



South Holland District Council

Review of Public Toilet Facilities provided by South Holland
District Council

An Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken by a Member Task Group on behalf of
Performance Monitoring Panel

(3rd January 2019)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2018 the Performance Monitoring Panel identified public toilets in South Holland to be added to the Panel's 2018/19 work plan. This related to queries regarding location, costs and refurbishment of these facilities.
- 1.2 A Member task group was formed consisting of 5 Members, and supported by a Manger independent to this area under review, and a Democratic Services Officer.

2. Scope of the Review

- 2.1 The scope of the review was agreed at the first meeting of the Public Toilet Task Group on 23rd April 2018.
- 2.2 The group agreed to look at the locations, costs, usage and refurbishment of all public toilets within the District that were the responsibility of SHDC.
- 2.3 The agreed terms of reference were:
 - To review public toilets in the District in relation to location, cleaning regimes, usage, reasons for closure and running costs.
 - To use information gathered to ensure value for money, good service and that the right money was being spent in the right place.
- 2.4 The following toilets which are owned or maintained by SHDC were considered as part of the review:

Spalding
Sheepmarket
Vine Street Car Park
Bus Station, Winfrey Avenue
Ayscoughfee Gardens

Donington
Park Lane

Long Sutton
West Street

Crowland
West Street

Holbeach
Church Street

Sutton Bridge
Bridge Road

3. Membership of Task Group

The task group consisted of the following Members:

Elected Chair: Cllr G K Dark
Cllr JR Astill
Cllr CJTH Brewis
Cllr TA Carter
Cllr PC Foyster

4. Background to Review

- 4.1 The Council operates 9 blocks of public toilets in the District. Several of these are located within or adjacent to public car parks, one is part of Asycoughfee Gardens and others are located centrally in towns and villages.
- 4.2 Provision of public toilets is not a statutory requirement. A BBC report in 2016 identified that at least 1782 public toilets had closed in the previous decade. Several areas were identified as having no council run toilet facilities at all.
- 4.3 The Local Government Association, Public Health England, Age UK and other organisations in recent years have voiced concerns over closures and promoted the need for such facilities to remain available in the community.
- 4.4 SHDC has not reduced the provision of public toilets in the District.
- 4.5 During the Budget October 2018 a proposal was announced that public toilets would no longer be required to pay business rates. This was announced in the context of a further decline in public toilet facilities. In a BBC news report at the time of the budget announcement, the British Toilet Association estimated that over 40%of public toilets had disappeared in the last decade.
- 4.6 Government policy is now being drafted to give local authorities power to grant discretionary relief on business rates for public toilets that they own or maintain.

5. Method of Review

- 5.1 At the first task group meeting it was agreed that the review would commence with site visits to all public toilets identified as being within scope of this work. This would be followed by meetings as required to gather information from officers and other key parties, review findings and make recommendations.
- 5.2 From the outset a number of key parties were identified as holding information relevant to the review including the Environmental Services, Assets and Communities Teams.
- 5.3 Information requested as part of the review included:

- Details of the public toilets, opening times, running costs, cost of vandalism, costs as a result of closure;
- Records of reported vandalism, and length of closure of toilets due to vandalism;
- Record of cleaning/servicing of toilets;

6. Summary of Findings

6.1 Site Visits

6.1.1 During May 2018 site visits were carried out by the task group at all of the 9 identified public toilet facilities in the District. The group were accompanied by an officer from Environmental Services who are the Department responsible for cleaning and day to day management of the facilities.

6.1.2 During the visits observations were recorded in relation to the following matters:

- Opening hours and accessibility
- Cleanliness
- Smell
- Damage
- Baby changing provision
- Disabled access
- Supplies of toilet roll, soap etc.
- Hand washing
- Hand drying
- Sanitary waste provision
- Lighting
- Bins

It was noted that some of these were not legal requirements, however it was useful for the group to observe the overall adequacy of the facilities.

The general observations are noted in Appendix A.

