

**INVESTIGATION AND REVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 JANUARY 2010**

**ITEM 7 REPORT OF THE INVESTIGATION & REVIEW SCRUTINY PANEL
ON THE PROVISION OF TOILET FACILITIES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Existing provision of toilets outside Loughborough is not satisfactory.

- Management is labour intensive and is relatively expensive
- Toilets are often mistreated and in poor condition
- Toilets are used for improper purposes

However the panel are firmly convinced that the removal of toilet facilities would be unpopular and inconvenient and would have a very negative effect on the quality of life for existing users.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that toilet provision would be retained but the existing provision be replaced with an alternative methods of provision.

We have identified two possibilities.

- The removal of all existing toilets and the implementation of a Community Toilet Scheme,
- Outsourcing of toilet provision

Recommendation 2

We recommend the outsourcing of toilet provision to a specialist company.

The outsourcing solution has definite advantages, but does not provide the level of budget savings as the alternative community scheme. Evidence suggests that outsourcing would remove the need for continued management effort and would lead to a very low level of complaints. This panel report provides the background to enable a decision to be made.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of reference

- 1.1.1 To review the existing provision.
- 1.1.2 To identify problems associated with the current system.
- 1.1.3 To ascertain the views of towns and villages concerning toilet provision
- 1.1.4 To identify alternative provision
- 1.1.5 To evaluate alternative provision
- 1.1.6 To make recommendations

1.2 Methods

The Panel was advised by Officers who produced detailed analyses of individual toilet facilities, detailed breakdowns of costs and who accompanied the panel Chairman on a guided tour of all the facilities. The Panel acknowledges the great help that Officers provided.

The panel contacted suppliers of alternative provision and researched the provision of Community Toilet facilities.

Letters have been sent to all Town and Parish Councils asking for their views on future provision.

The Panel Chair has inspected outsourced provision in Cotswold District Council and has interviewed the Officers responsible for that contract.

Review of the Existing Provision

The existing provision consists of toilet blocks in

Villages and Towns

Anstey

Barrow

Birstall

Quorn¹

Newtown Lindford²

Shepshed

Sileby

Woodhouse

Parks etc

Charnwood Water

Outwoods³

Queens Park⁴

Southfields Park⁵

Derby Road Playing fields⁶

There are

¹ Quorn Parish Council have taken over the administration and running of this facility

² The Newtown Lindford toilets are closed as alternative facilities have been provided by the County Council in the nearby car park.

³ The Outwoods facility is the responsibility of the Leisure Services department, but is serviced by the team that cover the village toilets.

⁴ Queens park toilets usage is monitored .on a daily basis by the Park Warden

⁵ The Southfields Park toilets had become notorious and were featured in Gay News. These conveniences are closed and only opened for specific park events..

⁶ These facilities are managed by the Open spaces team and are not within the remit of this panel.

Management

These toilets are managed by a team of two based in CBC who have the use of a hired van. The team visits each toilet in the morning, unlocking and clearing, renewing toilet papers etc.

The total journey takes about 3.5 hours. The process is repeated in the evening.

The budget for 2010/2011 includes a figure of £78651 for the mobile cleaning team

An inspection in the morning showed that the toilets were generally in clean condition and all were useable, but all showed signs of damage to fittings and graffiti.

There have been reports that the times of opening are variable and sometimes late, particularly in the case of Shepshed which towards the end of the run and arrival may be delayed if there have been additional cleaning work needed on the route. There have been occasions when the toilets have remained locked until 10.00 am.

If management could be taken over by towns and parishes there would be some local labour costs and the other current costs would have to be met.

Cleaning materials	£3795
Water	£6875
NNDR	£4628

Improper activities

Unattended public Conveniences are notoriously used for improper activities. The facility close to the junction of Forest Road and Epinal Way was so used to such an extent that it has been taken out of use permanently, the facility on the Leicester Road frontage of Southfields park became so notorious that it was listed in Gay News and is now permanently closed, only being opened for specific events. An Officers' report on the misuse of the Sibleby facility has been presented to Cabinet and abuse was so serious that the facility had to be closed for a time to dissuade regular abusers. The cleaning staff have to deal with used needles, condoms, carrots etc on a regular basis. The misuse of facilities is encouraged by the enclosed nature of the space and the fact that there is no possibility of observation of activities from outside. (this is an issue which is addressed by the proposal for outsourcing.. see below)

Vandalism

Many of the toilets show signs of wilful vandalism with broken fittings, toilet paper stuffed into the pan causing blockages and graffiti. Reports from officers and residents suggest that much of this occurs when children are coming out of school and find the toilets a place in which they can be hidden from public observation. It is notable that in all those toilets with a disabled section accessible only with a RADAR key there is no sign of vandalism. Repair of vandalism is a significant ongoing cost; a large part of the repair and maintenance budget is associated with wilful damage. Repairs and maintenance costs £4840 a year.

