

WTF132
FOR DECISION
WARD(S): WINCHESTER TOWN

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

10 JUNE 2009

PUBLIC CONVENIENCE INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP DRAFT REPORT

REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report asks the Forum to comment, on behalf of the Town, on the attached draft Public Convenience Informal Scrutiny Group's report. The Informal Group will meet to consider any comments from the Forum (and comments from the relevant Parish Councils, who were invited to comment t on the draft) before submitting its final report to the Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting on 20 July 2009.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Forum comment as necessary on the attached draft report.

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL
REPORT**

**Public Convenience Provision
Informal Scrutiny Group**

June 2009

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC CONVENIENCE PROVISION INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP

1. **Introduction**

1.1. At their meeting held on 11 November 2008, the Environment Scrutiny Panel resolved to establish the Public Convenience Provision Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG). Its membership was Councillors Lipscomb (Chairman), Busher, Gemmell, Howell, Jackson.

1.2. The establishment of the ISG was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 10 December 2008 who were concerned that the Group should not duplicate the work of the Asset Management Programme ISG. Principal Scrutiny Committee approved the establishment of the ISG at its meeting on 19 January 2009.

1.3. The Group agreed its terms of reference as set out below:

To consider the potential of an asset management plan for public conveniences, based on the priorities and budget available, including:

- i Numbers and provision
- ii Long term maintenance programme
- iii Hours of opening
- iv Cleansing arrangements
- v Provision for disabled persons, carers and parents with children
- vi Budget arrangements
- vii Signing

1.4. The ISG met on five occasions between March and May 2009. The minutes of their meetings are attached as an appendix to this report, but in summary:

1.5. **Meeting 1:** 11 March 2009

- Appointed its Chairman (Councillor Lipscomb)
- Agreed the Terms of Reference
- Received an officer presentation on the current arrangements
- Agreed its work programme

1.6. **Meeting 2:** 24 March 2009

- Received evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Environment (Councillor Pearson)
- Toured the public conveniences in the centre of Winchester (except Tower Street, which was closed due to adjacent building works)

1.7. **Meeting 3:** 27 March 2009

- Toured the public conveniences in the rural District

1.8. **Meeting 4:** 21 April 2009

Received evidence from:

- British Toilet Association (BTA)
- Chairman of Winchester Town Forum
- The Cleansing Manager, Serco
- The Parking and Concessionary Manager
- The Head of Economy and Cultural Services
- The City Centre Partnership

1.9. **Meeting 5:** 14 May 2009

The Group drew together its conclusion and agreed a draft of this Report. Immediately prior to this meeting, the Group inspected the newly refurbished facilities at Abbey Gardens, where the Group were extremely impressed with the architectural quality of the building and the high standard of facility provision within.

2. **Further consultation**

- 2.1. A draft of this report was considered by the Winchester Town Forum at its meeting held on 10 June 2009. The Forum's comments are detailed at Appendix Two of the Report.
- 2.2. A draft of this report was also sent to Alresford Town Council, Bishops Waltham, Wickham and Denmead Parish Councils. Their comments were~~XXX~~:
- 2.3. The Group had also consulted Colden Common, Twyford and Whiteley Parish Councils, regarding provision, and their comments are set out in paragraph ~~XX~~ below.

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. Further details on the recommendations are set out below under the Terms of Reference headings and within the minutes, set out in the appendix.
- 3.2. The Group recommended that:

1. That the Tower Street Public Conveniences not be reopened and that the money planned for its refurbishment, where possible, be re-directed to improve other public conveniences in the town.

2. That the Middle Brook Street Public Conveniences be closed, once the new public conveniences at Silver Hill become available. In the meantime, the lighting at the Middle Brook Street Public Conveniences should be improved.

3. That the Partnership Toilet Scheme (paragraphs **XX-XX** refer) be supported in principle and that, in the Winchester town area, the City Centre Manager investigate, through the BID process, in consultation with the Head of Economic and Cultural Services, and report back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

4. That the Head of Economic and Cultural Services investigate the possibilities for the Partnership Toilet Scheme in the rural District and report back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

5. That officers prepare a long-term programme of planned refurbishment (with costings and identified priorities for improvement) and that these be reported to Cabinet as part of the 2010/11 Capital Programme.

