

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

16 JUNE 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AND LEVELS OF SERVICE

1.0 Purpose of Report.

1.1 To set out for Cabinet, proposals on the future availability of public conveniences in the County Borough; to outline their current condition; and to seek approval for changes in the level of caretaking and cleansing.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This review links to the key outcomes and themes identified in the corporate plan: -
- **People in Bridgend County Borough are healthier.** This would mean our communities are stronger, cohesive, and sustainable, with appropriate access to services for all.
 - **People in Bridgend County Borough benefit from a stronger and more prosperous economy.** This would mean our communities are sustainable with the appropriate infrastructure to support business growth and thriving town centres.
 - **Bridgend County Borough is a great place to live, work and visit.** This would mean that people take pride in the county, their communities, the heritage and natural environment and our communities are clean and safe and have a good range of leisure, tourism, and cultural activities.

2.2 The proposals detailed in this report are consistent with the Communities Directorate response to reconciling the current financial settlement, with the levels of service provision in accordance with the improvement priorities detailed in the Corporate Plan under Priority 6 – (Working Together to Make Best Use of Our Resources)

3.0 Background.

3.1 There are thirteen public conveniences in various parts of the Borough which are serviced and maintained by the Council. Of these a number are permanently staffed while others are cleaned and visited on a routine basis. A list, along with information regarding their condition as described by the Property Department, is included as **Appendix 1**.

3.2 A fourteenth facility, located in Pencoed Square, was recently transferred to the control of Pencoed Town Council.

- 3.3 The provision of public conveniences is currently a discretionary power; however, the Welsh Government has recently published its public health white paper which seeks to place certain new duties on Councils with regard to the provision of public conveniences, which are seen by the Welsh Government (WG) as a necessary service for public health.
- 3.4 Welsh Government funded a Public Facilities Scheme, which enabled the Council to make small grants to businesses to permit the use of their toilets by the general public, from 2009 to 2014. This initiative was branded by Bridgend County Borough Council as the 'Comfort Scheme'. The funding, however, was removed from April 2014. This scheme was therefore temporarily suspended pending the outcome of this review.
- 3.5 A budget reduction of £50k was made to this area of service in 2014/15 as part of the directorates' response to identified savings in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 3.6 In 2015/16 a further £50k saving has been allocated against the service as part of the Communities response to the MTFS. The proposed savings attached to these proposals are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

4.0 Current situation

- 4.1 In light of the very challenging and difficult financial settlement imposed on the Council, Cabinet may wish to take into consideration the following detail when reconciling the future level of service provision and availability of public toilets, with the need to return a balanced budget. The following detail focuses on providing a core provision of good quality public conveniences, which are staffed at a level to maintain them in a clean and sanitary condition.
- 4.2 A public consultation was undertaken in the first quarter of 2015, inviting views on the importance of public conveniences in the Borough. It was open to the general public, Community Councils, disabled groups and also the Citizens' Panel. In total 933 responses were received. The consultation report is included as **Appendix 3**.
- 4.3 The major findings from this consultation are as follows: -
- Almost all (96%) of all those that responded stated that there should be disabled access at all public toilets in Bridgend County Borough.
 - In respect of Bridgend town the highest level of support was for the toilets at the Bus Station and Cheapside, with the facilities at Rhiw Hill and Derwen Road receiving less support.
 - In Porthcawl town the highest level of support was for the toilets at John Street and Griffin Park, with the Pavilion basement toilets receiving the least support.
 - For out of town conveniences Rest Bay received the highest level of support with the facilities at Kenfig Nature Reserve in second place. Pricetown and Blackmill received the lowest levels of support.

- A large majority (87%) of all those that responded supported the reintroduction of the Comfort Scheme.

- 4.4 It is recognised that the provision of an adequate number and spread of good quality public toilet facilities is important. The town centres of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg have public conveniences of reasonable quality and accessibility. There are some facilities in Bridgend and Porthcawl, however, which have issues regarding accessibility.
- 4.5 In considering the future provision of public toilets in the towns of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg, and other Borough wide facilities, Cabinet may wish to consider the following points and the detail provided in the attached appendices, which include at **Appendix 4** the full Equalities Impact Assessment. A summary of the current and proposed opening and closing times along with an indication of the hours allocated for cleaning the toilets is attached at **Appendix 5**.

