

Terms of Reference for the Review

“To review public toilet provision in Copeland to ensure that the existing provision is clean and well-maintained for the benefit of both local people and visitors to the area.

“That the cost of the provision to the public purse is identified, examined, and where appropriate, suggestions made for improvement (at no or minimal additional revenue cost) or savings.

“To review opening hours of public toilets during special events.

”To form an opinion on Copeland Borough Council’s strategy for the provision of public conveniences in Copeland.”

Background

1. There is no statutory regulation requiring the Council to provide public toilets, although the British Toilet Association is continuing to lobby Government to make the provision a statutory duty.
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. There have been at least two media articles in the past year with respect to the cleanliness and the opening hours of public toilets, which sparked this review of public toilets.
4. In carrying out the review, the sub group agreed at the outset that their main priority was to ensure cleanliness and good maintenance – toilets did not require to be state of the art, but clean and well-maintained.

There was no appetite to recommend a large amount of additional expenditure. There was, however, recognition of the importance of clean and well-maintained facilities both to local people and in support of the tourist industry.

5. The sub group felt that it should not just look at the provision by Copeland Borough Council, but should look at the bigger picture and include all those facilities supplied in the Borough.
6. Figures of the number of informal complaints with regard to the cleanliness or maintenance of Copeland Borough Council's public toilets are not available as informal complaints are not recorded in such a way that the data can be interrogated. It is envisaged that the system be changed to allow such interrogation in future.
7. 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.

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 .

Comparisons

8. Research showed that there are a large number of local authorities across England attempting to rationalise their public toilet provision and to find partners to take on the responsibility for outlying areas in the same way that this Council did 10 years ago. In that respect, Copeland Borough Council has already taken some difficult decisions. Neighbouring authorities who have been wrestling with this issue for some considerable time include Eden and South Lakeland District Councils.
9. In researching the magic formula for a loo of the year award, the most important factor seems to be local pride, whether it be an attended or unattended public toilet. The success of the unattended toilet at Drumnadrochit (Loo of the Year 2004) was put down to the diligence of the two cleaning ladies. Most, not all, attended toilets charge an admission fee of 20 p.
10. Craven District Council's attended toilet at Skipton brings in £38,000 a year on the basis of ca 200,000 users. Their costs (excluding maintenance) are £43,000.

11. The sub group did not feel the need to formally compare standards and maintenance in neighbouring districts – from their own experience they did not feel there were any particular shining examples of good practice and a firm view of what they wished to achieve, as set out in para 4, would set the standard.
12. It is evident from the research that vandalism, youth nuisance and anti-social behaviour are problems which are not unique to Copeland.

Location, Ownership and Cost of Public Toilets in Copeland

13. A list of public toilets in Copeland, approximate cost and the responsible bodies can be found at appendix 1.
14. The figures show that over £100,000 of public money is spent on the provision of public toilets in Copeland, that is £1.45 per head of population (69,193).

Mystery Shopping

15. The sub-group arranged for a 'mystery visit' to each of the public toilets identified in Copeland, to be inspected against a questionnaire adapted from the criteria used in the judging of the Loo of the Year awards.
16. It is recognised that this is not a fool-proof audit as a degree of subjectivity can be expected from a mystery shopper. However, the methodology provided a valuable impression at an unannounced time of the day.

The sub group took care to ensure that where there was a potential conflict of interest (for example a few members of the sub group were also Parish Councillors responsible for the maintenance of their local facility) that the mystery shopping was carried out by another independent person.

Persistent anti-social behaviour at some locations has a bearing on the comments below. These are not being identified in a public report for obvious reasons of copycat behaviour.

17. A summary of the findings:

Haverigg (Millom Town Council)

A good facility, clean with both disabled access and baby changing facilities. Maintenance issues identified in both Ladies (air and soap not working) and Gents (tap defect). No directional signage nor information as to where faults can be reported. (Inspected 14th July, 10.00am)

Eskdale Green (Lake District National Park Authority)

A good facility, just been cleaned on a Sunday (although underside of toilets seats and toilet rim had been overlooked). No disabled access. Maintenance issue (which detracted from the overall good impression) was that the toilet rolls were left either on the floor or the back of the toilet seat. No directional signage nor information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 10th July, 2.15pm)

Seascale (Seascale Parish Council)

