

Draft Terms of Reference – Public Conveniences Review Group

Membership

The Review Group will have cross-party membership of 5 members:

Councillor Tony Slater (Chair)

Councillor Gary Selwyn (Vice-Chair)

Councillor David Cunningham

Councillor Roly Hughes

Councillor Dilys Neill

Officer Support

Democratic Services will organise and support the meetings of the Review Group and produce any report/recommendations arising from the review.

Resident Services will provide information and advice to inform the Review Group's deliberations.

Background and rationale

Cotswold District Council operates fifteen public toilet sites across the district. During 2007 and 2008, ten of the sites were refurbished, introducing up to date systems and charging. The remaining five sites are still free. Reactive maintenance is dealt with as and when necessary, however no further refurbishments or improvements have taken place. The provision of public toilets is not a statutory duty.

The cleaning and responsive maintenance is contracted to Danfo UK Ltd. At the meeting of Cabinet on 17 July 2023, the decision was made to extend the contract to 31 September 2024. The contract cost is the main expenditure for each site, which has significantly increased over the last year due to wages, fuel, consumables, and cleaning products. Research into alternative service provision has shown there are no significant savings to be made by changing the service provider at this time. The contract extension was negotiated with reduced visits to several sites to enable moderate savings. All sites have one unit which is accessed free of charge with a RADAR key (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation), this is a national scheme sometimes referred to as the NKS (National Key Scheme).

In order to inform the future of Public Conveniences provision, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance asked that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish a task and finish group to review the work and inform a future Cabinet decision.

Purpose of the Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been asked to review the current service provision and consider options for the future of service provision. Preliminary research carried out by Officers has identified the following potential options for the assets;

1. Close all sites - Close all sites, followed by sell or re-purpose the assets- where there are viable alternatives in the town/village.
2. Transfer the assets to Town/Parish Councils. – Some of the sites are located in car parks, which should be carefully considered for any future plans.
3. Keep all sites owned and charge for usage.
4. A combination of two or more of the above options.

There are also the following options for service delivery:

1. Retender the contract.
2. Bring the service in house.

The Review Group will produce a report with recommendations to inform a Cabinet decision prior to the expiry of the contract (target: 5 February 2024 Cabinet meeting).

Out of scope

Public Toilets that the Council does not own are outside the scope of the review.

In August 2023, the Government announced a new building requirement to separate all toilets in new buildings by male and female. As the Review Group will be looking the provision of existing toilets, this is also outside the scope of the work.

Method / Approach

The Review Group will hold a series of meetings to consider and interrogate different options for the future of public conveniences in the district. In doing so the Review Group will consider benchmarking data and data on the usage and costs of different sites. The Review Group may also wish to undertake site visits and to understand the future capital costs of maintaining the assets.

Guest speakers

Review Group to consider whether to speak to external organisations or groups as part of this review, which could include representatives of:

- town and parish councils,
- the current contractor,
- external groups e.g. parent groups, disability groups (Crohn's and Colitis).

Timescales

26 Sept 2023 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish the review group.

w/c 9 Oct or w/c 16 Oct 2023 – Initial Review Group meeting to consider the terms of reference.

23 October 2023 – terms of reference published in Overview and Scrutiny agenda.

31 October 2023 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider terms of reference.

November to December 2023 – Review Group meetings to be held every c. 3 weeks.

Early January 2024 – final Review Group meeting to consider draft report/recommendations.

22 January 2024 – report/recommendations published in Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda.

30 January 2024 – report/recommendations considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 February 2024 – report/recommendations considered by Cabinet.

Background documents

East Devon District Council Public Toilet Review, 2021 – Undertook a similar review where a Task and Finish Group categorised toilets to refurbish and continue to provide, and those that they would no longer seek to provide, leasing some these, and selling some to Town and Parish Councils below Market rate. East Devon Council then consulted with Members of the Public on this work.

<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/community-engagement/public-toilet-review/>