6. That, in terms of improving the condition of the public conveniences, officers execute the “quick wins” identified by the Group at paragraphs **XX** and **XX**, where practical. In particular, the Group underlined the need to routinely check the operation of the disabled alarm systems, particularly at St Catherines Park and Ride car park.

7. That officers investigate and prepare a report to Cabinet on the feasibility of providing a “tardis-style” convenience to serve the night-time economy in central Winchester

8. That large events, such as the Hat Fair, be flagged up to the contractor in advance to prepare longer opening hours and additional cleans and that any significant additional costs be transferred to the event organisers, if possible.

9. That officers draw up and implement a programme of annual deep-cleaning each of the District’s public conveniences.

10. That a member of the Environment Team inspect each of the rural public conveniences at least once a month and more regularly in the Winchester town area.

11. That the public convenience cleaners in Winchester town centre should rotate from one location to another to provide a better service to the public.

12. That officers should consider undertaking Criminal Records Bureau checks on new cleaning staff who worked in the public conveniences.

13 That, during the development of new facilities, or the major refurbishment of existing facilities, officers consider:

a) the imbalance between male and female cubicles

- b) consulting the British Toilet Association and other local authorities on the design of new toilets
- c) bringing the disabled facilities up to current standards
- d) consider favourably the recommendations of the changing places scheme, subject to the practicalities of its implementation
- e) the need for a separate family room and low-level urinals, basins and wc seats for children

14 That the Portfolio Holder for Environment should try to secure sufficient budget for the long term maintenance programme and the consequences of the changes to the Public Convenience NNDR charges.

15 That, without adding clutter to the town and village centres, better signage was required (especially in central Winchester) to direct people to the public conveniences and that funding should be provided to make this possible.

16 That officers investigate the feasibility of the SAT LAV mobile phone system.

17 That the location of public conveniences be included on maps of the town/village centres on notice boards.

18 That the Head of Environment report back progress on the above recommendations to the Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 2 February 2010.

4. **THE GROUP'S CONCLUSIONS**

4.1. **Numbers and Provision**

4.2. BTA advised that, based on their calculations, the centre of Winchester had too few female cubicles (22, rather than their recommended 40) and too many male cubicles (17 cubicles and 25 urinals, whereas the recommended number was 20).

4.3. The Group concluded that officers should consider the imbalance in the ratio of male and female cubicles as new opportunities arise through the development of new facilities (such as Silver Hill) or major refurbishments.

4.4. The BTA recommended that the provision of disabled and baby changing facilities was sufficient.

4.5. The Group concluded that the provision/number of public conveniences in Winchester town was broadly acceptable, subject to their comments on Tower Street and Middle Brook Street below.

4.6. In regard to the provision of public conveniences in the rural District, the Group had not received any evidence to support the case for additional toilets. However, during the consultation on the Report, they specifically highlighted this

issue to the Parish Councils of Colden Comon, Whiteley and Twyford, as the largest conurbations currently without provision.

4.7. The response from the Parish Councils was....

4.8. Tower Street Public Conveniences

- 4.9. In her evidence, Cllr Nelmes (Chairman of the Winchester Town Forum) had questioned the need for the Council to provide a public convenience at Tower Street car park. She considered that this car park was mainly used by commuters who were a short distance from either their offices or the train station. She considered that those visitors that did use the car park were amply served by the nearby Discovery Centre public conveniences.
- 4.10. During discussion, the Group noted that the Parking Manager had received only one complaint whilst the conveniences had been closed during the car park's refurbishment.
- 4.11. The Group agreed that the Tower Street Car Park Public Convenience (including the disabled toilets) was therefore surplus to requirements and agreed that it be closed, with signage directing to the Discovery Centre (Tower Street) public conveniences. The Group agreed with the principle put forward by many of the witnesses that gave evidence that, in Winchester town centre, the Council had sufficient capacity to provide fewer, but better maintained, conveniences. Whilst the closure would lead to some minor water, electricity and routine maintenance savings, it would allow the contractor more time to clean other conveniences.
- 4.12. A driving factor in the Group making this recommendation was the imminent capital works required to the Tower Street toilets (as part of the car park's wider refurbishment). The Group therefore agreed that these not be progressed and that the Head of Environment be requested to investigate whether the money associated to these works could instead be utilised to improve other public conveniences within the Winchester town area.
- 4.13. **Middle Brook Street**
- 4.14. The Group had identified the poor condition of the conveniences at Middle Brook Street and their proximity to other nearby publicly available toilets.
- 4.15. The Group therefore recommended that consideration be given that these conveniences be closed, once the new public conveniences at the adjacent Silver Hill development become available. The Group had noted that the Middle Brook Street conveniences were predominately used by the market traders and that the market would be relocated in association with the Silver Hill development.
- 4.16. In the meantime, the Group recommended that the lighting in these conveniences should be improved.

