Joint Regeneration, Environment & Housing and Tourism, Leisure & Culture Scrutiny Panel

DATE 19 December 2016

REPORT OF Councillor Patrick – Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Inclusion

SUBJECT Public Convenience – Review and Consideration of Management Options

STATUS OPEN

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS
See cabinet report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The decision taken by cabinet on 23 November 2016 has been called in. This report is to process that call in.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION
To consider the reasons for the call in of a decision at a cabinet meeting of the 23 November 2016 in respect to the Public Conveniences in North East Lincolnshire.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 Further background information is in the cabinet report of 23 November 2016, where cabinet resolved that:

1) That the portfolio be rationalised, which would meet the financial savings required; however, would result in either a reduction in opening hours and selective closures as set out in section 1.9-1.11 of this report now submitted.

2) That the charging tariff be changed to 20p which would reduce the charge to use the public conveniences for residents and visitors to the Borough and could encourage increased usage as set out in section 1.8 of this report now submitted.

3) That the Director of Finance, Operations and Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Inclusion be delegated responsibility to ensure that all necessary actions are carried out in order to complete and approve the matters outlined above. The Director of Finance, Operations and Resources, may also implement other operational and non-monetary benefits in relation to income as outlined in section 1.7 of this report now submitted.

4) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to complete all requisite legal documentation in relation to the matters outlined above.

1.2 This decision has been called in with reference made to the decision to close the Public Conveniences at St Peters Avenue and the Boating Lake with the suggestion that the decision goes against the view of the public. Two separate
call in matters have been made to argue against the closure of toilets in the Golden Loop of the resort and at the Boating Lake. However, it should be noted, as stated in the cabinet report, these Public Conveniences experience the lowest footfall of those in the resort resulting in the associated costs being heavily subsidised by the Council.

1.3 The first call is in reference to the following points, which have been considered and answered at each point by officers:

i. The decision does not consider that the Public Conveniences located in the Golden Loop of Cleethorpes (St Peters Avenue, Seaview Street, Alexander Road and Market Street) are the only public conveniences available for people shopping in the area.

The cabinet report and the Public Convenience review considered the number and location of toilets within the Resort but identified a significant ‘displacement factor’ that existed with alternative facilities being available in close proximity of the Golden Loop. There are numerous alternative locations within the Golden Loop which offer toilet facilities for people shopping including the shops themselves, cafes, pubs and bars and restaurants. Furthermore, Public Convenience facilities such as Sea Road (0.2 miles) and Grant Street (0.3 miles) are all within 0.5 miles of the St Peters Avenue Public Conveniences.

ii. The St Peters Avenue Public Conveniences provide a valuable service to people of all ages. A loss of this service would disadvantage a high footfall area and potentially damage businesses as people may feel the need to go to out of town shopping centres which cater for the diverse needs of our population.

The Public Convenience review highlighted that although St Peters Avenue is a high footfall area, the Public Conveniences do not experience this same level of high footfall. The latest figures record that there has been a drop in the use of St Peters Avenue Public Convenience facilities by approximately 89% since charging was implemented in February. The current income levels generated will result in the Council subsidising these facilities by approximately £28,000 per annum. Furthermore, as stated above, the Council feel there is adequate alternative provision in the area to ensure that local businesses and the general public are not disadvantaged by this decision.

iii. The St Peters Avenue Public Conveniences are used more frequently compared to the Grant Street Public Convenience. Those in Grant Street are only busy during the summer months or when events are held.

The current footfall figures would currently support this statement; however it is worthy to note that the Grant Street Public Conveniences were only reopened in June 2016. It is therefore reasonable to expect that due to the closure period, behaviours of customers using these facilities has changed and alternative facilities used. Therefore, new signage and a sufficient period
of time to acknowledge these facilities are once again open is required. It is accepted that the Grant Street facilities are busiest in the summer months which is one of the recommendations to cabinet to implement a seasonal opening of this site from April-September. The site is important as a first point of contact for visitors who drive to the resort and park in the adjacent car park. As a result, customers will often require immediate access to toilet facilities after a journey and it would be less appropriate to redirect those customers who are more unfamiliar with the local area.

1.4 The second call in makes reference to the following points, which have been considered and answered at each point by officers:

i. The decision was against the view of the public.

This decision was taken in response to the lack of use of the Public Conveniences by the public since the implementation of charging. Overall, annual use of Public Conveniences across the Borough has fallen by approximately 87% overall. Latest figures estimate that this reduction in use has resulted in the Council saving only approximately £52,000 per annum and are therefore subsidising the Public Conveniences by approximately £245,000 per annum.

ii. The St Peters Avenue facilities should not be closed and the Boating Lake facilities should only be closed during the winter months if the Discovery Centre is open.

As stated above the St Peters Avenue facilities experience the lowest amount of footfall out of the resorts Public Conveniences. This is in part due to adequate alternative provision in the vicinity of this site. The Council will look to encourage and advertise this alternative provision following implementation of the cabinet decision.

The Boating Lake facilities experience the second lowest footfall of all the Resort Public Conveniences and this is consistent across both the summer and winter seasons. The annual use of these facilities has dropped by approximately 90% since the implementation of charging. As a result of this use, the Council is subsidising these facilities by approximately £31,000 per annum. The Discovery Centre is open at similar times to the Public Conveniences both in the summer and winter and as such it is felt that this would be an appropriate site to redirect customers to. It should be recognised however that these facilities will need to be monitored in respect to use and may benefit from a scheme of improvements should the footfall increase as a result.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 There is a risk to the Council’s reputation that by implementing the recommendations to cabinet, the Council are providing fewer Public Conveniences within the Borough. Whilst one reason for the decline in use could be sufficient alternative provision through other facilities, the Council are not directly delivering these alternatives and therefore has no jurisdiction to
enforce availability for general public use. The Council can demonstrate use, through the footfall figures, that there has been a decline in numbers using the facilities, and has taken this decision so not to subsidise underutilised facilities.

2.2 The Council will use the opportunity through its Communication strategy to improve the method in which it communicates to visitors and customers requiring use of the remaining Public Conveniences. Media channels such as the Council’s website, social media, digital and physical directional signage will be utilised to advise of alternative Public Convenience provision in the area provided by the Council.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS
3.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS
4.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
5.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
6.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS
7.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS
8.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS
9.1 As per the cabinet report of 23 November 2016.

10. CONTACT OFFICERS

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