
**Decision Session - of the Executive Member
for Neighbourhoods**

15th December 2009

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

City of York Council Public Toilets Review - Update

Summary

1. This report informs the Executive Member further about the Community Toilet Scheme, including the experiences of other participating local authorities, and proposes the next steps required to implement the scheme in York.

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. The quality of public toilets also plays a major role in defining the image and reputation of a city.
3. In addition, 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 quality possible, maximising the use of existing financial resources.
4. There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to provide public toilets but many people perceive that this is the responsibility of councils.
5. The update in July noted that, as part of the work done by ENCAMS, the business sector was asked their opinion of a community toilet scheme. They were asked to comment on their current and unsolicited experiences of non-customers entering their premises and using their toilets. The initial responses to the scheme were mixed and the majority of the respondents stated that:
 - Members of the public had either used or asked to use their toilets in the past.
 - Of those businesses asked, 40% perceived the scheme to be of benefit to their businesses, with the remaining 60% being less keen.

- Some of the businesses consulted had negative experiences of non-customers using their toilets. These experiences can be broadly divided into antisocial behaviour from the non-customers and impact on the businesses' facilities.
6. In considering this report, there are a number of factors that will need to be taken into account:
- The report in July identified that poor signage is a key issue in the provision of public conveniences within York.
 - Previous consultation has taken place with York Access Group, around accessibility issues, and the York Civic Trust about signage.
 - In July, the Executive Member agreed that the national community toilet signage would be adopted.

Findings

7. Research into the experience of other local authorities already running a community toilet scheme has identified that, the scheme is excellent value for money but, requires significant officer time to fully implement the scheme. A number of local authorities have been contacted to discuss their experience of implementing the scheme; below is a summary of the findings.

Current Participants

8. Richmond-Upon-Thames set up the first Community Toilet Scheme in 2002 and it has now become very successful receiving government recognition and endorsement. Brighton and Hove City Council also run a very successful community toilet scheme called *Your Welcome* and were 2nd in 'The Premier League of Local Authority Public Toilets for 2008'. Subsequently, many local authorities have become interested in the scheme, and of those local authorities that have invested in conducting a feasibility study, most have gone on to implement the scheme.
9. There is much anecdotal evidence of savings being made following the implementation of the scheme. In a few instances, significant annual savings have been made through the closure of a public toilet, which has offset the cost of implementing the scheme.
10. Local authorities running the scheme are able to offer a greater provision of public conveniences and improved facilities (e.g. disabled access and baby changing facilities), which are more accessible to the public.
11. Members of the scheme (i.e. businesses) have maintained clean, safe and accessible toilet provision for the public, improving the quality of life for visitors and residents.

12. In addition, few participating businesses have experienced a negative impact on their business, or the facilities offered.
13. A few local authorities have piloted the scheme in smaller areas prior to rolling the scheme out further. Conducting a pilot has enabled local authorities to establish the scheme, generate some initial publicity of the scheme and respond to any early lessons learnt prior to a further roll out of the scheme.
14. Business membership to the scheme varies across the country. In general, smaller areas and district councils have fewer participating businesses with two or three members. Larger areas, such as the London Borough Richmond-Upon-Thames, have 50 or more. Although this will depend on how widely a local authority decides to run a community toilet scheme.
15. However, the number of businesses participating in the scheme often depends on:
 - the level of need within the area,
 - the feasible number of businesses an authority can work in partnership with,
 - good marketing of the scheme to businesses.
16. In areas where the scheme has become very popular, the local authority requests applications from interested parties to join the scheme, these are then matched against local authority criteria based on the level of need, facilities available and opening times offered.
17. Food and drink outlets are the most prevalent businesses involved in a community toilet scheme due to their extended opening hours and facilities.
18. Most scheme memberships involve an annual payment to participating businesses of £600-£1000. The level of payment is often dependent on the facilities available, opening hours and level of need within an area.
19. However, a few councils are pursuing an alternative membership, one that is based on membership in kind. Chester and Chester West Borough Council offer free publicity in their local 'Mini Guide' and Sheffield City Council offer additional benefits provided by environmental services such as, free graffiti removal and street cleaning.

Implementing the Scheme

Marketing a community toilet scheme to businesses

20. Proactive marketing of a community toilet scheme is a critical success factor of the scheme.

21. Marketing the scheme is the most time-consuming period and often involves consistent communication with potential members of the scheme.
22. Local authorities have also been more successful in gaining business membership when officers have targeted businesses, which can provide facilities that match community needs.

Publicising the scheme

23. Publicity of the scheme is an additional critical success factor for the scheme and implementation of the scheme will require an ongoing communication strategy.
24. All businesses receive self- adhesive signs to place in their windows to advertise their membership.
25. For the scheme to be successful and for value for money to be achieved, residents and visitors must be made aware of the additional facilities.
26. Some local authorities have put up additional signs advertising the scheme. This is an additional cost of the scheme, although, many local authorities have delayed the purchase of similar signs due to budget pressures. Please see below for an example of the national signage used to promote the scheme.



