
Meeting of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Advisory Panel

19th March 2008

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

City of York Council Public Toilets Review

Summary

1. This report proposes a complete review of public toilet provision for York and presents members with information regarding the new Silver Street toilet facility which will be built to replace the existing facility in Parliament Street.

Background

2. The provision of clean, safe, accessible public toilets affects all local people and visitors to York. For older people, those with medical conditions such as diabetes and parents with young children, public toilets are an important factor in quality of life and in making the city centre user-friendly. Quality of public toilets plays a major role in defining the image of a city.
3. There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to provide public toilets but many people perceive that this is the responsibility of local authorities. The 2007/08 budget for providing this service is £443,000 with £41,300 allocated for repairs and no capital budget for improvements, other than the Silver Street proposal. Annex A sets out the current facilities in York. While the performance of our cleaning contractor is being carefully monitored and has recently improved, frequent vandalism puts significant pressure on the limited budget, resulting in a poor image and many complaints. Many of the toilets are no longer meeting expectations.

Reviewing public toilet provision in York.

4. York is a major tourist destination and has a thriving economy therefore it is important that the standard of toilet provision is of the highest standard possible maximising the use of existing financial resources.

A number of improvements are in train already. A new public toilet facility in Silver Street will be provided subject to a planning application in the near future. This facility will replace the Parliament Street provision which will remain open until Silver Street comes on stream. The new Silver Street facility will be fully attended and male and female customers will be charged the same fee. We will also continue to

charge both male and female customers at the fully attended Union terrace facility.

Review Scope.

5. It is proposed that a review of the existing toilet provision within York is undertaken. The scope of a review would need to include the issues below:
6. A full review of all existing sites. In addition to considering the level of use and cost effectiveness of existing sites, officers would undertake an options appraisal and condition survey for each current site, including cost implications to bring the current range of facilities up to modern standards.
7. The review will investigate the potential for a community toilet scheme to be developed in partnership with local retail outlets and public houses as in other large city's in the UK. This could significantly increase the level and quality of provision by inviting local businesses to allow members of the public to use their toilets for free possibly in return for a small annual fee from the council or as their contribution to the continued success of the city centre. If successful, this could allow toilets that are sub-standard and with low usage to be considered for closure without reducing provision. Savings resulting from reduced maintenance costs and capital receipts from the sale of any of the closed sites could be reinvested in the operation of the scheme or to upgrade the remaining council facilities. Current gaps in the provision of facilities in the evenings could also be addressed without the need for capital investment.
8. The review will examine where councils have introduced hydraulic urinals that are stored underground during the day and raised in the evening to reduce street urination. Alternatively, authorities such as Leeds City Council operate quality mobile units that are available in the city centre at week-end or other locations and events where high volumes of customers are expected. It is proposed that a working group of officers be assigned to look at such facilities, which would benefit the main city centre area, even if a community toilet scheme were introduced. The review would ensure that our provision incorporates the needs of the night time economy. The working group would report back to EMAP on the progress they have made at three monthly intervals.
9. The review will consider the charging regime across the range of attended and unattended toilet facilities, and ensure that future arrangements made the city fully compliant with equalities legislation, and considered how to cover the cost of ensuring that compliance.
10. The review will consider access issues to ensure that whatever solution was recommended improved facilities for a range of disabled residents and customers and their carers. Care would need to be taken to ensure that any community toilet scheme maintained accessibility.

11. Taking all of the issues above into account, the review will make recommendations about the potential for alternative patterns of provision across the city whilst reviewing the current contractual arrangements to clean and maintain the facilities.

Options

12. A number of options have been considered over how best to undertake a full review of provision in the city.
13. Option A: Bring in an external organisation such as 'The British Toilet Association' or 'encams' or a similar organisation to undertake a full review of all the issues sets out in paragraphs 7-11.
14. Option B: Carry out an in-house review of the issues in paragraphs 7-11.
15. Option C: A hybrid of options A and B where the bulk of the review work is carried out in house, but making use of expertise held by other interested organisations through their acting as 'critical-friends'.

Analysis

16. Option A: The advantages would be the opportunity to gain an independent view of these issues, and the speed with which the review could be completed. The disadvantages relate to cost and the lack of local knowledge in these organisations.
17. Option B: Doing the review in house means we would lose the independence that an external agent would bring. However, this would be cheaper. A further disadvantage is the level of resource required to carry out a full review would place significant pressure on the directorate with the implication that the review would likely take longer to complete.
18. Option C is recommended as the most practical way to undertake the work despite the fact that it may take longer to complete. Starting in April 2008 we would aim to complete the review and report its outcomes to EMAP in October 2008. Spring / summer is the best time to review provision as these are the times of year when pressure on the facilities will be highest and so the work will be most realistic.
19. While taking option C forward, we would seek to set up a multi-agency working group to consider the findings in depth. We would invite representatives from the city centre partnership as well as representatives of interested parties such as the tourism, economy and community safety sectors.

