

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: Ash Wharf, Friary and St Nicolas, Holy Trinity, Lovelace, Onslow, Tillingbourne

Report of Director of Service Delivery

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Public Conveniences Review

Executive Summary

On 1 April 2021 the Service Delivery Executive Advisory Board (EAB) supported a mandate to commence a public conveniences review. The recommendation was to investigate the removal of grant funding from Ash and Shere Parish Councils (£14,040) and produce a long list of 8 toilets, from the 16 we provide, to seek limited closures.

The review identified 8 locations and produced an officer's recommendation noting 4 toilets and the removal of grant funding. These locations were chosen due to both operational reasons, and nearby alternative provisions for residents and visitors. The officer's recommendation was taken to the Service Delivery EAB on 4 November 2021 and their consideration has informed this report.

Recommendation to Executive

1. That the closure of up to 5 of our public conveniences be approved in principle.
2. That public convenience grants are removed from Ash and Shere Parish Councils.
3. That, subject to a review of responses from a public consultation, the Head of Operational and Technical Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Environment, be authorised to determine which toilets should be closed in March 2022.

Reason(s) for Recommendation:

To achieve £65,000 per annum savings in the public conveniences budget, starting in the 2022/23 financial year.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication?

No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise the Executive of the outcome of the Service Delivery EAB's consideration into the public conveniences review. It was agreed that, due to the Council's financial position, this review is needed.
- 1.2 Seek approval for the closure of 4 or 5 toilets, and removal of grant funding, allowing us to remove the vacant toilet cleaner post, and achieve budget savings of £65,000 per annum.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 Guildford Borough Council currently operates 16 public toilets across the Borough. We also provide grant funding to Ash and Shere Parish Councils, to support their provision.
- 2.2 The Budget Survey 2021, undertaken by SMSR Research, asked residents to consider Council services in terms of importance, priority, and spending. The survey found that public facilities ranked 9th for all 3 categories, out of the 12 noted services we provide (see a table of these results in Appendix 1).
- 2.3 We have no legal duty to provide public conveniences but look to still maintain a high-quality provision after achieving £65,000 in budget savings.

3. Background

- 3.1 Although the provision of public toilets is not a legal duty, we have historically provided these for residents and visitors. We currently provide 16 public conveniences, 10 of which are in the GU1 area. All are well maintained and well used by residents and visitors to the Borough. They support the use of parks, car parks and those visiting the Borough's shops and attractions. We have a rolling refurbishment plan, funded by capital, to ensure the facilities are in good condition.
- 3.2 The Council is faced with financial difficulties so must look to cut spending in a way that minimises impact on residents and to ensure good value for money. The Service Delivery EAB confirmed its support for the public conveniences mandate on 1 April 2021, so that a business case could be developed with a view to bringing forward a long list of possible closures for consultation. Options 3 and 4 of the mandate were to be investigated – removal of grant funding from Ash and Shere Parish Councils and seeking limited closures. All of the considered options are outlined in section 13 below.
- 3.3 A long list of public conveniences was created and included Allen House, Bedford Road, Farnham Road, Onslow Recreation Ground, Ripley, Tunsgate, Ward Street and Woodbridge Road. The reasons for these toilets forming part of the long list, alongside any immediate issues in the event of closure, can be

found within Appendix 2 (Public Conveniences Report to the Service Delivery EAB – 4 November 2021).

3.4 The Service Delivery EAB agreed that, due to the Council's financial position, that this review is needed. The EAB's advice can be seen in section 12 below.

3.5 The officer's recommendation is that as part of the consultation there is a preference for Allen House, Bedford Road, Ripley, Woodbridge Road to be closed, or passed to another organisation. These 4 locations will allow us to suitably reduce the workload and remove the vacant toilet cleaner post.

The exact locations of closures will be decided following a review of public consultation responses. The cost implications of choosing one location over another are minimal. The important thing is that the above 4 locations will allow us to suitably reduce the workload in order to remove the vacant toilet cleaner role. The reduction in staff and vehicle cost is the majority of the aimed £65,000 savings.

Ripley was chosen for operational reasons, because if it is not closed as 1 of 4 then a total of 5 will need to be closed instead. The remaining 3 locations all have nearby publicly accessible alternatives.

