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**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 11 JUNE 2014****PORTFOLIO: ENVIRONMENT****REPORT FROM HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES****SUBJECT: PROVISION OF PUBLIC TOILETS****1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 That reduced operating hours are introduced for the toilets in Back Lane, Rochford as detailed within this report. That public consultation is undertaken as to whether these facilities are required in the longer term and/or whether they should be relocated.
- 1.2 That an “exit” survey is undertaken to ascertain the usage by the public of the facilities in Hockley and Great Wakering, and that a public consultation is undertaken so as to inform a final decision regarding the future of the toilets.
- 1.3 That market testing is undertaken in respect of the facilities in Hullbridge and Rayleigh, together with the adjacent land, to ascertain whether there is any business potential in developing the sites for alternative uses, but include an obligation to keep the facilities available to the public.
- 1.4 That a further report be submitted to the Executive, once the various options have been explored, in order that the results can be considered as part of the budget process.

**2 FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE No: 6/14****3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 As part of the annual budget agreed by Council in January, it was resolved that a review would be undertaken of public conveniences as part of the Council’s on-going budget review.
- 3.2 The present facilities require substantial improvements over the next two years and a decision is required as to whether further resources should be invested. The options will be explored through usage surveys and public consultation and a further report will explore the options of improving the facilities at the existing sites, the relocation of individual conveniences to different locations in the local area, or the closure of under utilised facilities.

**4 SALIENT INFORMATION**

- 4.1 There are six public conveniences in the District of Rochford that are cleaned and maintained by SITA as part of the Street Cleansing contract. The toilets are located at Back Lane, Rochford; Pooles Lane, Hullbridge; Crown Hill, Rayleigh; Southend Road, Hockley; High Street, Great Wakering and Hockley

Woods, Hockley. The toilets in Hockley Woods are of a modern design and are not considered as part of this report.

- 4.2 A number of redevelopment options have been considered over the last two years. The main obstacle to any progress has been the cost of providing toilet facilities that are fit for purpose and the reaction of the public to any potential closure of individual or all of the sites concerned.
- 4.3 The facilities in Rochford are subject to considerable misuse and the building layout does not meet current standards with regard to layout. The facilities have been operating on reduced operating hours (4.30pm each week day and all day Sunday) and have been closed for protracted periods over the past 12 months due to vandalism and intimidation of the contractor's staff. There has been no adverse reaction from the public. It is therefore proposed to make the reduced operational hours permanent, and to undertake public consultation on future provision and the potential to relocate them.
- 4.4 It is considered that facilities at Hockley and Great Wakering should be considered for closure, due to low usage. There is a difficulty in that the Council does not, at present, have accurate usage data. This exercise has been attempted in the past, but the automatic counters were vandalised and no useful information was obtained. It is now proposed that an "exit" survey is undertaken at low usage sites whereby Council staff will ask a few pertinent questions.
- 4.5 At the sites in Rayleigh and Hullbridge there is additional land in Council ownership adjacent to the toilet facilities that could be included as a development opportunity to attract private business. Both facilities are located in a detached brick constructed building requiring some modernisation although the appliances are satisfactory. The facilities in Rayleigh require significant investment in the structure. It is considered that alternative uses of both sites should be explored and that as part of any agreement there would be an obligation for toilet facilities to be available to the public.
- 4.6 A number of different options have been considered in the past including the closure of all toilets and offering a fee to local public houses and restaurants to allow their facilities to be used by the general public. The response from the trade was poor and this was not considered a viable option. There was also concern about allowing young children into licensed premises.
- 4.7 Another option explored was to pay Parish and Town Councils to clean and maintain the toilets. This option also failure to secure adequate support for a variety of reasons. The proposed public consultation outlined in this report will include the Parish Councils and other interested parties.

## **5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 The options available are to undertake the work to refurbish the toilets at the Council's expense or to take no action and allow the facilities to deteriorate with associated risks or to close some or all the facilities.

**6 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Whilst most of the facilities are serviceable, they all require modernisation and those in Rochford and Rayleigh require a major investment. If no investment is made over the next two years they will continue to deteriorate and become an attraction for vandals with the subsequent problems of crime and disorder.

**7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There has been a history of vandalism concerning the toilet and the various unsavoury acts which have taken place especially in the Back Lane toilets Rochford. The present toilet facilities are not conducive in preventing crime and it should be noted that as the facilities age so the level of vandalism will increase. Toilet facilities which are old and do not meet modern standards increase the perception that the area is "run down" and neglected.

**8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The public consultation, monitoring and marketing of the facilities can be met within existing resources.

**9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 It is not a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide public toilets, but if they are present then they should meet current standards and not be a potential hazard to the users of the facilities.

**10 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The provision of public conveniences has implications for public and individual health, transportation, crime prevention, urban design, economic and cultural development and social equity and accessibility. It is an important factor in delivering a "people friendly" environment for everyone who comes to the centre of the town and villages in Rochford.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: 

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**Head of Environmental Services**

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

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