6.1.3 Recommendations were made to Environmental Services and assurances were sought that any issues requiring immediate attention were rectified as soon as possible.

6.1.4 The general consensus amongst the group was that standards were variable, and this appeared to correlate with the length of time the facility had been open, or since its last refurbishment, and the perceived usage and footfall. Members also felt that some of the facilities did not support the South Holland Pride initiative, particularly where there was a need for more robust cleaning and repairs.

- 6.1.5 The task group noted variation in how the public toilets were sign posted. They felt that improved signage and directional posting would help visitors in the District to access the facilities more easily.
- 6.1.6 The group felt that more attention needs to be paid to the disabled toilet facilities in the District, as these appear to attract problems such as vandalism and rough sleeping. The group felt that a better standard could be maintained if they were locked at the same time that the adjoining toilets are closed.
- 6.1.7 In addition to the site visits, the group also visited the adult changing facility which is located at the South Holland Centre. This is a toilet and changing facility which is part of the Changing Places scheme (<http://www.changing-places.org/>). It provides a facility for people who cannot access standard public toilets and provides more space and equipment such as a height adjustable changing table and a hoist. The task group were very pleased with this facility and fully supported it remaining in place for the use of visitors in Spalding town centre.

6.2 Cleanliness

- 6.2.1 Cleanliness of the facilities varied and it was acknowledged that some issues related to the age of the fixtures and fittings. As part of their enquiries members established the following:

- Cleaning is carried out in most toilets by staff in Environmental Services.
- The cleaner has other duties to carry out in the day in addition to cleaning the toilets, e.g. street cleaning
- Crowland toilets are opened/closed and cleaned by the Parish Council on behalf of the Council
- There is no standard procedure or specification for cleaning in place
- Estimated average time spent on cleaning each block is 1 hour per day
- There should be a contract for sanitary bin provision in each block
- Litter bins are not required in the toilets, but where provided they are emptied
- Where cleaners identify faults they are referred through to the Central Support unit at the Depot for action
- There are 6 official complaints from members of the public officially recorded on the complaints system since 2016, however anecdotally officers advised that more may have been received and dealt with informally

6.3 Vandalism and Graffiti

- 6.3.1 Members were concerned about the presence of graffiti and damage that appeared to have been caused by vandalism, visible in several of the toilets. As part of their enquiries, members established the following:

- No specific records of criminal damage are held, although maintenance records reflect repairs made
- There is no specific record of length of time toilets are closed for repair
- Issues include: graffiti; removal of fixtures and fittings including toilet seats, soap, toilet rolls and toilet roll holders; damage to and removal of tiles, littering; spreading faecal matter on walls; holes in cubicle walls; deliberate blocking of toilets and sinks.

6.4 Maintenance and Refurbishment

6.4.1 A key area of consideration for members of the task group was the scheduling of maintenance and refurbishment and associated budgets

- A programme of refurbishment was carried out between 2001 and 2006 for all toilets
- Maintenance is carried out as and when required and a budget of £7,500.00 per year is held by the Assets team for this work in total for all of the public toilets in South Holland.
- By September 2018 over half of this budget allocation had been spent on necessary maintenance at Donington public toilets
- There is not currently a future programme for refurbishment of the toilets, but members felt that this is something their review could inform
- Members were advised that it would cost approx. £360 per toilet block for a full deep clean
- Members were advised that it would cost in the region of £20,000 to carry out necessary repairs and updating at the Holbeach toilets.
- General discussions took place around more significant refurbishments but members felt that some of the facilities needed more urgent attention in the meantime.
- Members were supportive of the view that a more ambitious programme of refurbishment should be explored and costed as part of a future capital works programme.

6.5 Budgets

6.5.1 The identified budget for 2018/19 for the cleaning and supplies for the toilets is outlined below. This shows total budget spend in the region of £150,000 per year (including support service recharges). This relates to staff, equipment, materials such as toilet rolls, utilities etc.