3.6 The difference in closure numbers is because of the distance Ripley is away from our base of operations, Woking Road Depot, and the distance away from all the other toilets we provide in the Borough. Currently, we pay Ripley Parish Council to open and close Ripley toilets on our behalf. If the toilet was to close, or be passed to the Parish Council, this funding would stop.

It is acknowledged that there are currently no publicly accessible provisions nearby in Ripley, according to national mapping, with Parish residents and visitors having to rely on the private sector if this location closes. We do remain hopeful that Ripley Parish Council will take over the Ripley toilets. However, as Ripley toilets have the lowest footfall of those surveyed in 2018 it was important to ensure our recommendation was for 4 facilities, rather than 5, therefore minimising the overall impact on Borough residents and visitors. A report from Healthmatic, setting out results of a usage survey in 2018, is attached as Appendix 3.

3.7 The project is expected to close on Friday 1 April 2022, ensuring the annual budget savings are delivered for the 2022-23 financial year. This means the Head of Operational and Technical Services, if authorised as described in the recommendation to the Executive, will have 4 to 5 weeks after consultation to determine, in consultation with the Lead Councillor, which toilets should be closed and enact the closures.

3.8 It is noteworthy that neighbouring Waverley Borough Council have closed the vast majority of their public toilets over the past years. Many Town and Parish Councils, alongside community groups, stepped in to take some of the toilets over.

4. Stakeholder Consultation

4.1 Parish Councils

Ash, Ripley and Shere Parish Councils are major stakeholders in this review. The most recent and relevant contact can be seen as Appendices 4 to 8. In summary, all three Parish Councils are objecting to the review's plan to close or remove grant funding from the toilet most relevant to them. Ripley Parish Council have said they cannot afford the additional expense of taking over the Ripley toilets, in addition to the £40,000 they already spend on The Green. Ash and Shere Parish Councils note the strain the removal of grant funding will put on their budgets, and that they have heavy use from residents and visitors from outside of their Parish areas.

4.2 Onslow Village Tennis Club have replied in opposition to closing the Onslow Recreation Ground toilets highlighting its importance to users of the recreation ground. They also note that they have no ability or funding to take over the toilets (see Appendix 9).

4.3 Experience Guildford have previously registered objection to town centre toilet closures. More recently, they highlighted that Business Improvement Districts cannot replace a service and only add or enhance an existing project, service or project. The previously thought possibility of Experience Guildford taking over a town centre toilet is now ruled out (see Appendix 10).

4.5 We are still awaiting response from Woodbridge Road Café and are in early discussions with Guildford Sportsground Management Company, regarding the Woodbridge Road facilities.

4.4 Waverley Borough and Farnham Town Councillor David Beaman is speaking at this meeting in his role as Chair of the South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network and as a member of the Guildford Access Group. Our past contact largely focused on alternative ways to generate funding, as an alternative to closures (Councillor Beaman's comments are set out in Appendix 11).

5. Public Consultation

5.1 Public consultation is due to take place starting mid-January 2021 for 6 weeks. We will set our officer's recommendation as a preference, but the toilets to close will be chosen by reviewing the consultation's responses.

5.2 We will be encouraging parish councils, residents' associations, community groups, places of worship, local NHS Trusts, charities, Government support groups and local businesses to respond to the consultation. This includes groups like the Guildford Access Group, Experience Guildford, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Age UK and the Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust.

6. Key Risks

- 6.1 It is acknowledged that there has been, and will be, extensive negative feedback from all external stakeholders as we are removing some service provision.
- 6.2 There is potential for toilet closures to affect our future budding to retain Green Flag and Purple Flag awards.
- 6.3 Closures could impact on the number of visitors to the Borough in a post COVID world. This made equalities impacts very important and work will be ongoing to increase publicly accessible provision via The British Toilet Association's "Use Our Loos" scheme and The Great British Toilet Map.
- 6.4 A correct balance between the benefit of cost savings and the negative impact on, or perception with, residents need to be ensured. The officer's recommendation, for preference at consultation, tries to minimise the impact on residents while delivering much needed cost savings.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Public Convenience Budget

Salaries and on costs	£92,000
Overtime	£22,000
Operating costs (utilities/consumable)	£35,000
Transport	£18,000
Maintenance	£19,000
Grants	£14,000
Overheads	£47,000
Business Rates	£8,000
Depreciation	£54,000
Income	(£16,000)
Total Budget	£293,000