Bridgend Town Centre

- 4.6 Bridgend town centre is currently serviced by four public toilets. These are located at the Bus Station, Derwen Road, The Rhiw and Cheapside. The following future provision is proposed for the town centre:-
- 4.6.1 The Rhiw Hill toilets are low lying, damp and subject to flooding. There are no disabled facilities although there is an accessible toilet in the area of the Rhiw car park where mobility vehicles are rented out. The toilet attendant reports feeling insecure when working in these toilets because of antisocial behaviour. Accessibility is very poor even after the recent regeneration works, and it is hard to see how this can be improved due to the physical constraints of the site. The Rhiw toilets were closed for some months whilst maintenance and repair works were undertaken to the roof of the market. During this closure there were very few calls from the public regarding their closure, and there are alternative and better facilities located nearby at Cheapside. It is proposed, subject to consultation and satisfactory negotiations with the landlord on the terms of the lease for these toilets, that the Rhiw Hill toilets should be permanently closed and decommissioned.
- 4.6.2 Cabinet will note from the detail provided in **Appendix 6** that the toilet facilities in Derwen Road are not well used. In addition they have some major structural issues which appear to be caused by subsidence and are plagued by antisocial behaviour. It is proposed that this facility should be closed and permanently decommissioned.
- 4.6.3 Bridgend town centre has a staffing input of 101 hours per week over 7 days. All of the current staff are female. Over half of these hours are devoted to the Bus Station, with the other three toilets run on only 46 hours per week.
- 4.6.4 It is proposed, subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, that continuous cover of the Bus Station should be discontinued and the Bus Station should become the headquarters from which the Bus Station and Cheapside facilities are serviced. The total weekly hours applied should be reduced from the current level of 101 hours to 60 hours.

Porthcawl Town

- 4.7 Porthcawl town is currently serviced by four public toilets located at Grand Pavilion, John Street, Griffin Park and Rest Bay. The following future provision is proposed for the town:-
- 4.7.1 The basement level public toilets below the Grand Pavilion are only accessible by steep steps. Again it is difficult to see how accessibility could be improved without very significant expenditure. These toilets are in very close proximity to the John Street facility, which are well maintained and accessible. The toilets in the Grand Pavilion basement appear surplus to requirements they should therefore be closed and decommissioned.
- 4.7.2 The public toilets at Griffin Park are used by visitors to the town and the park. It is proposed that Griffin Park public toilets remain open and serviced by the attendant based at the John Street toilets in the town centre.
- 4.7.3 Porthcawl has a staffing input of 108 hours per week in the winter season and 206 hours per week during the summer, over a 7 day cycle. The gentleman's facilities have a male attendant while the ladies are serviced by a female attendant. Going forward, subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, this practice should end with male or female attendants cleansing both facilities with appropriate signage used to identify that cleaning is ongoing.
- 4.7.4 The provision should be similar to that in Bridgend with a roving operation based from the John Street facility. Weekly hours subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, would be reduced from 108 hours to 60 hours in the winter, and from 206 hours to 90 hours in the summer.
- 4.7.5 The toilets at Rest Bay are generally satisfactory with a small maintenance backlog. During the winter they are opened, closed, and cleaned by the Council's Cleaner Streets team. In the summer season they are staffed by agency workers. It is a condition of Rest Bay's blue flag status that there is a public convenience available, and it is seen as a very important facility by both residents and visitors. The funding arrangements for the Rest Bay car park and toilets are very complex and require further investigation. It is therefore proposed that Rest Bay continues to be operated under the existing arrangements, with the longer term goal of seeking support, potentially from the Town Council to take over the management and operation of the facilities.

Maesteg Town Centre

- 4.8 In Maesteg Bus Station the public toilets are largely satisfactory, although there are some minor reoccurring maintenance issues at the site. These facilities should be retained.
- 4.9 Maesteg town centre has a staffing input of 57 hours per week over 7 days. All of the current staff are female.