Summary

The present system provides a service which is appreciated by residents, but it does not represent a satisfactory use of resources, and it creates ongoing problems. The panel recommend that it should be changed.

2. THE RANGE OF OPTIONS AVAILABLE.

1. Convert all toilet facilities to supervised operation.

This would be very expensive, the salaries and wages costs for the Loughborough toilets are £26,000 each. To provide permanent staff for each toilet would cost £250,000 a year. In view of the relatively light usage this could not be justified.

2. Hand over responsibility to town and parish councils

The evidence from town and parish councils was varied some would be prepared to use their cleaning and maintenance staff to maintain a service and some would not. For the toilets in the smaller villages, the Outwoods and Charnwood Water this would not provide a solution. Quorn parish council have already taken over responsibility with the assistance of a grant. Syston and Shepshed might be prepared to do the same. If some towns and parishes took over responsibility CBC would retain responsibility for the rest and would need to maintain a mobile cleaning team and would lose economies of scale.

3. Close all the toilets and adopt a Community Toilet Approach.

The system is being promoted by central government, and has been adopted by a significant number of Local Authorities. Shops, restaurants, coffee shops and public houses are invited to apply, and if the facilities are found suitable they receive an annual grant towards the cost of water, electricity, cleaning supplies etc. Of the 10 schemes found in an internet search the annual fee is in the range of £700 to £1,000. It would be necessary to identify at least three facilities in each site and at least one of them would have to meet DDA standards and there would be a need for baby changing facilities.

Assuming that we provided 3 community toilets for the seven towns and villages and offered the lower figure of £700 the payments would total £14,700. However there would be overheads in administration, and inspection.

Internet searches reveal that some authorities have had difficulty in getting recruits and that a number have reinstated some public facilities. Where the provision is largely in public houses there are some concerns about use by children. Panel members have reported problems in finding suitable premises, which would be particularly difficult in Shepshed. Evidence from internet searches suggests that there have been problems in finding premises, that maintenance standards are variable, and that it officers' time would be needed to allocate licences, organise signing and information, to agree the payments and inspect the facilities.

The panel think that this is a cheap and potentially satisfactory solution for the towns and villages, but would leave Charnwood Water without a solution.

4. Outsource the provision of toilets

Our research has identified one firm that offers a specialist outsourcing service. Although no detailed costings have been provided it appears that the company are able to provide a service that would be comparable in costs to our present budget, and might offer savings of up to 20%.

The proposal would involve the use of our existing buildings, would remove all the existing internal provision, and install complete units, which would have an external door.

They would remove all problems of abuse and vandalism. The Panel Chair has inspected units managed by this company and found them very satisfactory.

If a charge of 20p is levied (as is the case at the facility inspected by the Panel Chair) the firm will cover all the costs of water and electricity. The maintenance would be the responsibility of an area based engineer and the firm would employ a local cleaner. Generally they employ fit early retired people.

The door is opened on a time switch and the cleaner locks up after the evening clean.

The Panel Chair has discussed the installation with the Officer at the local authority responsible for the facility who commented:

- Complaints had fallen by 90% and were now negligible.
- the company were keen to employ cleaners who were local and who knew local people and this had been a good move. There had been some adverse comments about the loos being unisex, but people now accepted that this was the same situation as at home,
- There had been some complaints about having to pay 20p but it was pointed out that it would otherwise be a charge on the Council tax and it had been accepted.
- A few people had had difficulty in mastering the process of putting in the 20p and then opening the door, but this was no longer a problem.

Overall the Council concluded that the outsourcing had been a success, that public toilet provision was no longer a problem, and that there had been significant savings.

Costings.

The company suggested that the cost of conversion is normally amortised over 15 years and added to the maintenance costs. As a very first approximation, the company believe that, subject to a detailed site investigation they could offer a contract which would be close to our present budget, might offer some savings, but would produce a very much better service.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel consider that the existing system is unsustainable and recommend that serious consideration should be given to outsourcing to a specialist company. It is recommended that the contract is advertised through the normal channels and that bids are subsequently evaluated

However if there are no bids within the budget considered affordable a community toilet scheme should be considered a possible solution, but with a number of negative aspects.