- 7.2 The £65,000 savings will largely come from removing a vacant grade 1 toilet cleaner role, and reducing the number of vehicles in the service accordingly. This will reduce the salaries and on costs and transport parts of the budget by 1/3, or £36,600.
- 7.3 The closure of up to 5 of our facilities will reduce the revenue expenditure of the operational costs, maintenance, overheads and business rates part of the budget. To what extent savings are made in these categories largely depends on what locations are chosen after consultation.
- 7.4 If the 4 locations in the officer's recommendation are chosen after consultation the budget savings across the above-mentioned categories will be £13,830. When including staffing and vehicle costs the total revenue saving would be

£50,430. If the £14,040 grant funding is also removed, we will achieve savings totalling £64,470.

- 7.5 If we close the lowest budget cost 5 locations, we will achieve budget savings of £11,860, within the same categories. This scenario includes 5 locations because it does not include Ripley.
- 7.6 If we close the highest budget cost 4 locations, we will achieve budget savings of £19,760, within the same categories.
- 7.7 Due to the above, the exact location of closures has minimal impact on the overall savings target of £65,000, when in comparison to staffing and vehicle costs.
- 7.8 The combinations of locations chosen for closure produce a relatively small spread between the lowest and highest budget savings, compared to the overall target. Therefore, we believe it is important to place more emphasis on minimising the impact on residents, public opinion, and operational efficiency. This is how the locations in the officer's recommendation were decided and why the locations should be chosen by reviewing the results of the public consultation.
- 7.9 The project is expected to close on Friday 1 April 2022, ensuring the annual budget savings are delivered for the 2022-23 financial year.
- 7.10 Closure of facilities will also reduce future refurbishment costs, that are funded by capital. The scope of these savings depends on the locations chosen. However, capital expenditure reductions are long term and not within the scope of this review. They are also heavily dependent on future quality vs cost decisions.
- 7.11 The toilet cleaner role is currently being covered on a temporary basis, and the individual will move back to their full-time street scenes post. This means there are no redundancy implications.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 By way of information S87 Public Health Act 1936 confers a discretionary power on the Council to provide public conveniences and also powers to transfer them to other providers. Consultation must be conducted in line with the principle set out in *Gunning v Brent LBC 1985* case – timed at a stage early enough in the process to be meaningful, provide sufficient information to be meaningful, adequate time is provided for consultees to provide a response and the responses are conscientiously and adequately considered.

9. Human Resource Implications

- 9.1 Management will have to notify the individual temporarily covering the vacant toilet cleaner role that they are moving back to their full-time street scenes post.

The Parks and Street Scenes supervisors will have to ensure the individual's training is up to date.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 Equality Impact Assessments were undertaken for 8 of the toilets that we placed onto a long list (see Appendices 12 to 19). The long list was created to ensure we could hit our savings target but to also ensure the impact on residents in protected groups is minimised, as those chosen have low footfall and/or have nearby alternatives.

- 10.2 The 8 assessments all concluded that while the facilities have existed for many years, and closures would directly affect all regular and potential users, its potential additional negative impact on those in protected groups is indirect. Leaving facilities open purely for one or more protected group is not financially viable given the Council's financial position.

11. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

- 11.1 The reduction in 1 vehicle will reduce the Council's diesel fuel use by 2,000 litres per year. Diesel releases around 2.6kg of carbon dioxide per litre used. Therefore, there will be a reduction of 5,200kg of carbon dioxide produced by our toilet cleaning operations.

- 11.2 The reduction in the number of public conveniences we provide will reduce the amount of electricity and water consumed by the Council's estate. This will become measurable after closures have taken place and the end of the COVID pandemic sees resident and visitor numbers return to normal.

12. Service Delivery Executive Advisory Board comments

- 12.1 Look for involvement from Parish Councils, or the private sector, in running the current facilities as an alternative to closure.

Responses to discussions are seen in section 4 and associated appendices. Discussions which will continue.

- 12.2 Concern of anti-social knock on but feel it is not a significant issue.

- 12.3 Provide an alternative mix, alongside the current officer's recommendation, of toilets for closure.

This is not possible at this stage, due to the locations being determined after reviewing the responses to an upcoming public consultation.

- 12.4 Further information regarding impact from Parish Councils and Guildford Access Group was requested.

