

REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 9 NOVEMBER 2011

PORTFOLIO: ENVIRONMENT

REPORT FROM HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE PROVISION OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 That, with the exception of the facilities within Hockley Woods, the public conveniences in Hockley, Hullbridge, Rayleigh, Rochford and Great Wakering will close with effect from 1 April 2012.
- 1.2 That, by January 2012, officers develop a Public Toilet Strategy for the District in order to minimise the impact of these closures. This will include specific proposals for each site.

2 FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE No: 15/11

3 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 At the meeting of Council held on 25 January 2011, a 45% reduction was agreed in the budget for public conveniences (previously £101,000).
- 3.2 This comprised £15,000 for 2011/12 ongoing and £30,000 for 2012/13 ongoing. The savings for 2011/12 were found by reducing maintenance budgets and identifying sources of income. It is not practicable however, to reduce this budget by a further £30,000 and officers have, therefore, investigated additional funding opportunities and alternative provision.
- 3.3 Letters were sent to the Town and Parish Councils in respect of the facilities in the urban centres of Rayleigh, Rochford, Hockley, Hullbridge and Great Wakering. The offer was also made to attend Parish meetings to discuss details and meetings were attended in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hullbridge. Two broad options were identified, one based upon the status quo whereby the contract with SITA would remain in place and the Parishes would make up the shortfall, calculated at £7,500 p.a. each. The second option involved the parishes making their own arrangements for cleansing and locking up with the Council making an annual contribution of £3,267 towards these costs, together with full payment of NNDR, and typical utility costs. The Council would also retain the responsibility for major repairs.
- 3.4 Responses have been received from Rayleigh, Rochford and Hullbridge declining either option. Each Parish Council has expressed concern over the loss of facilities and some suggested that the installation of new self-cleansing units should be considered.

- 3.5 It is proposed, therefore, that all of the facilities are closed on 31 March 2012 with the exception of those in Hockley Woods. These facilities will in future be maintained through our Grounds Maintenance contract.
- 3.6 The sites concerned have been surveyed and each one is considered to have development opportunities. Proposals are being developed for consideration by Members at a later date. Some of the sites are considered suitable for commercial redevelopment with the option of imposing an on-going obligation to provide public toilet facilities.
- 3.7 In order to minimise the impact of these closures it is proposed to develop an overall strategy for the District which will include site specific assessments, commercial opportunities and the potential to reinvest capital receipts at alternative locations.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 A research paper produced by the House of Commons identifies the significant role of public conveniences together with alternatives such as community toilets (The provision of Public Toilets, 2008).
- 4.2 A community toilet is a facility run by a commercial business, such as a catering establishment, where the local authority provides a subsidy to make facilities available to the wider public. Opportunities have been examined in Rochford, Hullbridge and Hockley, but no businesses have been identified that were prepared to accept the arrangement.
- 4.3 Officers have also researched the costs of installation and maintenance of automatic public conveniences, the details of which are as follows:-

Fully automatic self cleansing units (capital)	£70,000
Connection to services (estimated capital)	£30,000
Annual servicing costs (estimated) Costs can be off set against income and advertising.	£15,000

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The lack of availability of public toilets can result in street cleansing issues for the Council and local businesses. It is known that such issues currently occur in Rayleigh as part of their night time economy, as facilities are closed during the evening.
- 5.2 Closure of our toilets will invariably lead to an increase of these issues, particularly where there are no alternative facilities.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The budget for public conveniences is in the order of £101,000 comprising £74,600 contractor costs for opening, cleansing and maintaining the facilities; £5,175 for NNDR; £8,400 for utilities and £11,000 for major maintenance.
- 6.2 The Medium Term Financial Strategy identifies on-going savings of £15,000 for 2011/12, which have been achieved, and £30,000 for 2012/13.
- 6.3 If the contract is cancelled, it will be necessary to compensate the company for loss of management overhead, profit, equipment leasing costs and potentially, redundancy costs, which is estimated at approximately £10,000.
- 6.4 Whilst the buildings remain out of use, there will be a continued requirement to pay NNDR of £5,175 and the need to retain a small maintenance budget of around £2,000. From the balance, in the order of £12,000 will be required to fund the arrangements for the toilets in Hockley Woods with the Grounds Maintenance Contractor. The remaining £26,500, will provide additional budget savings.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Public Health Act 1936 gives local authorities a power to provide public conveniences but imposes no duty to do so.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The lack of public toilets can result in certain groups feeling anxious about getting out, noticeably older people, the disabled and those with small children. Accordingly an equalities impact assessment has been completed.

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: _____

Head of Environmental Services

Background Papers:

None.

For further information please contact Richard Evans (Head of Environmental Services) on:-

Phone: 01702 318044

Email: richard.evans@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.