4.17. **Partnership Toilet Scheme**

4.18. The BTA, the City Centre Partnership and the Head of Economic and Cultural Services had spoken in support of the partnership toilet scheme. The Scheme involved local authorities making a financial contribution to commercial organisations (such as shops, pubs and restaurants) to ensure that their toilets were open to the general public. The Scheme typically involved signage from the local authority and the businesses benefited from increased footfall into their premises.

4.19. The Head of Economic and Cultural Services had suggested that the Council might wish to consider working in partnership with a local pub, tearoom or other business to provide additional toilets to serve the rural tourism hub areas associated with the anticipated increased demand from the South Downs National Park.

4.20. Following a debate on this issue, the Group recommended that the Council support the project in principle and requested that, in the Winchester Town area, the City Centre Manager take the project forward within the BID process, in consultation with the Head of Economic and Cultural Services.

4.21. The Group recommended that the Head of Economic and Cultural Services investigate the opportunities for the scheme in the rural District (for example, with Public Houses) and the Group suggested that any scheme should include incentives (for example, a discretionary reduction in Business Rates) and would require a survey of existing, non-Council provision.

4.22. The Group requested that progress on the scheme (in the Winchester town area and the remainder of the District) be reported back to the Environment Scrutiny Panel by the Head of Economic and Cultural Services.

5. **Long Term Maintenance Programme**

5.1. The Group discovered that there was no long term maintenance programme for the authority's public conveniences.

5.2. The Group therefore recommended that officers prepare long-term programme of planned refurbishment (with costings and identified priorities for improvement) and that these be reported to Cabinet as part of the 2010/11 Capital Programme.

5.3. In addition to this, from the evidence gathered on their tour and the advice from the BTA, the Group requested that officers execute the following quick wins, where possible:

5.4. **Quick Wins**

1. Replacement of elderly hand driers (as likely to be energy inefficient)
2. Replacement of toilet rolls with robust, enclosed paper dispensers (as they were more hygienic and cheaper in the long run)

3. Feminine hygiene bins should be provided in each cubicle and not the current practice of providing only one in a communal area.
4. Nappy disposal bins should be provided as this could prevent attempts to flush them away.
5. Toilet seats should be replaced yearly.
6. Door locks should be easier to use (especially for those who had difficulties in using their hands)
7. All cubicle doors (both male and female) should have coat hooks
8. Shelves should be provided by hand washing and baby changing facilities
9. Mirrors should be provided

Quick Wins identified from the Group's Tour:

10. The Discovery Centre

- a. the emergency pull switch in the disabled toilets did not work
- b. that the stainless steel was of poor quality and should be replaced

11. Middle Brook Street

- a. the third mirror be removed from the ladies' toilet and replaced with a baby changing table
- b. that there was no emergency alarm in the disabled toilet and no hooks on the doors)

12. Chesil Street Car Park

- a. there were no baby changing facilities
- b. there were loose pan seats in the ladies';
- c. that (as there was no mirror in the ladies') the mirror from Middle Brook Street should be transferred to Chesil Street
- d. that the light in the disabled toilet did not work
- e. that the coat hook on the back of the disabled toilet door was positioned too high for wheelchair users.
- f. Hand driers were out of the ark!

13. Other general points the Group noted were that the signage to the conveniences was poor and that the sign to the closed ladies' toilets in Abbey Gardens needed to be removed.