A good facility and clean, with disabled access. Maintenance issues were identified with taps in the Ladies and there was no dryer in the gents. No directional signage could be identified nor was there information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 28th June, 5.15pm)

Egremont (Copeland Borough Council)

A clean and functional facility with disabled provision. Poor lighting was identified as an issue to the point of being dangerous to some people (shopper had to use torch to inspect). Defects to down pipes and guttering were also identified. Signage from High Street (in need of minor attention). No information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 2nd July, 10.00am)

Wasdale Head (Lake District National Park Authority)

A reasonable facility which would have received a 'good' rating if not for the considerable insect carcasses stuck to walls and ceilings (otherwise clean). No disabled facilities. Soap dispenser had come away from the wall in the Ladies. No signage whatsoever (most visitors believe the toilets belong to the Inn) nor information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 10th July 12.20 pm)

Cleator Moor (Copeland Borough Council)

A reasonably clean and functional facility which had been newly painted, with disabled facilities. Maintenance issue identified - toilet rolls left on back of toilet - was felt to be unacceptable, no dryer. No directional signage nor information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 24th June, 4.15pm)

Millom Park (Copeland Borough Council)

A good facility, clean with disabled provision (although the location would prohibit parking immediately outside, but parking available across the road). No directional signage nor information as to where faults can be reported. Minor lighting defects. (Inspected 6th July 11.05 am)

Millom Lancashire Road (Millom Town Council)

A reasonable facility, generally clean (smell of urine from gents) with disabled provision. Maintenance issues included loose external flagstones and minor lighting defects. Directional signage obstructed by tree. No information as to where faults can be reported.

(Inspected 6th July 11.30 am)

Gosforth

A functional facility¹. The overall impression was that the building could be cleaner both internally and externally. One disabled toilet (the other has been converted to a store room).

(Inspected twice on 5th and 24th August at 12.00pm).

Bootle (Waberthwaite Parish Council)

A clean and functional facility with disabled provision. No maintenance issues identified, but overall impression was that it would benefit from some updating. Good signage.

(Inspected 3rd August 11.00 am)

Silecroft

A functional facility. No maintenance issues identified, but overall impression was that it would benefit from some updating. No directional signage, but very obvious in the immediate location of the car park. Small sign giving contact information.

(Inspected 17th July 09.30 am)

Whitehaven St James Street

A good facility, clean (although one toilet in Ladies full of loo paper). Maintenance issues identified included locks on doors (some of which required 10p to open) including the mother and baby unit. Disabled provision.

(Inspected 8th August 11.45 am)

St Bees (Copeland Borough Council)

A good facility, clean with both disabled provision and mother and baby facilities. Maintenance issues identified included missing guttering and down pipes and toilet rolls on the back of the toilet seats. No signage.

(Inspected 3rd August 09.15 am)

Ravenglass (Lake District National Park Authority)

A reasonable facility, with disabled and baby changing facilities, which would have been rated good had the Ladies been cleaner and better cared for.

Maintenance issues included lack of toilet roll holders (rolls on ledges and floor) and broken seat. (Inspected 3rd August 08.30 am)

¹ The Parish Council reports that some work has been put on hold (including refurbishment of the car park) pending plans to introduce a Tourist Information Centre to the car park.

Conclusions and recommendations

Cleaning and maintenance

The mystery shopping illustrated that, on the balance of evidence and given the anti-social behaviour which most providers had to deal with, facilities provided were generally acceptable (if not perfect) for a borough the size of Copeland.

Clearly, however, the publicity would suggest that there were times when the facilities fell below what might be considered acceptable standards. The sub group considered how this might be addressed:

The sub group did not consider that it would be feasible to return to attended toilets, there not being the traffic to make this a cost effective option nor a willingness on the part of the public to pay for use.

Therefore, with no full-time attendant on duty, faults of cleanliness or maintenance are less readily identified and the sub group concluded that communication between users, cleaning staff, and those responsible for maintenance might be improved. With this in mind, the sub group make the following two recommendations:

Recommendation 1:	for Copeland Borough Council, Lake District National Park Authority, Parish and Town Councils
-------------------	---

That internal signage is erected encouraging members of the public to report faults to the appropriate authority.	
---	--

Approximate cost: £40 per sign	
--------------------------------	--

Recommendation 2:	for Copeland Borough Council, Lake District National Park Authority, Parish and Town Councils
-------------------	---

That there is a clear expectation of cleaning staff to report any faults they uncover to the appropriate parent body for speedy action and that this is a written instruction.	
--	--

The sub group examined the policy for dealing with maintenance faults. Clearly there were occasions when there were delays in maintenance for quite valid reasons, for example specialist ordering of vandal-resistant guttering.

