

REPORT TO: THE MORAY COUNCIL ON 30 JANUARY 2008

SUBJECT: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To allow all Members to reconsider the decision taken by Council at the Budget meeting on 8th February 2007 (Item 10 of the Minute refers) to close eight Public Conveniences as of June 2007.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Members agree to the cessation of the current programme of public convenience closures but that the facilities closed in 2007 at North Street, Elgin, Town House, Buckie and the Findhorn Dunes Area remain closed.**
- 2.2 **It is further recommended that officers examine the 'Comfort Scheme' approach to service provision and report back to the Service Committee with details of a Moray scheme following engagement with the level of support for such a scheme and consultation with communities as set out in the Background section of this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Policy Committee Meeting on 29 August 2007 (Item 5 refers), the Committee requested that a comprehensive review of the closures be carried out by officials in view of the public reaction to the proposed closures, in consultation with Members, to the benefit or otherwise of retaining the rural Public Conveniences which had previously been agreed for closure.

- 3.2 The current status of public convenience closures is as follows:-

- North Street, Elgin - Closed in August 2007
- Findhorn, Dunes Area (seasonal) - Closed. Did not open in 2007
- Buckie, Town House - Closed in June 2007 when member of staff at risk of redundancy found alternative employment
- Keith, St Rufus Park and Cullen Harbour (both seasonal)) - Remains open, but closed for winter season

- Keith, Reidhaven Square) - Remains open
Buckie Fishmarket
and Lossiemouth, Esplanade)

- 3.3 The original decision taken to close these Public Conveniences was taken following a series of reports to the Service Development Group in 2006/07 to consider options for rationalising provision so as to effect budget savings and efficiencies in the provision of the Council's non-statutory Public Convenience provision service. The options considered during this process were closure of all facilities, conversion of manned facilities to unmanned facilities, transfer of responsibility to local community groups and closure of duplicate facilities. **Appendix 1** shows a summary of all Council owned public conveniences which was presented to the Service Development Group at that time to inform the decision making process.
- 3.4 The option agreed to pursue was to identify Public Conveniences in towns/villages where the Council had more than one facility and look at opportunities to remove one or more of the facilities whilst maintaining parity across the whole Council area. This process identified the list of Public Conveniences identified in Item 3.2 above.
- 3.5 The criteria used in arriving at the list of Public Conveniences for closure was:
- Is there more than one Council owned Public Convenience in the town/village?
 - Is there any other public facility available nearby?
 - Comparison of numbers of facilities in towns/villages across the Council, e.g. Elgin (x2), Forres (x2), Keith (x4), Buckie (x3).
 - Location and distance between facilities
 - Revenue costs and projected long term refurbishment costs (including DDA alterations)
- 3.6 Following the decision taken by Service Development Group, and prior to Council approving the closures, all Ward Members affected were made aware of the reasons for the decision and given copies of consultation with all Community Councils and others who were communicated with to establish whether there was any interest in community management of the facilities following their closure.
- 3.7 The following consultees were contacted asking if they wished to operate facilities identified for closure at their own cost:

Findhorn and Kinloss Community Council
Elgin Community Council
Buckie Community Council
Keith Community Council
Lossiemouth Community Council
Harbourmaster, Buckie
Educational Resources Manager
Libraries and Museums Manager

Correspondence was received from, and discussions held with, Councillors Shepherd and Hamilton. Correspondence was received from Keith Community Council and Findhorn and Kinloss Community Council.

The only group willing to manage a facility was the Cullen Tourist Initiative through Councillor Shepherd but they had no financial resources and no legal standing.

- 3.8 There has been considerable public opposition voiced to these proposals to close the remaining Public Conveniences identified in para 3.2 above. All Members were given a further opportunity to comment on the closures during late 2007, and of those who responded it was evident that there was no support for further closures.
- 3.9 As an alternative, officials have investigated providing a 'Comfort Scheme', as currently operates in Perth and Kinross Council. The Comfort Scheme, which was implemented following the Council's decision to close unmanned facilities, involves the Council reaching agreement with local cafes/hotels for the public to use their toilet facilities for an annual grant payment of approximately £1300. Appropriate signage, including road signage, is provided to make the public aware of the locations and they are listed on the Council's web site. Perth and Kinross have 26 businesses signed up to the Comfort Scheme, and have closed all of their unmanned toilet facilities. They continue to operate seven manned Public Conveniences, have plans to construct Automatic Public Conveniences (APC's) in some of their Parks and make all Council Office toilets available for public use in Perth City. The Council may wish to consider a Comfort Scheme for Moray but this would require time and resources to investigate and implement. The Council would also need to be aware that for substantial budget savings to be achieved from the implementation of a Comfort Scheme, assuming local businesses are supportive, most of the non-manned Public Conveniences across Moray should be closed.
- 3.10 In view of the significant opposition to the current closure proposals and the cost savings that could accrue from a shift to 'Comfort Scheme' provision of toilet facilities, it would be prudent to reduce the Council's involvement in direct delivery of toilet facilities and conduct the following actions:
- Cessation of the current programme of closures
 - Detailed investigation into 'Comfort Scheme' provision
 - Engage with business and tourism facilities to establish the level of support and potential provision of toilet facilities through this method
 - Consult with communities on these proposals.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

Revised provision of Public Conveniences would be in accordance with the Corporate Plans Best Value Framework and Financial Plans and the Overall Aims and Priorities in respect of delivering services within available resources and powers.

(b) Policy and Legal

There is no statutory duty on The Moray Council to provide Public Conveniences.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

The proposed closures were to achieve £100k savings in Revenue Budget over a full year. With the closure programme not fully implemented it is estimated that only £25k will be realised in 2007/08 and should the current closures stand then the savings in a full financial year will be reduced to £51k.

Redundancies have been implemented for staff employed at the North Street, Elgin facility which closed in 2007.

(d) Consultations

All Elected Members have been consulted on the further closure proposals.

Lorraine Paisey, Principal Accountant has been consulted and is in agreement with the financial implications contained in the report.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Closure of public toilets will inevitably create reactions from local communities, but when examined it is clear that provision of this non-statutory service across Moray is not equitable – both in terms of the number of units in settlements and the size of the communities served by each.

5.2 Whilst they can clearly be necessary facilities, they are often vandalised and abused, and with relatively low patronage their running costs far outweigh any possible income stream that could be realised from an entry fee.

5.3 In appreciation of the significant savings in budgets that the Council will have to demonstrate over the next four years, it would be a reasonable approach to re-examine service provision.

- 5.4 The 'Comfort Scheme' approach to service provision has worked successfully elsewhere and officers should therefore examine this alternative in detail, consult and engage as necessary to establish the potential uptake in a Moray scheme, and report back to the Service Committee in due course.**

Author of Report: I D Bruce, Environmental Protection Manager - 7040

Background Papers: None

Ref: IDB/MAS