

NORWICH CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

CITY CENTRE PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION

REPORT TO SCRUTINY 10th December, 2009

Scrutiny task & finish group:

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Purpose of Report

The brief of the 'city centre public toilet provision' task & finish group is to review the current provision, consider options and report its findings back to the Scrutiny Committee, with recommendations as to how the council can ensure adequate provision of fit for purpose facilities serving Norwich city centre

Background – City Centre public toilet provision

Norwich City Council had over the years developed 16 public toilets serving the city centre within the inner ring road area. Many of these developed age related structural issues, were not adequately accessible, failed to meet modern hygiene requirements, or had become the focus for anti-social behaviour. As a result, the council has had to close many of these facilities leaving the following that make up the council's city centre provision:

1. Provision Market
2. Tombland
3. St. Saviours
4. St. Giles (multi storey car park)
5. St. Andrews (multi storey car park)
6. Chapelfield gardens
7. Prince of Wales Road automated facility
8. Prince of Wales Road 'butterfly' urinal facility

Other 'customer' facilities are in existence within the city centre, reasonably accessible by the public:

1. Department store related (6)
2. Shopping Centre related (3)
3. City Hall
4. St Andrews Hall
5. The Forum
6. Bus Station
7. Railway Station (requires platform ticket)

All facilities other than at the railway station (these require a platform ticket to be purchased) are free to users during the hours the business premises are open. The council facilities are generally 7am to 7pm daily other than Tombland that closes at 6pm.

Norwich has developed a strong 'night time economy' particularly in the area of Prince of Wales Road and Riverside. Provision is supplemented by restaurants, nightclubs, bars and cinemas in these areas although such facilities tend to be reserved for customers.

The 'night time economy' has recently brought increasing demand for more public toilet facilities in the area of Prince of Wales Road area.

Research carried out in 2003:

In November 2003 the council commissioned OPERA community research to carry out baseline research to inform the strategy development of public conveniences in Norwich. The brief for this research recognised that 'Norwich city council had been forced to reduce funding for the maintenance of public conveniences ... as a result of anti-social ... resulting in facilities locked for extended periods or closed altogether'.

The research sought to establish

- Views from the public on access to public toilets in the city
- Views from individuals and travel groups that might need special consideration
- An understanding of provision of public & private sector ladies & gents toilets, baby change, breast feeding, facilities designed for a range of disabilities

The research reported the comments received, and these formed the basis for the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Public toilets are seen as a fundamental element of public service provision
2. They need to be accessible to all.
3. They were a vital facility for some sectors of community
4. Many were seen as uninviting, and to some 'no go areas'
5. The council was viewed as providing facilities 'on the cheap'

Research carried out in 2007:

In 2007 research was carried out to review the provision market renewal scheme, and identify additional improvements that could be made. The research contained responses about the toilets as these facilities were generally seen as part of the market. The toilets were identified in the top ten most important issues, and 23% of respondents specifically mentioned they would like to see improvements to the toilets.

A National perspective:

A new British standard against which public toilets can be measured is in the course of preparation, however has not yet been issued(Draft BS 6465-4). British standards in relation to Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people was published on 27th February 2009 (British Standard 8300:2009)

The Communities and Local Government report 'The Provision of Public Toilets' October 2008 recommended that the provision of public toilets was important and that 'that the Government imposes a duty on each local authority to develop a strategy on the provision of public toilets in their areas, which should include consultation with the local community and which should be reviewed annually .It specifically suggested that:

- Anti social behaviour is controlled
- Attended toilets should be considered as the ideal
- Poor access should not be used as an excuse for closure
- There is clear signage present
- Proper provision is made and needs assessments carried out regularly
- Community toilet schemes are looked at by local authorities

The Government responded in January, 2009 generally in support of the recommendations but avoiding the requirements for 'compulsion' and recognising the pressure that local authorities were under (Government Response to the Communities and Local Government Committee Report on the Provision of Public Toilets)

The British Toilet Association specifically campaigns for improvements in public provision. In September 2009 they have launch a 'Where can I go?' campaign specifically aimed at local authorities:

- An end to public toilet closures – authorities acceptance that use of a toilet is a basic human need and a Toilet Provision Strategy must be implemented in all towns and cities to ensure adequate facilities are provided
- More clean hygienic publicly accessible toilets in all towns and cities throughout the UK
- Inclusive facilities for all types of users where and when needed
- Changing Places toilet in every major town and city
- Independent audits to ensure compliance to standards , e.g. Loo of the Year Awards

Budgetary constraints

Budgetary pressures on the council have resulted in a reduced capital and revenue provision which has meant that no improvements to the council's public toilet provision have been possible. There is a continuing requirement to remove £1m of revenue spend from the re-provisioning of services from April 2010 which will reduce cleaning budgets and further impact on the council's ability to maintain or keep open all the existing facilities open in the next financial year..

