

**Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee – 15 August 2007**

**Item 6**

**MYSTERY SHOPPING**

**LEAD OFFICER:** Tim Capper  
**REPORT AUTHOR:** Neil White

**Recommendation: that the Executive be advised that:**

**(A)** the Council's vision for the public conveniences service should be to:

- (1) promote a positive image of Copeland,
- (2) be accessible to all and have close disabled parking at all locations,
- (3) have cleanliness and levels of provision that match the British Toilet Association standards, and
- (4) have toilets that are clearly signposted,

**(B)** A service improvement plan be prepared by the Head of Leisure and Environment detailing timescales, desired outcomes, and responsibility for implementation of recommendations to enable the Council to meet the vision for the public conveniences service detailed at (A) above,

**(C)** At St Bees Foreshore the Head of Leisure and Environment be requested to investigate and report back on:

- (1) removal of the wishing well at the rear of the public conveniences, and
- (2) the feasibility of using more "visitor friendly" language on the yellow public notice on the promenade that warns "use of the promenade is at your own risk", and

**(D)** details of the public conveniences in the borough including opening hours be placed onto the Council's website

**1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 Public toilets and a mystery shopping approach to address concerns at the toilets and adjacent "grotspots" have been the subject of a number of reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Executive.

- 1.2 The Environmental Well - Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 June 2005 agreed that a sub group of members be set up, to undertake a review of public toilets.
- 1.3 The Sub Group made a number of recommendations to the Executive at its meeting on 6 December 2005. A copy of that report is at Appendix "A". The Executive agreed a number of these recommendations and a copy of the Statement of Executive Decision is at Appendix "B".
- 1.4 Following an update on public toilets at the Environmental Well - Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 3 May 2006, the Committee noted that a number of the previous recommendations had not been undertaken and agreed a number of actions to progress the outstanding issues. A copy of the decision is at Appendix "C".
- 1.5 The Committee also agreed to undertake another mystery shopping exercise of the public toilets. The tour of the south of the borough was undertaken on 18 May 2006. The results of that tour are at Appendix "D".
- 1.6 The tour of the north of the borough was undertaken on 15 May 2007. The results of that tour are at Appendix "E".

## **2. RESULTS OF THE TOURS**

- 2.1 The Tours have shown that a number of general issues still remain in the provision of public toilets. These are:

### **Signage**

- There was a need for additional signage to be erected within the locality that pointed out where the locations of the toilets were so that visitors to the area would know where these facilities were.
- There was a lack of signage at the toilets showing the opening and closing times of a number of toilets.

### **Cleaning and Maintenance**

- A number of toilets needed to be cleaned with one in an unacceptable condition and therefore gave the impression that they were not being cleaned regularly,
- This view was enforced through the lack of any cleaning schedules or where there was one (St James Street, Whitehaven) it was almost a year out of date.

### **Disabled toilets**

- At a number of toilets the access for disabled users was too far way or not available at all and there was a need to improve the access so that users with defined disabilities can park closer to a public convenience.
  - Better advice as to where disabled users can obtain RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) keys to access disabled facilities was needed.
- 2.2 There were a number of issues at individual toilets where items were not working or were unavailable (highlighted in Appendices “D” and “E”), particularly in the disabled toilets. A better standard of service was needed at these sites.
- 2.3 At St Bees there were two other issues outside the public conveniences that the Sub Group requested officers to look at. These were:
- a) The wishing well to the back of the toilets has become an eyesore and is used more as a rubbish bin than as monument. The Sub Group would like to see the wishing well removed.
  - b) The large yellow public notice before the promenade states that “use of the promenade is at your own risk” and the sub group would like the notice to be rewritten to use language that is more inviting to new visitors.

### **3. POLICY**

- 3.1 Public Conveniences are one of the longest established municipal services. Councils have no statutory duty to provide this service but have a power under the Public Health Act 1936. The Council may also charge such fees for the use of any such conveniences, other than urinals, as they think fit.
- 3.2 The Public Health Act 1936 states that a local authority may provide sanitary conveniences in proper and convenient situations. Any new public convenience is obliged to ensure that it includes facilities for people with disabilities.
- 3.3 Copeland Borough Council current policy is to demolish public toilets in rural areas if no other local organisation can be found to provide maintenance and cleaning.
- 3.4 Copeland Borough Council reviewed its provision of public toilets over 10 years ago, drawing up a strategy of providing public toilets in service centres and in strategic tourism sites namely St Bees and Gosforth.

Subsequently, Gosforth Parish Council took responsibility for the public toilets at Gosforth car park as part of the car park leasing arrangements.

- 3.5 Other leasing arrangements were entered into with Seascale and Bootle Parish Councils, Millom Town Council (for Haverigg) and with the Lake District National Park Authority (for Silecroft), each of whom receive a grant from the Council towards costs.
- 3.6 British Standard 6465 gives recommendations for the scale of provision and guidance for the selection and installation of sanitary appliances, including toilets for disabled people. The British Toilet Association (BTA) publishes a providers guide to the provision and management of 'away from home' toilets including identifying user needs, operating public toilets and installing better facilities to meet today's demands.
- 3.7 A scheme operated by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR) enables disabled users to purchase a special key that is of a common design and fits all specially designed RADAR toilets throughout the United Kingdom.

#### **4. VISION**

- 4.1 The Sub Group felt that it was time for the Council's policy on public conveniences to be updated and that a new vision for the service be established.
- 4.2 The vision should be made up of 4 parts, that:
  - (1) it was important for the Public Conveniences Service to promote a positive image of Copeland. This was especially true in an area where tourism was a key part of the local economy,
  - (2) the public conveniences should be accessible to all and have disabled parking close to the facilities at all locations,
  - (3) the maintenance of the toilets should ensure that they have a level of cleanliness and provision that matched the British Toilet Association Standards, and
  - (4) all toilets are clearly and effectively signposted.

#### **5. FINANCE**

1. A list of public toilets in Copeland, approximate cost and the responsible bodies can be within Appendix "A" to this report.

2. The Council's current budget for public conveniences is 57,890. However at Executive meeting on 30 May 2007 it was noted that an overspend of £5,586 has been spent in this financial year on the Public Conveniences service. The budget included income for public toilets however a decision was made by the Executive after the budget was set to remove the charges due to the cost of having to replace damaged locks at some of the toilets. Therefore no income has been received and an overspend has been incurred.

## 6 CORPORATE PLAN

There is one applicable action in the Corporate Plan. This is:

Action	Outcomes (measurable)	Target date
Maintenance and improvement of street scene.	Enhanced visitor experience.	From 2008
Investment in public realm and accessibility	Increased visitor numbers and spend.	
	More attractive environment for businesses and customers.	
	Improved perception of safety.	

## 7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

Most authorities provide details on their websites of the public conveniences in their area including the location and times of opening. This information is not provided on the Council's website and the Sub Group felt that it would be useful if this information was provided along with who to contact if there is a problem with one of the facilities.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The Committee is invited to consider the recommendations of the mystery shopping sub group at the head of this report.

### List of Appendices

Appendix A – Overview and Scrutiny recommendations to the Executive meeting on 6 December 2005

Appendix B – Statement of Executive Decision 6 December 2005

Appendix C – Decision of the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 3 May 2006

Appendix D – Mystery shopping tour of the south of the borough

Appendix E – Mystery shopping tour of the north of the borough

**List of Background Documents:**

None

**List of Consultees:**

Waste Services Manager  
Business Development Manager