manager

Background Papers: Information Pack; Government Guidance – Improving Public Access to Toilets – Guidance on Community and Toilet Schemes and SatLav; London Borough Of Richmond – leaflet on Community Toilet Scheme.
Corporate Implications: Please refer to table at end of report
Options: See recommendations
Risks: N/A

Executive Summary

This report sets out the results of a benchmarking exercise with our ‘basket’ of similar authorities in the context of public toilet provision, and further information concerning the ‘Community Toilet Scheme’ (originally pioneered by the London Borough of Richmond) and ‘pay’ toilets.

Decision

1. Although it is noted that there are no proposals to close the Council’s existing public toilets as part of the 2010/11 budgetary savings, it is **RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet take note of the responses received as a result of the consultation exercise that was undertaken at the start of this study, expressing concern at the loss of any of the Council’s current public toilets;
2. If there is any perceived gap in public toilet provision in the future, it is **RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet investigates (as one of the possible options) the feasibility of providing a “Community Toilet Scheme” in partnership with local businesses.

1. Introduction

The Committee will recall that at its meeting on 22nd July 2009, it was agreed that the Scrutiny Manager should undertake a benchmarking exercise with our ‘basket’ of similar authorities, and also seek examples of good practice in dealing with toilet provision including further details of the ‘Community Toilet Scheme’ (originally pioneered by the London Borough of Richmond) and ‘pay’ toilets.

2. Bench Marking

A bench making exercise of the 16 local authorities included in the Council’s Cipfa family grouping was undertaken. 10 responses were received and the results are set out in Appendix 1 attached.

The survey indicates that BDC has the lowest total annual running costs (net of income), and the 2nd lowest average cost per location. It has the 3rd lowest number of public toilets, and in terms of facility per head of population it is ranked in 9th place.

Question 11 of the survey also asked respondents to provide details of any innovative provision of public toilets and these are set out in the Appendix.

3. The Community Toilet Scheme

Guidance published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in respect of Community Toilet Schemes and SatLav is set out in Appendix 2.

A leaflet on the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames' Community Toilet Scheme is attached in Appendix 3. A network of cafes, pubs and shops participate in the scheme and are required to display special signage and give free access to the public. The Council pays each business that participates in the scheme an annual grant of £600 a year towards the costs of cleaning and maintaining their loos.

The benefits of a Community Toilet Scheme are that you can increase the provision without the need for capital investment, address any perceived gap in provision and achieve longer opening hours. However, there are costs involved in promoting and managing such a scheme, including paying a grant to participating businesses.

A number of the bigger authorities with large city centres have adopted Community Toilet Schemes although the principles of such schemes could be applied in any local authority area.

It should be noted that sharing the facilities of commercial premises may not be acceptable to all groups of users. Mothers may not wish to take children into public houses. Some religious groups may not wish to enter licensed premises and school children would not be able to access these facilities when not accompanied by an adult. The aim should therefore be to include a mixture of types of premises in any proposed scheme.

4. Pay Toilets

The Council does not currently make a charge for the use of public conveniences, and only two Councils in the survey operated pay toilets.

Some local authorities have installed 'turnstile' systems at the entrance of their attended public conveniences. Users then 'open' the turnstiles by inserting a coin – the charge is usually 20p.

Other authorities have installed modern state of the art 'superloos' with self cleaning facilities within their town and city centres. These are modular units fitted out with vandal resistant interiors. Some provide 'piped' music for the users pleasure. The units self clean and sanitise immediately on the customer leaving the facility. Entrance charges for this type of facility range from 20p to £1.

5. Summary of Investigations Undertaken to Date

Members are reminded that the original terms of reference for this study were to build a picture of the Council's current disabled public toilet provision in the District, and to investigate the options available in supplementing that provision.

Those terms of reference were subsequently extended to include all the Council's public toilets and not just disabled.

A report was submitted to the Committee on 29th April 2009 when Members considered the Information Pack setting out the responses received as a result of the consultation exercise. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to seek further information from Community Services.

A further report was submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 22nd July 2009 setting out additional information under the headings of:-

- * location of the Council's public toilets;
- * times of opening;
- * why they are located where they are;
- * whether in planning the provision of public toilets any account is taken of population growth;
- * availability of benchmarking information.

At that meeting (as no comparison information was available), the Committee asked that a benchmarking exercise with our "basket" of similar authorities be undertaken, and that examples of good practice in dealing with toilet provision including further details of the 'Community Toilet Scheme' and pay toilets be sought. These are the subject of this current report.

6. Conclusions

The Committee will recall that as part of last year's budgetary saving measures, it was initially proposed that the Council's public toilets in the District be closed. Although this proposal was not subsequently pursued, the concern at the time is reflected in some of the responses received during the consultation exercise that was undertaken following the commencement of the study (copies were included in the Information Pack).

There are no similar proposals included in the budgetary savings for the Cabinet's proposed 2010/11 budget, but the Committee may wish to draw the attention of Cabinet to the concerns that have been expressed.

Given the Council's difficult financial circumstances it seems unlikely that the Council will be in a position to increase the provision of public toilets in the District in the near future.

However, if there is any perceived gap in provision, one of the future options for Cabinet to consider could be to investigate the feasibility of providing a "Community Toilet Scheme" in partnership with local businesses. The Committee may wish to make a recommendation to Cabinet to this effect.

Corporate Implications				
Financial:	None			
Legal:	There are no legal implications arising from this report.			
Equalities & Diversity:	There are no equalities and diversity implications arising from this report.			
Customer Impact:	None			
Environment & Climate Change:	None			
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Local Committees	No	Partners	Yes
	Public	Yes	Staff	No
Key Decision:	No			
Public/Private Report:	Public			
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