14. Worthy Lane Car Park, Winchester

- a. Needed a thorough clean and paint
- b. Poor smell (attributed to clogged urinal pipes)
- c. Required a cigarette stub collector outside
- d. External drains were blocked
- e. The hand-drier in the gents' did not work

- f. A baby changing table, mirror, better signage and door hooks were needed in the ladies'.
- g. Entrance to the ladies was poorly positioned and could benefit from improved landscaping

15. Alresford

- a. Requires an additional "Ladies" sign
- b. Gents' had no toilet seats

16. Denmead

- a. Windows required cleaning (to include the external lamp)
- b. Broken toilet roll holder in the ladies'
- c. Sanitary bin broken
- d. No mirror in the ladies'
- e. Graffiti on the gents' door
- f. Despite visiting just after the cleaner, there was a blocked toilet in the gents'

17. Wickham

- a. Obscene graffiti on the cubicle door in the gents'
- b. A light in the disabled toilets not working
- c. The eaves required cleaning
- d. A baby changing table was required in the ladies'

18. Bishops Waltham

- a. Broken tiles at the entrance to the ladies'
- b. A mirror and baby changing table was required in the ladies'
- c. Obscene graffiti in the gents'
- d. The handwash facilities did not work in the disabled toilets

19. St Catherines Park and Ride

- a. The internal walls required re-painting
- b. No toilet rolls in the disabled toilets
- c. The alarm in the disabled toilet is not linked to the Out of Hours service but simply to an external klaxon. The Group requested that this system should be investigated as matter of priority.

5.5. The Group had also noted the audio message service in the new Abbey Gardens facilities. Although the Head of Economic and Cultural Services had suggested that this system could be used to promote tourist and general information (in a variety of languages), the Group agreed that this would detract from the peaceful ambience of the conveniences. They therefore agreed that the system should continue to play quiet classical music, as it had on their visit to the facility.

- 5.6. It had also been suggested that all the public conveniences should provide basic tourist information publications and notice boards. However, the Group agreed that these should not be installed as they would be vulnerable to vandalism.

6. **Hours of Opening**

- 6.1. From the evidence they had gathered, the Group had not identified a need to alter the hours of opening, subject to the provision of a 24-hour convenience in central Winchester.
- 6.2. Through the evidence given by its witnesses, the Group discovered that there was a need for 24-hour public convenience provision in the centre of Winchester. Whilst the public toilets in rural areas remained open overnight (because they were less likely to be vandalised) a 24-hour provision had been recommended by the BTA because;
- without it, the Police were largely powerless to act against street urination
 - its absence resulted in an unwelcome cleaning problem for shop keepers etc
 - not everyone who needs the toilet late at night felt comfortable using the conveniences in the public houses that were open at those times.
- 6.3. In acknowledging the potential for vandalism if the current toilets were unlocked, the BTA had recommended the installation of a tardis-style toilet. These automatically flushed though and opened the doors on the cubicles every 20 minutes.
- 6.4. The Group therefore recommended that officers investigate the feasibility to provide a tardis-style convenience to serve the two centres of Winchester's night-time economy (the Broadway and Jewry Street) and prepare a report for consideration by Cabinet.

7. **Cleaning Arrangements**

- 7.1. The Group concluded that the cleanliness of the public conveniences was broadly acceptable, but it was apparent that they were generally "unloved", looked "tired" and functional at minimal standard of provision and maintenance. However, they found the newer provision to be excellent. Older toilets were difficult to keep more than superficially clean (which they were) and a refurbishment programme was needed to reflect the City Council's status as a caring authority and major tourist centre.
- 7.2. The Group recognised the importance of good design in making public conveniences easier to maintain.

