

SUBJECT: Future provision of Public Conveniences

MEETING: Strong Communities Select Committee

DATE: 10th September 2015

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To update members on the provision of public conveniences at various sites within the County and seek feedback from members on options for the future provision of public conveniences.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That members review the information provided, consider the options for the future provision of the service (paragraph 4.1 below) and offer commentary for submission to Cabinet.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 In 2010 the Strong Communities Select Committee undertook a detailed review of the provision of public conveniences. This informed a strategy for the future provision of public conveniences and as a result new arrangements were implemented including some closures but also transfer of responsibility to other providers (community and town councils).
- 3.2 Since then some further adjustments to service provision have been arrived at through greater collaboration with town councils and mandated in the MCC budgets for 14/15 and 15/16.

3.3 This has resulted in the majority of public conveniences remaining open to the public but the method of management and provision varying between towns and villages.

3.4 Appendix 1 lists those toilets where MCC retains an 'interest' and approved proposals for their future provision, including details of current revenue and capital costs associated with possible transfer as well as a commentary on capital receipts opportunities.

3.5 Those toilets that remain the responsibility and cost to MCC after the proposals already approved are:

1. Abergavenny: Whitehorse Lane
Castle Street
Brewery Yard
Bus station
2. Monmouth: Blestium Street (Cattle market)
3. Usk: Maryport Street car park
Usk Island
4. Tintern: Beaufort Cottage

4. REASONS:

4.1 Following their meeting held on 12th March, 2015, members of the Strong Communities Select committee have asked for a further update on developments surrounding public conveniences. Furthermore, as part of the exercise to identify potential savings within Operations, consideration has been given to the future provision of public conveniences by the Council

4.2 As previously noted, guidance from Welsh Government indicates that whilst there is no statutory requirement on the part of the Authority to provide this service, members will be mindful of the likely impact of removing these facilities from our local towns, both in terms of the needs of local communities and also with regard to tourist activity, which plays such a significant role in the local economy

- 4.3 Recent discussions with colleagues in Town Councils have highlighted an interest in the possible transfer of these services to facilitate more localised delivery arrangements, on the premise that they are able to meet the cost of the provision of that facility
- 4.4 The revenue costs associated with the provision of these services within the separate town areas, are incorporated within appendix 1. This is based on the presumption that that in each case, the respective town council is prepared to meet the full cost of providing the facility. This information has recently been provided to each town council as appropriate. (Appendix 1 also provides a status/options comment that summarises comments in paragraph 4.10 below).
- 4.5 In terms of the available funding to undertake the refurbishment exercise it is possible that most of these sites could be accommodated, however, having regard for the existing provision within Abergavenny, it is unlikely that additional funding could be identified to refurbish the facility at White Horse Lane (Abergavenny Town Council acknowledge that the major refurbishment of the toilets is unlikely in the foreseeable future).
- 4.6 Welsh Government recognises that each authority will need to address the continued provision of such facilities in the context of the limited resources available and to consider a range of approaches that will facilitate appropriate provision within its local communities. To this effect, consideration may be given to extending the use of existing facilities in leisure centres, libraries and other public buildings as part of a wider strategy to this meet this requirement
- 4.7 To date, arrangements have been made for the transfer of facilities at Jubilee Way and Bank Street to Caldicot and Chepstow Town Councils respectively, also Chepstow TC have taken on the cost of managing and cleaning the toilets at the TIC. At this point, however, there are still no other clear expressions of interest in the transfer of facilities
- 4.8 Following discussions with CADW, it has been established that facilities at Tintern Abby will not be made available to the public. In addition, following recent discussions with Tintern Community Council, it has been noted that the council is not currently inclined toward the transfer of the facilities at Beaufort Cottage
- 4.9 Members have requested an update on current arrangements which is provided within the report. However officers are taking this opportunity to promote discussion around options available for the future provision of public conveniences. In offering suggestions officers are prompting further discussion but are also conscious of the financial pressure upon local authorities combined with the success achieved so far in keeping public conveniences open but provided by community and town councils.

- 4.10 Within this context officers would suggest that members commission officers to consult with town and community councils on the option of complete withdrawal from direct provision and management of public conveniences as from April 2016. In conjunction with this decision the authority would enter into discussions with the relevant town and community councils about the potential transfer of the public conveniences to their responsibility.
- 4.11 MCC supports community and town councils that provide public conveniences (previously provided by MCC) by an annual grant of £1200. To support any further transfers officers would suggest that the grant continue to be paid for a further three years after the current approval expires but at that time is withdrawn completely.
- 4.12 The grant provided by Welsh Government to private businesses that make their facilities available to the general public has been withdrawn (subsumed into the revenue support grant). Should members be minded to completely withdraw from the direct provision of public conveniences then they may wish to mitigate the impact by supporting shops and businesses that make their facilities available, similar to the Welsh Government scheme, albeit within a limited budget.
- 4.13 Further mitigation may also be offered by advertising the availability of conveniences in Council buildings that might reasonably be made available to the public.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

As detailed in appendices 1

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS: Appendix 2

7. CONSULTEES:

Senior Leadership Team
All Cabinet Members
Head of Legal Services
Head of Finance
Head of Employee Services

8. **BACKGROUND PAPERS: Nil**
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