To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 23rd March, 2017

JOINT MEETING OF THE REGENERATION, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY PANELS

19th December, 2016

PRESENT: Councillors, Brown, Cairns, Hasthorpe, Jackson, Mickleburgh, Pettigrew, Rogers, Rudd, Shepherd, Shreeve, K Wheatley and Wilson.

Officers in Attendance:

Sharon Wroot Director of Finance, Operations and Resources
Zoe Campbell Scrutiny and Committee Advisor
Wendy Fisher Capital Assets and Programme Manager
Benji Smith Graduate

Also in attendance:

Councillor Patrick Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Inclusion
Councillor Hyldon-King Portfolio Holder for Health & Wellbeing

There were 4 members of the public and 1 member of the press present.

JSP.5 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – That Councillor Jackson be appointed as the Chairman for this meeting of the joint panel.

COUNCILLOR JACKSON IN THE CHAIR

JSP.6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Bolton, McGilligan-Fell and Walker.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in items on the agenda for this meeting.

CALL IN – PUBLIC CONVENIENCES MANAGEMENT

The panel considered two call-ins of a decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 23rd November, 2016 in relation to the latest management review of the Public Conveniences portfolio.

Councillor Brookes, a signatory to the first call-in, addressed the panel explaining there was no statutory duty to provide public conveniences but he felt it was an issue of public health. He noted that the council was encouraging and promoting health and wellbeing but referred to the impact of the closures on people with medical conditions that required the use of public conveniences whilst exercising to keep healthy. He added that the closure of the St Peter’s Avenue public conveniences would have a detrimental effect on shopping trade and he was concerned over the capacity of the Discovery Centre to cope with the increased flow in people using its toilets. He asked whether the Discovery Centre had increased its opening hours to cope with this demand. Ms Fisher explained that the Discovery Centre was open all year round and the opening times were on the council’s website.

Councillor Parkinson, a signatory to the first call-in, explained to the panel that public conveniences were essential to the area. He had visited Grant Street and Sea Road public conveniences and was unsure about the validity of 89% drop in public usage. He felt that Cleethorpes was a destination and if people had a bad experience they were less likely to come back and the public convenience facilities were essential to this. He felt there should be further investigation carried out into what the costs were to run the public conveniences portfolio.

Councillor Brown, a signatory to the second call-in, stated that in his opinion Cleethorpes was the jewel in the crown of the East Coast which had high footfall for national events. There was high demand for public conveniences to attract local residents and tourists to shop in the area, especially the golden loop referred to in his call in. These public conveniences provided valuable facilities for a range of people. He was concerned about closing the public conveniences in St Peter’s Avenue. If the public conveniences were closed the council was at risk of pushing people out and they would not come back. He was aware of the council’s financial constraints and accepted this panel must come up with alternatives suggestions.

Councillor K Wheatley, a signatory to the second call-in, accepted it was not sustainable to keep all of the public conveniences open but she believed that the St Peter’s Avenue public conveniences needed to be kept open. She referred to research that she had carried out into councils
with tourist resorts who were successful at providing public conveniences through sponsorships, community take-overs or a move to a new style of public conveniences through a rental scheme. She also felt that by taking away the public conveniences, this would encourage anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Patrick explained it was clear that no one wanted to close the public conveniences but it was down to loss of budget from central government. No final decision had been reached and he was happy for scrutiny to have their input but they would need be mindful that a balanced budget would need to be achieved. He felt the closure of certain public conveniences would not turn people away because there were numerous alternative facilities such as the leisure centre and library in close proximity.

Ms Fisher explained that officers had carried out an exercise looking at alternative toilet provision within the golden loop (mentioned in the call in) and the map showed a large number of alternative toilet facilities including disabled toilets. Ms Fisher confirmed the reason for the footfall going down in St Peter Avenue by 89% was the introduction of the paddle gates and the cost of 30p to use the public conveniences. The gates allowed officers to monitor the footfall.

Members challenged the reduction in footfall percentages in the report because on numerous occasions it had been witnessed that the paddle gates had been left open, allowing free access. Ms Fisher agreed this may have been the case when the gates had been vandalised, however they had now been repaired. She explained that as soon as the damage was reported to Engie the work was actioned immediately. Ms Wroot confirmed that footfall figures were accurate and they had been collated over a period of time and on numerous occasions. Ms Wroot said the footfall drop explained that the public were using other toilet facilities in shops, café’s and restaurant within the area.

Members were concerned about the poor state of the public conveniences, the vandalism and cost incurred when they were not in use. Members felt there were genuine public concerns around the poor state of public conveniences and members felt this could damage the resort's reputation.

Member discussed reducing opening hours and the potential to resource the public conveniences on a full time basis which could stop misuse and anti-social behaviour. It was felt that this would give members of the public more confidence in paying to use them. Members appreciated there would be a cost associated with the resource, however this cost could potentially outweigh the cleaning cost when vandalised. Ms Wroot confirmed she would be happy for officers to carry out a cost comparator.

Ms Wroot explained to members about the communication strategy and the new methods open to officers to communicate to members of public where the public conveniences were located, opening times and costs.
These methods include social media and new signage. Members were encouraged by this.

Members discussed the recommendations to come out of the meeting and felt they would like more time to input into alternative solutions to close the public conveniences through potentially a working group. Ms Fisher confirmed there was a Select Committee that took place in 2014 to review public conveniences and the report to Cabinet on its findings was available for members of the panel to read.

The panel agreed unanimously in favour of the charging tariff being reduced from 30p to 20p but further requested that Cabinet reconsider the public convenience strategy for both Grimsby and Cleethorpes, to included alternative methods of provision of facilities, maintenance and cleaning.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET -

(1) That the reduction in the charge from 30p to 20p be supported, subject to further consideration as part of resolution 2.

(2) That Cabinet reconsider the public convenience strategy for both Grimsby and Cleethorpes, to included alternative methods of provision of facilities, maintenance and cleaning.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.30 p.m.