- 7.3. The Group therefore recommended that during the design stage of future public conveniences and/or any major refurbishments, officers consult with the BTA and other local authorities.
- 7.4. The BTA, Serco and Head of Environment supported the suggestion that cleaners should rotate between locations in Winchester town. This was likely to provide a better service to the public, deter vandalism and increase the attractiveness of the job (the Group noted the difficulties of recruitment in this area). The Group noted that this was currently the subject of negotiations between Secro and the Council and agreed that this level of detail should remain with officers.
- 7.5. The Group had also received a suggestion that cleaning staff working in the public conveniences should be subject to the Criminal Records Bureau Check and recommended that this issue be implemented following discussions with the contractor.
- 7.6. The Group had also noted that the Council was currently reliant on the contractor, Serco, to inspect the conditions of the conveniences. The Group therefore recommended this should be supplemented by inspections from the Head of Environment's Team; at least once a month to each rural convenience and more often in the Winchester town area. The Group agreed that a check of the disabled alarms system should be included as part of the inspections.
- 7.7. The Group considered that the condition and appearance of the public conveniences would benefit greatly from an annual deep clean recommended that a programme be drawn up as soon as possible. The Group recommended that, as part of the deep clean, the tiling be re-grouted where necessary.
- 7.8. The Group had also considered the effect large events had on public conveniences in terms of increased use, additional cleaning and requirement for extended opening hours. The Group recommended that these events, such as the HatFair, should be flagged up to the contractor and that any significant additional costs be recharged to event organisers, where possible.

8. **Provision for disabled persons, carers and parents with children**

- 8.1. In general, the Group found the provision for disabled persons, carers and parents with children to be acceptable, but requested that officers investigate the practicalities of implementing the following quick wins:
- i) that the grab handles should be of a contrasting colour to the walls
 - ii) that some rails were missing from the inside of doors
 - iii) that the hand washing facilities should be accessible from the toilet seat, in future designs
 - iv) that the floor surface should be non-slip
 - v) that the flush handle should be placed on the wheelchair side of the cistern, to save reaching across, in future designs

- vi) that the emergency alarm cord should be within reach of the floor (in the event of a user collapsing) and at wheelchair height (they had noted that some cords had been tied up).
- vii) Baby changing units should be safe (through the provision of straps or a 'cup' type design)
- viii) That, ideally, there should be a toddler seat with strap next to the baby changing facility.

8.2. Longer Term Improvements

- 8.3. That all disabled facilities should be brought up to current standards, including remotely monitored alarms, when refurbished.
- 8.4. The BTA had recommended that there was a case for abolishing the current system of accessing disabled toilets via a radar key. They argued that the keys were easily available via the internet, but that this made it difficult for disabled foreign and non-local disabled users to access the toilets. However, the Group agreed that to make the disabled toilets open to all users during the day would make them vulnerable to vandalism and therefore, as a result, more difficult to use for the majority of disabled people.
- 8.5. The BTA also spoke in support of "Changing Places" toilets and the Group noted that they were likely to be a standard requirement of future DDA legislation. The Group noted that DDA legislation could not be applied retrospectively and therefore agreed that officers continue to ensure that all future public conveniences be constructed in accordance with the latest Building Control and DDA legislation. However, if physical space and budgets permitted, officers should consider favourably the recommendations within the Changing Places scheme.
- 8.6. The Group had also noted the need for a separate family room (to cater for single adults with male and female children) and low-level urinals, basins and wc seats for children.
- 8.7. The Group agreed that these issues should be considered during the development of any new public convenience or during the major refurbishment of existing facilities, depending on sufficient space

9. Budget arrangements

- 9.1. The Head of Environment had advised that there was sufficient budget for:
 - a) the day-to-day maintenance
 - b) the identified "quick wins"
 - c) the annual deep clean
- 9.2. However, the Group noted the need for the Portfolio Holder for Environment to secure sufficient budget for the long term maintenance programme and the

consequences of changes to the Public Convenience NNDR (Business Rates) charges.

- 9.3. The Group noted that in January 2009, the Government had repealed the 1936 Act which forbade local authorities to charge the public to use a urinal. Whilst the witnesses had reservations about charging, the Group raised no objection to the principle of charging, so long as the money collected was used to improve the toilets.

10. **Signing**

- 10.1. From the tour and the evidence gathered from the BTA and the Head of Economic and Cultural Services, the Group agreed that, without cluttering town and village centres, more signs were required (especially in central Winchester) to direct people to the public conveniences. The Group agreed that visitors should be able to find public conveniences easily.
- 10.2. The Group had learnt of the "SAT LAV" mobile phone system operated by Westminster Council and agreed that officers should investigate the feasibility of the scheme.
- 10.3. Similarly, the Group agreed that the location of public conveniences should be included on town/village centre maps on notice boards.

Appendices