

SCRUTINY

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC CONVENIENCES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. Purpose of the Report

To outline the findings of the Task and Finish Group in relation to the provision of public conveniences within the Borough.

2. Background

2.1 A scrutiny form was completed by an Elected Member who raised concerns about public conveniences, following which the Executive Director of Resources presented a report to Policy Scrutiny in January 2007, which outlined options in respect of the provision of public conveniences.

2.2 The Policy Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to investigate current usage of public conveniences and consider how to take this forward.

3. Membership of the Task and Finish Group and Terms of Reference

3.1 The Members of the Task and Finish Group were Councillor Cheetham (Chair), Councillor Dickinson, Councillor Eaton, Councillor Haworth and Councillor Neal.

3.2 The Terms of Reference were as follows:

- To look at the provision of current public conveniences and make a preliminary assessment of their condition.
- To review the current budget allocation for repairs and maintenance
- To review access times for public convenience
- Review the monitoring and future cleaning of the facilities
- To review the feasibility of the reopening some of the public conveniences in the Borough
- To look at the possibility of working in partnership with local traders to provide a community service scheme on specific sites around the Borough

4. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In determining how to take the work forward and how best to consult with the public, a press release was produced through the Rossendale Alive Newsletter which is distributed to all households in the Borough

A questionnaire was also produced which was circulated at the Neighbourhood Forums and also by Elected Members. The questionnaire was also available to download on the Council's website as well as being available in local libraries.

There was consultation with specific groups including Age Concern, Help the Aged and toddler groups within the Borough

Site visits were also undertaken to the facilities.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 To look at the provision of current public conveniences and make a preliminary assessment of their condition.

There is no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to provide public conveniences and the Government does not see the introduction of legislation to require the provision of public conveniences as the way forward.

In the absence of legislation specifically relating to the provision of public conveniences there are however pieces of legislation that Local Authorities need to consider in providing the service. These are:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – which required that the Council makes the public conveniences it provides accessible. Where this does not occur, the Council will in the future leave itself open to challenge.

The Public Health Act 1936 – which merely gives the Local Authority the power to provide public conveniences.

Rossendale has a significant stock of public conveniences with approximately 75% currently operational, the remainder having been closed over a long period of time. In addition, the facility on James Street in Rawtenstall would be replaced by a facility in the new shopping centre operated by the developer.

The condition of the current facilities are inadequate, as well as basic condition issues there is a significant requirement for additional disabled access work.

As a result of vandalism, drug abuse or other inappropriate behaviour there have been a reduction in the number of people using these facilities resulting in the closure of some public conveniences within the Borough.

Existing Provision of facilities are as follows:

- St James Street, Rawtenstall – New facilities would be provided within the new Valley Centre
- Haslingden Market
- Stacksteads
- Waterfoot
- Whitworth
- Whitaker Park, Rawtenstall work has been undertaken to ensure they comply with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Edenfield (no longer operational)
- Bacup (no longer operational)
- Crawshawbooth (closed)

5.2 To review the current budget allocation for repairs and maintenance

The Task and Finish Group were advised that if they decided on the option of completely ceasing to deliver the service, there would be a revenue saving of £36k (see table below), with significant capital spending being avoided,

although some capital spending would be required to demolish the current structures.

Table 1

	£
Employee Related Costs	15,090
Rent / Rates	5,320
Utilities	4,680
Repairs and Maintenance	6,600
Insurance	310
Supplies	1,000
Transport	3,490
Total	36,490

The condition of the current facilities is not good and as well as basic condition issues there is a significant requirement for additional disabled access work. The scale of these costs is outlined in the table below, showing separately the costs for both the operational and currently closed facilities. It should be noted that the figures for the facilities at Bacup and Rawtenstall Markets and Stubblee Park cannot be disentangled from the condition survey information dealing with much larger assets and they are therefore excluded.