Silver Street Design Proposals

20. Current thinking on good practice is that the best way to avoid the type of vandalism and community safety problems in York's public toilets is to operate a mix of facilities that include a small number of well-

designed, paid for and attended public toilets ('supertoilets'), alongside a range of community toilets provided by retailers, augmented as and when needs arise by temporary on-street facilities. The difficulties that we and our current maintenance contractor have experienced in running the current facilities suggests that a radical approach is required and that Silver Street, as the city centre's main public toilet, should be designed as an attended, paid for 'supertoilet' using the Union Terrace model.

21. The new Silver Street facility will be fully attended, with male and female customers being charged the same fee. Architects drawings which have now been submitted for planning approval are attached at Annex 2. The facility will offer a range of improvements over the Parliament Street facility:
 - Level access throughout.
 - One ambulant w.c. cubicle in both the male and female toilet.
 - Baby change facility.
 - Wheelchair accessible wc to be open 24/7 through RADAR scheme.
 - Changing place accessible during opening hours using a key to be held by the toilet attendant. This will include a hoist and bed and is a significant step forward in terms of making the city centre accessible to wheelchair users and other disabled people and their carers.
 - Alarms in place for both the accessible wc and changing place linked to the attendant's office.
 - More modern fittings and fixtures which will be easier to clean and maintain to an acceptably high standard.
 - Much better plumbing layout which will reduce the amount of time toilets are out of order.
 - More modern approach to payment which will reduce loss of income through customers letting other customers in without paying.
22. The proposed opening hours for Silver Street are from 0700 - 2100 daily. This is an improvement on the Parliament Street opening hours of 0800 – 2000 daily. The net cost of attendance at Silver Street is estimated to be £10k, (see finance section below) but this would be covered by the review of the contract or other savings within the Service Area. Any part year cost (Dec 08 to March 09), will be covered by existing budgets.
23. The disabled access wc will open directly onto the street. An option that was considered would be for the disabled access wc to open onto the internal corridor. However by having the toilet open directly onto the street with access via a RADAR key, we can ensure that the facility is available 24 hours a day. If it opened to the corridor it would only be available during the opening times of the toilets ie 0700-2100 daily.

We would want to consider how to design the internal layout of the disabled wc to ensure that somebody using the facility would be shielded from the street if the door was opened, or to ensure that the facility could not be inadvertently opened from outside once occupied.

Consultation

24. This report asks members to agree to a full review of this service which would include a significant amount of consultation with a range of interested parties.

Corporate Priorities

25. This report is important for the following corporate priority:
 - Improve the actual and perceived condition of the city's streets, housing estates and public spaces.

Implications

Financial

26. There will be additional funding required for the attendant duties, this will be part funded by transferring the existing attendant at Parliament Street, and additional income received from charging male users as well as females (c25k). This will leave a funding requirement of c£10k in 2009/10. The review will identify opportunities to make savings or reinvest budget currently spent in other areas of the cleaning contract.

Human Resources (HR).

27. The current attendant at Parliament Street will transfer to the new facility.

Equalities

28. This paper has taken access issues into account. Under the recommended review method option C at paragraphs 18-20 we would invite community groups interested in access issues to take part. Access issues have been central in designing the proposed Silver Street toilets. The formal planning process provides an opportunity for community groups to make detailed comments on the proposals.

Legal.

29. There are no legal implications.

Crime and Disorder.

30. Improving the quality of the facilities, making the toilets fully attended and increasing the opening hours should reduce vandalism experienced in Parliament Street facility. The review being proposed

would take community safety issues into account, and in particular look at ways to improve facilities during the evenings and thereby potentially reduce environmental crime.

Information Technology (IT).

31. There are no IT implications.

Property

32. The Silver Street premises are part of the councils portfolio and available for re-development following the transfer of the electrical sub-station.

Risk Management

33. In compliance with the council's risk management policy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to deliver a service review of sufficient quality (operational) which could lead to damage to the Council's image and reputation and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations (governance).
34. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risks at this point need only to be monitored as they do not provide a real threat to the achievement of the objectives of this report.

Recommendations

35. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member:
36. To agree the scope of a review of public toilet provision at paragraphs 7-11.
37. Reason: To inform the Executive Member of meetings with potential partners to this review.
38. To agree Option C at paragraphs 12-20
39. Reason: To carry out a cost effective review of the public toilet provision in York.
40. To agree to a report being presented to EMAP at three monthly intervals to detail the progress of the review.
41. Reason: To keep the Executive Member informed on the progress of the review.

Contact Details

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A - Existing facilities.

Annex B: - Architects drawing of Silver Street plans.