The Committee felt that the communications issues addressed at Recommendations 1 and 2 might help communication internally and externally, but would like to verify that by the following recommendation.

Recommendation 3: for Copeland Borough Council

That once recommendations 1 and 2 have been implemented, that audit be asked to randomly 'track' 6 faults to establish how maintenance issues are being addressed and what communication has taken place.

The sub group noted that there appear to be varying standards of what is acceptable in terms of cleanliness.

Recommendation 4: for Copeland Borough Council

That Leisure and Environmental services draw up written cleaning guidance for the cleaning of public toilets, outlining daily, weekly and monthly duties for cleaning staff and that the guidance be shared with other partners.

A recurring theme throughout the mystery shopping was the unacceptability of having toilet rolls placed on the back of toilet rims. This would appear to be occurring due to the vandalism of the toilet roll holders installed and the subsequent removal of the toilet roll spindles.

Recommendation 5: for Copeland Borough Council (but other providers may wish to join in a bulk order)

That vandal resistant toilet holders be placed in all cubicles (£130 per unit, but reductions for a bulk order and understood that this can be met from existing budgets)

The sub-group further felt that a good way of monitoring the above issues would be to continue mystery shopping at periodic intervals to help ensure that standards remained acceptable.

The Committee also examined the issue of the 10p pay locks in Whitehaven St James Street. These had been installed at a time when full-time cleaning had been envisaged. The locks are frequently faulty for a variety of reasons, including some vandalism and the locks cost £600, with additional frequent costs in servicing and repairing the locks. The target income from the locks was £3-4,000, however in reality, because of the maintenance issues, the past two years have seen a maximum of £500 income.

It does not make financial sense to continue with a pay system when the cost of repairs, maintenance and replacement of the locks are greater than the income received. An additional weight to this argument is that the toilets are not attended full-time.

Recommendation 6: for Copeland Borough Council

That the 'pay' locks at Copeland Borough Council's St James Street toilets are removed.

Anti-social behaviour and opening hours

The sub group considered the issues of anti-social behaviour occurring in a good many facilities. This was not an easily resolved problem, but it was continuing to cost the public purse a considerable amount in additional cleaning and maintenance. The sub group was fully aware that opening hours are curtailed to minimise anti-social behaviour (often on the advice of the police).

There are, however, occasions when providers require to be sensitive to local circumstances, such as festivals, special events and holiday peak periods. On the latter, Seascale Parish Council maintains later opening during summer holidays to accommodate families on the beach.

Recommendation 7: for Copeland Borough Council (in the main)

That note is taken of specially organised events and that provision is put in place to accommodate those special events (noting that one criticism of provision was that the St James Street toilet was not open later during the Christmas festival).

That consideration be given again to longer opening hours, particularly during summer, at St Bees to accommodate both walkers, cyclists and families.

Publicity

The sub group make the following recommendation to the Western Lake District Tourism Partnership:

Recommendation 8: for Western Lake District Tourism Partnership

That any promotional maps of the Borough include the facilities as set out in Appendix 1 and also include locations of supermarkets.

Provision of toilets

The sub group questioned whether there was a need for toilet provision in Ravenglass (given the other privately run facilities on offer), examined the current cost of provision and concluded, after considering costs of provision with other private sector partners, that there would be no great saving to be made for the Lake District National Park Authority in considering a private sector partnership in Ravenglass.

The sub group also questioned the need for two public toilets in Millom. One is currently run by the Town Council and the other by Copeland Borough Council. The latter is a more up-to-date facility and is provided as part of Copeland Borough Council's strategy of maintaining provision in service centres. The Town Council's facility is more dated and costs £8,300 to the public purse.

Recommendation 9: for Millom Town Council

That serious consideration be given to the closure of Millom Lancashire Road public toilets with a saving to the public purse of £8,300.

Strategy

The sub group considered that Copeland Borough Council's strategy (see para 7 above) was pretty much in line with what other Councils were trying to achieve.

They did, however, hope that having achieved a solution to provision in outlying areas some years ago, that partnership arrangements would be sustained with good will on both sides and that any differences of opinion on any issue affecting the provision of public toilets could be resolved amicably