Description	Revised Estimate	Forecast outturn (at Q2)
Employee costs* Total	£26,806	£26,806
Business rates	£15,600	£16,221
Electricity	£0	£695
Premises insurance	£800	£830
Rent payments	£0	£0
Premises Total	£16,400	£17,746
Clothing, uniform, laundry	£100	£100

Furniture and equipment	£500	£500
Insurance	£100	£310
Materials & consumables	£4,200	£4,200
Telephones	£200	£200
Supplies & Services Total	£5,100	£5,310
CPBS recharges to services	£500	£500
Recharges to/from support services	£78,700	£78,700
Support Services Total	£79,200	£79,200
Depreciation on assets total	£20,200	£20,200
Rents/ Income total	-£400	-£400
TOTAL	£147,306	£148,862

*This cost relates to the portion of the role involved in cleaning public toilets

6.5.2 A separate budget of £7,500 per year is held by Assets to cover maintenance and repair. In addition to this, further costs could be met by the wider asset budget or by a capital bid.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 From the site visits, examination of data, budgets and other information provided, the task group formed the following conclusions:

7.1.2 Generally Members were pleased with the provision of public toilets. Having reviewed the location and usage from anecdotal evidence and from observations it was considered that all of the public toilets were well used. This suggests that they are in the correct locations. The group did not consider changing the locations or adding additional facilities as part of their scope.

7.1.2 The group were concerned that despite some immediate maintenance issues and repairs that were required, more significant repairs and cleaning was required. In particular the group identified Holbeach toilets as needing to be prioritised due to the state and disrepair.

7.1.3 The group also considered that all of the toilets needed some additional maintenance to be carried out in the next two years.

7.1.4 The group were grateful to the Cleaners for their work in relation to the toilets, however concluded that more time could be spent on this task at each facility. It was however acknowledged that toilet cleaning was only part of a wider role.

7.1.5 All of the public toilets visited in South Holland were found to vary in terms of what was provided within them. For example there was variation in use of

toilet rolls and toilet roll holders, soap, hand drying, sanitary bins and litter bins. Some of these were provided in some toilets but not all.

- 7.1.6 Having queried the procedures for reporting and carrying out repairs, the group felt that a more standardised approach could be achieved. The group also felt there could be improved communication between departments when repairs are carried out to ensure that they are open to the public at the earliest opportunity.
- 7.1.7 The identified annual budget for maintenance was considered to be very low for the number of facilities it covered. However the group were reassured that this would not prevent essential work being undertaken if required.
- 7.1.8 The group feel that it is important to maintain the current number of toilets in South Holland. They also feel that improvement needs to be made to ensure that they provide a safe and suitable facility for the public, and reflect positively on the District.

7.2 Recommendations

- 7.2.1 The task group propose the following recommendations:
- 7.2.2 A standardised written specification for the toilets should be prepared so staff cleaning and maintaining them have a clear understanding of what materials and equipment should be present and what cleaning is required.
- 7.2.3 Spot checks should be carried out at regular intervals to determine if the specification is being met, and ensure issues are reported.
- 7.2.4 A protocol should be agreed between Environmental Services and Central Support Unit to ensure consistency in how work is reported, feedback is provided when work is scheduled and has been completed, and tasks are effectively prioritised.
- 7.2.5 Public reporting of issues should be encouraged through notices on display in each toilet block
- 7.2.6 The disabled toilet facilities should be fitted with more substantial locks to prevent vandalism and improve security
- 7.2.7 The disabled toilets in Spalding town centre should have a notice to advise of the adult changing facility at the South Holland Centre
- 7.2.8 Improved location and directional signage for the public toilets could be added to ensure that visitors to the District can easily locate the facilities. It is also recommended that a map is added to the Council's website to show the location of the public toilets