Review of Council facilities

The following contains a summary of the state of council owned public toilet facilities in the city centre. These are shown on the map in Appendix A to this report.

1. Provision Market

This is a rather dated toilet facility with male, female and disabled provision. There is supervisory accommodation on site and it is one of the most heavily used public toilets provided by the Council. There are separate toilet



cubicles for market stall holders within the existing facility.

This unit is in need of refurbishment and whilst its design does not prevent inappropriate behaviour entirely, it is limited by having staff on site. These toilets were scheduled to be demolished as part of the phase II of the Memorial Gardens refurbishment, however due to budgetary limitations no scheme is currently within the council programme.

2. Tombland

These are male and female toilets, located just outside the entrance to the Cathedral in an area of cafés and bars. They are partially sunk into the ground and are landscaped so that they do not detract from their surroundings.



They are however, becoming very dated and the design and layout of the fixtures and fittings are also dated, which makes the units difficult to keep clean. The resultant appearance does not create an attractive facility and the unit will need to be totally refurbished within the next two to three years.

These toilets have also been designed with 'lobby' areas which mean that the facilities are subject to inappropriate behaviour at times and they are therefore locked at 6pm to reduce this problem. Because of the stairs to each they are not accessible for all. Opened in the evening at week ends by taxi marshals they have however been little used.

3. St Saviours Car Park

These are stand-alone buildings away from the main city centre, located adjacent to the Council's pay and display car park.



The building is located in an area of predominately small shops, with the exception of Anglia

Square that has toilet provisions for general public / customer use that will be carried on into a redevelopment scheme. These facilities also have a 'lobby' design in both the male and female units and they do not appear to be well utilised or maintained and are not fit for purpose.

4. St Giles Multi-Storey Car Park

These conveniences are located in the northern stairwell of the car park, the male and female toilets on level B and disabled toilets on level D.



In common with other facilities, they have a 'lobby' design, which has led to several incidents of inappropriate behaviour. It would not be easy to redesign them or justify the expense of refurbishment, however they are not therefore 'family friendly'

5. St Andrews Multi-Storey Car Park

These are modern toilets provided as part of the new car park.

There are both male and female facilities built to the latest designs, along with the requisite disabled facilities.



6. Prince of Wales Road

The current toilet (automatic coin operated type, known as APC) is located at the Eastern end of Prince of Wales Road, and is supplemented by a 'butterfly urinal' that is opened Friday and Saturday evenings, due to this road being one of the principal areas for evening and late night entertainment in Norwich.



This automatic facility was rebuilt in 2001 and consists of an individual unit. The unit is constantly breaking down and is difficult to get parts for, and has a history of being occupied by vagrants. It has a limited further life expectancy before replacement is required.

The current butterfly provision is located very near to food outlets, and this is seen as inappropriate by food businesses in the area.

The residents petition submitted to the council cites inadequate public toilet provision as a key issue that needs to be addressed.

Note: Damaged by fire 1st Decmber, 2009

7. Chapelfield Gardens

The toilet is located in a secluded corner of Chapelfield Gardens, a popular park on the Western edge of the city centre.

There are both male and female toilets in an older lobby style building. This location has suffered seriously from abuse and a large number of incidents of inappropriate



behaviour. The fabric of the building is also very dated and does not lend itself to having the problems designed out. It is adjacent to a nursery school and an under pass which is not ideal.

Good practice:

Other local authorities have tackled the provision in differing ways, from continuing in providing a wide range of facilities direct through to closure and funding private provision as a replacement. Examples of good practice elsewhere examined included:

Community Toilet Scheme

This has been developed by Richmond council, where the council will look to close its own toilets and has put in place funding to promote businesses with toilets into joining a public toilet access scheme. The council pays the members an amount to make their toilets available to the public and advertising material promotes the scheme. The government view was that this scheme needed to continue to be supplemented with council facilities.

The task & finish group felt this was a good scheme but did not see the merit in paying additional funds for facilities that are already available or considered it represented the best use of council funds.