Reproduced from the Department for Communities and Local Government report on 'Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets' March 2008.

27. Local authorities also advertise the scheme on their website (some of which have interactive maps) and produce additional material such as leaflets, maps or pocket sized 'snap maps' to advertise the locations of participating businesses.
28. Local authorities have also stressed the importance of managing good public relations with the media. One local authority advised that

negative publicity about the scheme, prior to its implementation, could have an adverse affect on membership.

Implementation and Monitoring

29. All participating parties must agree to the terms and conditions of the partnership. Participating businesses are able to withdraw, or be withdrawn, (if a business is deemed not to be meeting the agreed terms and conditions) from the scheme.
30. Local authorities regularly inspect participating premises to ensure that the facilities are maintained clean, accessible and are appropriately stocked with the necessary resources.
31. This report has identified that the inspections carried out on participating scheme members vary in degrees of regularity and method including, council officers, (town centre managers or environmental health officers) or by using mystery shoppers.
32. The London Borough of Merton also monitors the use of the community toilets once a week through town centre management. Visits are made to the venues and enquiries are made through the staff or management of the participating business about any matters arising. Merton LBC also envisage that support from Wardens and PCSO'S will supplement the monitoring of community toilets.
33. Participating businesses are also regularly consulted about the health and safety of staff and customers, security and community issues, impact of the scheme on the business and their experience of the scheme.

Resources

34. In most cases, an officer is identified to lead on the scheme and is responsible for:
 - Marketing the scheme,
 - Establishing and maintaining contact with (potential and participating) scheme members,
 - Maintaining good publicity of the scheme,
 - Monitoring participating businesses and customer satisfaction,
 - Ongoing administration.
35. Although this work has often been a bolt on to existing work, local authorities have stressed that this work can be labour intensive and time consuming, due to the nature of partnership working.

Conclusions for York

36. Implementing a community toilet scheme would deliver value for money and provide further public convenience provision for York City Council residents and visitors.
37. By providing improved access to toilets and working in partnership with local businesses, a community toilet scheme would support the work of City of York Council, with regards to achieving a few of our corporate strategy themes such as:
 - Inclusive city
 - Thriving city
 - Safer City and,
 - Healthy City
38. York would benefit from conducting a pilot of the scheme. A pilot would enable the scheme to be initially set up and established within the council, conduct some initial publicity of the scheme and respond to lessons learnt from the initial set-up. It would be suitable to conduct a pilot in an area where there is identified need for additional toilet provision and within an existing retail or entertainment area in York.
39. It is proposed that Acomb would be suitable for a pilot of the scheme. At present, City of York Council provides a public toilet in Acomb with current levels of annual usage to date of, 41,400 for Ladies and 65,100 for Gents.
40. This site is not manned and is poorly signposted. In addition, the results of the conditions survey noted that the property is “structurally sound with some minor repairs needed. Internal improvements and updating should be considered”.
41. A pilot of a community toilet scheme in the retail area of Acomb would improve the current provision and publicity of the public toilets and offer a more inclusive and accessible retail area.
42. York would benefit from implementing a community toilet scheme based on benefits rather than annual payments. This scheme is more financially sustainable and more likely to deliver value-for-money. The benefits that City of York Council are able to offer in kind are:
 - publicity,
 - a named contact within the council,
 - a flower basket,
 - street cleaning and,

- graffiti removal.
43. It is important however, that businesses value the benefits offered to establish good partnership working. This will involve negotiation and the establishment of good working relations between City of York Council and participating business.
 44. Free publicity will be the key benefit for businesses, and therefore, the greatest financial investment required by City of York Council will be for the publicity of the scheme. Good publicity of the scheme will ensure that City of York Council will achieve value for money and more importantly, the scheme is widely used by the public.
 45. Suitable publicity methods for York would include developing a webpage for a community toilet scheme, a named contact for participating businesses, producing additional publicity material and to work closely with City of York Council Press Office, York Retailers Forum and Visit York.
 46. City of York Council would be required to regularly inspect participating premises to ensure that the facilities are maintained clean, accessible and are appropriately stocked with the necessary resources. It is proposed that for an initial pilot, a community toilet scheme co-ordinator would conduct these inspections and monitor business satisfaction, to establish good working relations. This would have to be reconsidered if the pilot were to be rolled out citywide.
 47. The implementation of this scheme would also require close working relations across the council involving officers who have established relationships with businesses within the city for support.
 48. It is proposed that an operational pilot could be achieved within 3 months to establish the scheme.