- 4.10 Sunday opening should, subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, be discontinued since attendants report an average one user per day on Sundays, and there is an alternative payable facility in a nearby car park. Continuous cover from 09:00 to 18:00 totalling some 57 hours per week should be reduced to 6 hours per day from Monday to Saturday, a total of 36 hours per week.
- 4.11 In order to facilitate these reductions it would be necessary to coordinate the management of all public convenience staff to enable the cover of holiday and sickness periods. The Council's Cleaner Streets staff may, subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, be seconded to cover holidays or periods of short term sickness.
- 4.12 Outside of the main town centres there is a variety of provision: -
- 4.12.1 **Pandy Road, Aberkenfig.** These facilities are in fair condition with disabled provision. They are opened, closed and cleaned by Cleaner Streets operatives. Newcastle Higher Community Council has expressed an interest in taking a more active role in their management. This option is currently being progressed with the Community Council. If they do not wish to manage the facility then it should be closed.
- 4.12.2 **Kenfig National Nature Reserve.** These toilets are in good condition. They are opened and closed by staff of the Reserve, and cleaned by the Council's Cleaner Streets team, who have to travel some distance out of their way to reach the facility. Subject to consultation with relevant Trade Unions and employees, ongoing responsibility for the opening closing and cleaning of these facilities should be passed to staff at the Nature Reserve and aligned to the activities at the Centre and only opened and available to the public during those times that the main facilities at the site are available and open.
- 4.12.3 **Pricetown Square.** These facilities are in a poor condition. The cost of making them accessible was estimated at £22,000 some years ago. Opening, closing and cleaning are by the Council's Cleaner Streets team. These facilities should be offered to Ogmores Vale Community Council. If they are unable to take over the facilities they should be permanently closed and decommissioned.
- 4.12.4 **Blackmill Square.** These toilets are permanently open. They lack even hand washing facilities and the cost of accessibility modifications was estimated at £25,000 some years ago. They are cleaned by the Council's Cleaner Streets team. These facilities should be offered to Ogmores Vale Community Council. If they are unable to take over the facilities they should be permanently closed and decommissioned.
- 4.13 Following the cessation of specific WG funding for the National Comfort Scheme, it is proposed that a local scheme is established to support where necessary a small number of strategic sites where it is felt that the provision of a toilet facility, open and available to the public, would be beneficial. The Council would invite applications for such provision and consider them on their merit. To this end a small amount of revenue funding has been allocated within the budget to support such provision, with an annual grant being made available to any qualifying business.

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

5.1 This report has no effect on Policy Framework and Procedural Rules.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 A Full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, and this is shown as **Appendix 4**.

7.0 Financial Implications.

7.1 The proposed spending profile on the provision of public toilets across the County Borough is detailed in **Appendix 2**, subject to the recommendations of this report being accepted by Cabinet the savings identified against the service area detailed in 3.5 and 3.6 above of £100k will be substantively achieved.

7.2 A funding bid against the Authority's asset removal budget will be made to support the permanent decommissioning of assets should Cabinet be minded to approve the recommendations in this report to close and demolish facilities where Town and Community Councils are unable to take them over and fund their ongoing provision.

8.0 Recommendations.

8.1 That the Cabinet approval contained in 8.2 – 8.5 are subject to consultation with the relevant employees, and the Corporate Director, Communities being satisfied with outcome of any deliberations arising from the consultation process.

8.2 Cabinet are asked to approve the proposals outlined in 4.13 above to re-introduce the Authority's Comfort Scheme following the withdrawal of specific funding by the Welsh Government.

8.3 Cabinet are asked to approve the proposals outlined in 4.5 - 4.11 above with regard to the provision of public toilets in the three main town centres of Maesteg, Bridgend and Porthcawl. In particular Cabinet are asked to give their approval for formal negotiations to take place with the landlord of the Rhiw Hill Toilets, with a view to these facilities being permanently closed.

8.4 Cabinet are asked to approve the proposals outlined in 4.12 above with regard to the provision of public toilets outside the main town centres.

8.5 Cabinet are asked to approve ending the practice of gentleman's facilities having a male attendant and ladies being serviced by a female attendant. Going forward either a male or female attendant should cleanse both facilities.

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Background documents