'Sat Lav' Project

This system was enabled with telecoms operators. It allowed phone users to call a number and be directed to their nearest public toilet. The set up costs and annual running costs are high, and no real advantage could be seen to justify the additional spend.

Assessment of options available

The following options were examined by the Task and Finish group:

1. **No change:** the task & finish group did not consider this an option based upon the issues with overall budgets, and the condition of the units.
2. **Closure of all toilet provision in the city centre:** whilst the provision of facilities is non – statutory, the Task and Finish group were aware of public demand for the provision of council run facilities and closure was therefore considered inappropriate.
3. **Continue as at present but invest in facilities:** The task and finish group considered that the council should ensure all its facilities were fit for purpose and recognised this would require increased capital and revenue funding, currently not within the council's programme.
4. **Focus resource on fewer facilities:** Partial closure was reviewed giving cost savings and removing facilities that are not fit for purpose. The facilities retained should be the Provision Market toilets where these also serve the traders, St Giles and St Andrews multi storey car

park facilities, Chapelfield and the facilities within Prince of Wales Road (the latter only in the very short term), with closure of Tombland and St Saviours, both identified as not fit for purpose. This would enable a concentration of resources into fewer facilities, and would be on the basis that the sites retained should be brought up to British Standard (when published), as and when funds permit. There should also be an urgent review of the requirements for the night time economy areas.

5. Out sourcing Provision: The advantages of this approach are that the facilities can become self funding as charging becomes possible, and this would enable a higher level of supervision and cleanliness / updating for the larger facilities. However, capital investment would be required at start up with an agreed level of income that may requires some council subsidy, and a budget of over £200,000 would be required per annum for the first few years of such a scheme.

Further considerations:

1. Night time economy area

The task and finish group considered that the night time economy area had a different profile to regular public toilets, and should be a specific study carried out as part of an overall review project for the night time economy areas, perhaps with business subsidy.

2. Advertising

The task and finish group identified that very clear 'signposting' to facilities was required for the council provided facilities.

Conclusions:

1. Overall the facilities owned and managed by the council have had a lack of investment (other than the facilities more recently provided in St Andrews car park) and generally are run down with a range of issues including poor accessibility.

2. The task and finish group recognised the current financial position of the council would not enable immediate change but recommend that the, council should ensure that it develops budget provision to ensure that in future facilities are 'fit for purpose'. This would require additional revenue and capital funding.

3. The special and urgent demands of the night time economy appear as separate issues from the day to day facilities found elsewhere in the city and should be the subject of a separate review.

4. The council had limited 'signposting' of the facilities to visitors.

5. Good practice from elsewhere was not considered immediately relevant but may have merits to review for the future, particularly where additional investment could be generated.

6. Overall the task and finish group identified a continuing need for the council to provide some public facilities alongside the wide range of private customer facilities, most of which are well known and recognised.

Recommendations

1. The facilities at St Saviour's and Tombland are closed from the end of this financial year.
2. An urgent review of the facilities required to support the night time economy is commissioned, with recommendations being brought forwards and implemented as soon as possible. The options considered should both include temporary and permanent facilities, and investigate ways that these facilities can be funded.
3. The remaining city centre facilities should be reviewed against the British standard when released, and schemes developed to make all facilities fully fit for purpose for inclusion in the future capital programme with appropriate revenue budgets reserved. As part of this review an examination of charging via private partners operating the schemes should be assessed, together with supervision and revisiting the community toilet scheme to re-test the benefits of that option. It is recognised that as part of this review the current siting of the Chapelfield provision may not be sustainable, and alternative options may need to be considered.
4. In the interim the council should improve advertising of facilities
5. The council should actively continue to publicise the availability of private sector provision through the parking planner and suitable sign posting within the city centre.
6. The council should focus on reducing the anti-social issues that impact on the public conveniences.
7. The council should also ensure that some of the savings realised from the closure of facilities should in the short term be used to ensure the remaining facilities have improved maintenance.

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Appendix B – Consultation

The Opera report consulted with various groups of the general public. These included Members of the public aged 18-65 in socio-economic groups B, C1 C2 D & E.

People aged 70-80

People with disabilities and disability groups

Breast feeding mothers

Ethnic minority women.

Adult single parent women some on benefits with dependant disabled children.

Other consultation

City Centre Partnership to cover local businesses within the city centre.

Survey of provisions market users following its refurbishment in 2007