- 7.2.9 A rapid response procedure to offensive graffiti be explored to ensure this is removed or covered at the earliest opportunity
- 7.2.10 When Government policy enables the Council to remove the business rates requirement for public toilets, this budget should be diverted to cover additional refurbishments and repairs in future years.
- 7.2.11 A deep clean programme is undertaken during 2019/2020 at all public toilet facilities, and all outstanding repairs are carried out. An investment is made into repairs at Holbeach toilets (estimated up to £20,000) to bring these up to a satisfactory and safe condition.
- 7.2.12 A capital programme for refurbishment of public toilets be prepared for future years and be completed by 2025.
- 7.2.13 As part of this programme, Officers should be tasked with exploring more modernised facilities and designs such as self-cleaning toilets, and facilities that are designed to combat issues such as vandalism or graffiti. A further task group could be set up in due course to consider this.
- 7.2.14 Officers should explore alternative funding sources, or contributions from business or organisations whose customers benefit from the facilities.

8. Financial Implications of Recommendations

- 8.1 The recommendations have proposed a deep clean at each facility which officers have advised could be carried out within existing budget, to take place before April 2020.
- 8.2 The task group have also asked that Holbeach toilets are given a refurbishment to improve standards, hygiene and appearance by April 2020. The estimated cost for this provided by Officers is £20,000. This would need to be sourced outside the existing maintenance budget for the year, through a capital bid.
- 8.3 It has also been recommended that a further piece of work is carried out to develop a refurbishment programme for all public toilets, which could include more significant changes to layout and equipment in order to invest to save in the future. Costs have not been identified for this piece of work.

9. Main Sources of Information and individuals contacted during the Review

Site visits to the public toilets

Complaints Information from Corporate Improvement and Performance team

Budgetary information from Finance

Input from officers in Environmental Services, Communities, Assets, Finance, Legal and

Open source news articles and websites:

<http://www.changing-places.org/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36405414>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46024769>

10. **Abbreviations**

SHDC South Holland District Council

Appendix A
Observations from Public Toilet Visits May 2018

Vine Street, Spalding

- Ladies cubicle closed
- Low height of door
- Tiles off wall in male toilet
- Graffiti
- Baby changing adequate in male and female
- Supplies OK
- Lighting, sanitary, bins etc adequate.
- Reasonable condition and cleanliness

Sheepmarket, Spalding

- Well used – busy
- Tatty from outside
- One of the larger facilities
- Unpleasant smell
- Wear and tear
- External door needs repainting
- Separate baby changing
- Dirty, stained
- Flush difficult to use
- Male toilets lighting poor

Bus Station, Spalding

- Ladies toilets unclean – scale, old dirt, mould on ceiling.
- Mens' toilets – broken tiles
- Graffiti
- No seat on one of the toilets
- Door needs painting
- No supplies
- Broken window

Ayscoughfee, Spalding

- Male toilets reasonable
- Female toilets need cleaning
- Bad smells
- Several lights in ladies not working

Sutton Bridge

- Quite decent facility – relatively new
- No bad smells
- No major damage
- Separate disabled toilet but no alarm
- No bins, baby changing or sanitary provision
- Sign to report damage – good

Long Sutton

- Generally clean and no smells

- No significant damage
- Some graffiti on back of doors in disabled toilets
- External sign pointing wrong way
- No toilet roll holders
- No sanitary provision

Holbeach

- Fairly clean, smell not too bad
- A lot of graffiti
- Locks damaged, particularly in ladies and not fixed well
- Panel under sink hanging off
- No toilet roll
- Mens' toilets - tiles smashed
- Side drain cover broken
- No baby changing
- Separate disabled facility
- Hand dryer in ladies didn't work

Crowland

- Stainless steel, generally dirty with wear and tear
- Smells of smoking
- Leak under sink in ladies
- Graffiti on doors
- Dirty tiles
- Broken tiles in front of urinal
- No baby changing, soap or hand dryers
- No bins and no sanitary provision

Donington

- Fairly dirty but quite superficial
- Dirty doors
- Graffiti
- Tiles cracking
- Disrepair rather than cleanliness main issue
- Baby changing in mens' toilets – only one seen there
- Cubicle wheelchair accessible in ladies.
- No soap
- Dryer didn't work in the mens' toilets