Table 2

Facility	Area Sq m	Condition Survey Works (5 Year total) £	Immediate DDA Expenditure £	Condition Survey Work £/Sq m	DDA Work £/Sq m
Crawshawbooth	23.41	5,370	27,000	229.39	1,153.35
Haslingden	26.29	1,530	16,600	58.20	631.42
Rawtenstall - James St	38.76	4,590	30,000	118.42	773.99
Rawtenstall - Whittaker Park	18.24	1,010	12,600	55.37	690.79
Stacksteads - Newchurch Road*	39.27	5,430	19,300	138.27	491.47
Waterfoot	26.18	3,580	35,000	136.75	1,336.90
Whitworth - Healey Corner	35.39	1,230	20,000	34.76	565.13
Total Operational	207.54	22,740	160,500	109.57	773.34
Bacup - Boston Road	35.39	1,230	26,000	34.76	734.67
Edenfield - Bury Road	35.39	1,230	28,000	34.76	791.18
Total Non Operational	70.78	2,460	54,000	34.76	762.93
Total	278.32	25,200	214,500	90.54	770.70

To invest in the current services would require capital investment of £148,650. However, in order to protect such an investment and address the various community safety issues it would be necessary to increase the level of cleaning and supervision.

The Council examined four options which are summarised below:

Option A illustrates 3 non driving operatives each maintaining 2 conveniences

Option B illustrates 2 non driving operatives each maintaining 3 conveniences

Option C illustrates 3 driving operatives each maintaining 2 conveniences

Option D illustrates 2 driving operatives each maintaining 3 conveniences

Table 3

	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
	£	£	£	£
Employees	73,920	49,350	91,260	60,910
Materials	2,240	2,240	2,240	2,240
Transport			35,010	23,340
	76,160	51,590	128,510	86,490

5.3 To review access times for public convenience

Facilities at Haslingden Market are now open Monday-Friday between 9am-3.30pm, this being dependent on when the cleaner opens and closes them.

Facilities in Rawtenstall, Waterfoot and Whitworth are open 9am- 4.30pm weekdays, again times are in the main, dependent on when the cleaner opens and closes them.

The responsibility of the opening and cleaning of the facilities in Stacksteads is undertaken by the Stacksteads Caretaker who commences work at 10am. They close around 4.30pm

Whitaker Park is open Monday to Thursday 8.30 am to 3.30 pm and Friday 8.30 am to 12.00 noon. If the Kiosk is open in Summer at weekends and Bank Holidays they are then opened by the Friends of the Museum

5.4 Review the monitoring and future cleaning of the facilities

The facilities are cleaned on a daily basis, with the exception of weekends as there is no staff presence.

Site visits were undertaken by Members of the Task and Finish Group, at which time all appeared to be clean

5.5 To review the feasibility of the reopening some of the public conveniences in the Borough

As well as presenting significant financial issues, particularly in terms of disabled access, public conveniences present particular difficulties in relation to

other current agendas which the Council must address across a full range of its service provision

- **Community Safety** – public conveniences tend to provide a relatively undisturbed enclosed, yet publicly accessible environment. This results in them often being used as the setting for various forms of anti-social behaviour and leaves them highly prone to vandalism.
- **Every Child Matters** - The Council has a duty to safeguard the well being of children and young people using facilities that it provides. Historically, unsupervised public conveniences have provided opportunities for incidents of child abuse to take place.

It was recognised that both Rawtenstall and Bacup were the main areas in need of public conveniences, with the provision of the facilities at the present time in Bacup being non-existent.

As Rawtenstall attracts the most shoppers to the area, and if the Council were to promote Rawtenstall as a tourist area, there was a need for better public conveniences in the town centre.

The facilities at Crawshawbooth were closed over three years ago following a fire which had destroyed a single integrated unit. Members heard from an Officer of the Property Services Team that it would cost £2,500 to re-open them.

Edenfield public conveniences were closed on police advice, due to inappropriate behaviour. The Chair indicated that there is a cycleway through Edenfield, which was well used by cyclists at weekends, with no public convenience facilities being available. Apparently, the electrical supply to the closed facility had been cut off.

The facilities at Bacup had been closed due to inappropriate behaviour but an Officer of the Council indicated that the facilities had been inspected and appeared to be adequate.

Members of the Task and Finish Group considered replacing the existing facilities with 'superloos', but the Group agreed that this option would be too costly, with an annual running cost in the range of £10,000 - £14,000 per cubicle (i.e. £20,000 - £28,000 per site), which would include cleaning and maintenance. The actual figure would depend upon the exact level of servicing required.