Ripley and Shere Parish Councils have reconfirmed their position since the Service Delivery Executive Advisory Board. Ash, Ripley and Shere Parish Councils have included costings across their responses. Additionally, Cllr David Beaman is speaking at this meeting, as Chair of the South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network and member of the Guildford Access Group.

- 12.5 An alternative 24-hour location if Bedford Road toilets are to close.

The out of hours use of Bedford Road is very low, so a 24-hour provision may not be needed. It is acknowledged that if a need for 24-hour toilets is later identified then there is possibility of making a remaining provision open all hours. This is not something that can be currently planned for as it would be subject to future budget constraints and decision making, should a need be identified.

13. Summary of Options

- 13.1 The supported project mandate laid out 6 options for consideration.

Option 1 – complete closure of services

Deliver £200,000 of savings and future refurbishment costs. However, the process would need extensive consultation and result in other challenging issues. Due to the loss of scale it would make the provision of service to the remaining 'paid for' toilets challenging.

Option 2 – part closure of facilities

Close a smaller number of facilities, compared to option 1, where at least 6 would need to close in order to suitably reduce the overall workload for 1 toilet cleaner post to be removed.

Option 3 – removal of grant funding

Removal of the grants we pay to Ash and Shere Parish Councils for their toilets. This option would create pressure on the Parish budgets which may lead to closure.

Option 4 – mixed approach

Limited closures aligned with a redistribution of work. Future Guildford has realigned car park cleaning into a wider town centre public realm team. This scale would allow for toilets in the town centre to be cleaned by the town centre team allowing for saving of 1 toilet cleaner post with the closure of only 4 toilets.

Option 5 – do nothing

This would result in the current provision continuing as it is and avoid the costs associated with the original mandate.

Option 6 – charge for some of the services
This was previously considered and ruled out.

- 13.2 The Service Delivery EAB supported this mandate on 1 April 2021 and while there was some support for option 5, which would result in current provision unchanged, it was recognised that this was unrealistic for a discretionary service given the Council's current financial position. Accordingly, it was agreed that options 3 and 4 should be pursued.

14. Conclusion

- 14.1 Although a reduction in public convenience provision is not ideal, the Council faces financial challenges which must be addressed. The Council has no legal duty to provide public toilets and Waverley Borough Council chose to close most of their provisions in past years, although some remain due to other organisations taking them over.
- 14.2 A long list of 8 toilets at risk of closure was created, and we ensured relevant stakeholders were consulted throughout. An officer's recommendation was produced, as a preferred option at public consultation. The exact locations of closures will be determined by reviewing the responses to the public consultation.
- 14.3 The recommended option of closures and removal of grant funding would achieve a £65,000 savings target, while still maintaining high quality standards alongside a good level of provision. These closures allow us to still retain our economies of scale.
- 14.4 There are a number of alternative provisions nearby to the majority of those at risk of closure, and officers will work to increase the publicly accessible provision via The British Toilet Association's "Use Our Loos" scheme and The Great British Toilet Map.

15. Background Papers

List of public toilets taken from www.guildford.gov.uk/publictoilets

16. Appendices

Appendix 1: Results of the Budget Survey 2021, prepared by SMSR Research

Appendix 2: Public Conveniences Report Service Delivery EAB 04.11.21

Appendix 3: Healthmatic Public Toilet Survey User Count 2018

Appendix 4: Ash Parish Council's response – Ash PC 02.11.21

Appendix 5: Ash Parish Council's cost breakdown – Ash PC Cost Breakdown
16.12.21

Appendix 6: Ripley Parish Council's response – Ripley PC 03.12.21

Appendix 7: Shere Parish Council's response – Shere PC 20.09.21

- Appendix 8: Shere Parish Council's second response – Shere PC 09.12.21
- Appendix 9: Onslow Village Tennis Club's response – Onslow Village Tennis Club 24.11.21
- Appendix 10: Experience Guildford's responses – Experience Guildford 31.08.21 & 12.11.21
- Appendix 11: Cllr David Beaman as Chair of the South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network's response – Cllr David Beaman 11.09.21
- Appendix 12: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Allen House
- Appendix 13: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Bedford Road
- Appendix 14: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Farnham Road
- Appendix 15: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Onslow Recreation Ground
- Appendix 16: Equality Impact Assessment – EIA Ripley
- Appendix 17: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Tunsgate
- Appendix 18: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Ward Street
- Appendix 19: Equality Impact Assessment - EIA Woodbridge Road