Consultation

49. The July report highlighted the significant consultation previously conducted with a range of interested parties, including local businesses and the general public, about current public toilet provision. Key conclusions were:
 - Generally most of the buildings are in sound condition and adequately placed but a community toilet scheme would offer more facilities.
 - A key issue was the lack of signage
50. There has also been further consultation with businesses within the Acomb area to gather some more feedback on the proposal of a community toilet scheme.

Options

51. (i) Not to pursue implementing a community toilet scheme and maintain current provision of public toilets throughout the city.
52. (ii) To pursue the implementation of a community toilet scheme, initially as a pilot in Acomb and establish learning for how the scheme will work for York.
53. (iii) To pursue a community toilet scheme citywide from the offset.

Analysis

54. Conducting a pilot of a community toilet scheme would be advantageous in providing further knowledge about how the scheme would work for York. However, if the scheme were to be rolled out further, consideration of the different levels of need, requirements, and expectations of businesses operating in the city centre will be required.
55. Sheffield City Council and Chester and Chester West Borough Council have been successful in pursuing a membership based on rewards in kind instead of an annual payment to members of the scheme. Whilst this is an innovative adaptation to the scheme, there is less published research or anecdotal evidence, of the success of this type of community toilet scheme.
56. Whilst there has been a review of the provision of public conveniences provided by the local authority, there isn't comprehensive understanding of the facilities currently available, which are provided by businesses. This scheme would have to dedicate resource to view and assess the current toilet provision within the city, mindful of the needs of a diverse living and visiting population (including the importance of the changing places scheme and DDA requirements).
57. Signage for the scheme will require further work and engagement with planning and the civic trust to determine a suitable type and location. A key benefit to a commercial business participating in a community toilet scheme is that their establishment is signposted from at least two locations in the city centre.

Corporate Priorities

58. This report is important for the following corporate strategy themes:
 - Inclusive city
 - Thriving city
 - Safer City and,
 - Healthy City

Implications

Financial

59. Annual payments or benefits offered to scheme members will have financial implications.
60. The key resource for the scheme is officer time. Participating local authorities have stressed that due to the nature of the scheme the work is time consuming and labour intensive.
61. Additional costs will also involve publicising the scheme either through the purchase of publicity materials or signage. Members of the scheme could offset these costs.

Human Resources (HR).

62. Officer capacity is required to implement the scheme as a 'bolt-on' to existing work.

Equalities

63. This report has taken into consideration the diverse residential and visiting population and recommends that such considerations be made when assessing the suitability of a business to join a community toilet scheme.

Legal

64. Agreed terms and conditions of the scheme will have to be signed by City of York Council and each participating business. See Annex 1.
65. All participating members of the scheme would be required to hold Public Liability Insurance to the value of £5,000,000.

Crime and Disorder

66. It is proposed that by extending the provision of public toilet facilities, in supervised premises, a community toilet scheme will have a beneficial impact on the perception and fear of crime and will deter anti-social behaviour.
67. However, this report is mindful of the possibility of participating businesses suffering from anti-social behaviour, or criminal damage, by opening up their toilet facilities to the public.

Information Technology (IT)

68. The development of an interactive webpage to publicise the public toilet facilities available and an email address to report any incidences, issues or provide feedback from the scheme members and the public with the public toilets facilities.

Property

69. None

Risk Management

70. Low risk as regular monitoring will be carried out by council officers.

Recommendations

71. (i) Executive member to agree to conduct a pilot, prior to rolling out the scheme across the city, in the Acomb area and approve the publicity costs to be funded from existing budgets.

- Reason: To allow learning from a pilot to inform a decision to roll the scheme out citywide.

72. (ii) Executive member to consider the option of pursuing a community toilet scheme which offers benefits such as graffiti removal, publicity of their business and a named contact within the council as an alternative to offering an annual financial consideration.

- Reason: To implement a financially sustainable scheme which will increase public toilet provision and facilities available across the city.

73. (iii) Executive member to agree to set up a scheme to regularly monitor the participating businesses to ensure compliance with the agreed terms and conditions.

- Reason: To ensure the council meets its obligations in providing high quality and accessible public toilets.

74. (iv) Executive member to request a further report on the outcomes of the pilot and potential for rollout to the wider city.

- Reason: To consider using a community toilet scheme as a method to increase public toilet provision in York.

Contact Details

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Report Approved

Date

26th November
2009

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

City of York Public Toilet Review – Meeting of the Executive Member for the Decision Session – 21st July 2009

City of York Public Toilet Review – Meeting of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Advisory Panel – 19th March 2008.

City of York Public Toilet Review – Update Meeting of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Advisory Panel – 5th June 2008.

City of York Public Toilet Review – Update Meeting of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Advisory Panel – 15th October 2008.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Draft Terms and Conditions for City of York Council Community Toilet Scheme