5.6 To look at the possibility of working in partnership with local traders to provide a community service scheme on specific sites around the Borough

The Community Toilet Scheme was an option to consider, working in partnership with local traders, which would operate through the payment of retainers to selected traders.

This scheme enables local businesses like pubs, restaurants and shops to work together with the Council to make more clean, safe and accessible toilets available to the public. Members of the public can use toilet facilities during the premises opening hours and without the need to make a purchase.

6. VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC

To seek the views of the public, a questionnaire was distributed by Members and available on the Council's website and public libraries. We received 205 completed questionnaires.

A copy of the questionnaire attached at **Appendix A**

7. RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The results are attached as **Appendix B**

8. CONCLUSION

The Task and Finish Group were faced with a number of options as follows;

- a) Close the facilities and use the Community Scheme – 44% do not use the facilities and yet 68% indicated they would use the community scheme. On the assumption that 6 facilities would be required and that the maximum revenue payment is £2,000 per annum, then the cost would be £12,000. A detailed scheme and policy would need to be developed for member approval if it was agreed to adopt this scheme.
- b) Re-open the facilities in Bacup, Edenfield and Crawshawbooth at a cost to the Council (**Appendix C**)– If the Council spent money on the facilities, perhaps people would use them.
- c) Combination of options a and b – keep them open in some areas of the Borough and offer community scheme to others.

It was felt that although there were budgetary issues, the most important factor was to ensure that public conveniences were accessible to everyone in the Borough.

Following a meeting with the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, the Property Services Manager and the Scrutiny Support Officer, a series of actions were agreed to provide better information on the issues raised by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

The details set out in **Appendix C** have been provided by the Property Services Manager and are for the cost of re-commissioning and reconstructing the public conveniences of Edenfield, Bacup and Crawshawbooth.

The Council's Executive Team will consider the appropriate location within the organisation for developing the Community Toilet Scheme if the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are agreed by the Cabinet.

Further information of this aspect and the Richmond Council Scheme will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group and after discussion the following recommendations were agreed. These would be presented to the next Cabinet for consideration.

1. That the opening times of public conveniences throughout the Borough be extended to include Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays, where possible.
2. That consideration be given to the possible re-opening of Crawshawbooth, Edenfield and Bacup facilities, in the future.
3. That consideration be given to asking the traders of Bacup Market to allow the public the use of their facilities.
4. That a six month pilot of the Community Toilet Scheme be considered for Bacup, to include developing the Scheme in buildings within the Council's remit, to include a retainer fee eg sport centres, libraries, in consultation with Lancashire County Council.
5. That consideration be given to a rolling programme of painting and upgrading of all public conveniences within the Borough, with a budget of £20,000 to be allocated to begin the upgrading of public conveniences and consider using the probation service as a form to assist with any work needed.
6. That consideration be given to the future management of these facilities with continuous resources being made available to improve and maintain the facilities.

Resolved:

That the above recommendations be considered by Cabinet.

Membership of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Cheetham (Chair)

Councillor Dickinson

Councillor Haworth

Councillor Neal

APPENDIX C

The details set out below have been provided by the Property Services Manager and are for the cost of re-commissioning and reconstructing the public conveniences of Edenfield, Bacup and Crawshawbooth.

Work Required	Costs £
Test and inspect electrical installation x3	750
Test and check plumbing systems x3	750
Commercial clean x3	1,500
New Signage x3	750
General Repairs x3	6,000
Commission Wallgate Units (hand dryers, soap dispensers, wash basins) x 3	1,500
Additional Costs	
Reconnect electrical supply at Edenfield	750
Repair Fire Damage at Crawshawbooth	2,500
Operational Costs	
Cleaning per day £18 x 5 x 52 x 3	14,040
Opening/closing per day £12 x 5 x 52 x 3	9,360
Total Cost	£37,900

Note:

- a) The cost of opening/closing could be reduced if opened/closed at the same time as cleaning
- b) Whitaker Park public convenience is already in an operational state and is used by the Friends of the Museum in summer months and only the operational costs will apply
- c) Stubbylee Park public convenience will require major refurbishment to re-open