

Petition – Whitehaven Public Conveniences

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Peter Kane

LEAD OFFICER: Keith Parker, Head of Neighbourhood Services

REPORT AUTHOR: Keith Parker

WHAT BENEFITS WILL THESE PROPOSALS BRING TO COPELAND RESIDENTS?

The report is presented as a requirement of the Council's constitution, supporting public engagement in the democratic process.

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE EXECUTIVE?

(eg Key Decision, Policy recommendation for Full Council, at request of Council,etc.)

To follow the Councils Constitution Rule 19 which specifies at 19.1 All petitions addressed to the Council shall be considered by the Executive or relevant committee at its next meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Executive note the petition submitted "Whitehaven Needs Public Toilets" and confirms no change to the Council's policy in relation to the provision of public conveniences.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As Executive will be acutely aware as a result of public sector spending constraints the Council is having to reduce its expenditure significantly from some £15 million a few years ago to a likely £9 million next year. Cuts of this magnitude mean that the Council has, and will have to continue to, consider very carefully what services it provides and especially for non-statutory services, to what standard. This budget reduction means the Council no longer can afford to provide services our citizens have come to expect and we will have to increasingly focus expenditure on those services we are obliged to provide by law, such as refuse collection and environmental health. One of the manifestations of the Council's difficult policy decisions in discretionary services is the

closure or, in most cases, transfer of public conveniences. The cost of direct provision of public conveniences was in the order of £41,000 p.a to which can be added a further £7,200 in grant support to third parties. The public conveniences in Whitehaven absorbed the lions share of these costs since its fixed costs in terms of utilities, non-domestic rates amount to approximately £18,000 alone. Re-instating these costs will require an additional, sustainable saving of equivalent value to be found.

1.2 A petition has been forwarded to the Council by the MP under the title “Whitehaven Needs Public Toilets” The petition carries 2,053 signatures.

1.3 Public conveniences are one a number areas affected by the Council’s policy to reduce expenditure on discretionary services, ie those it is not obliged to do so by law. It should be noted that most former Council public conveniences in the Borough are still open for public use as parish and town councils are continuing to operate many. Only Cleator Moor, Whitehaven and Egremont facilities have closed with Haverigg, Millom, Silecroft, Bootle, Gosforth, Seascale and St Bees remaining available for public use.

1.4 The law is such that all “places of entertainment” are required to provide facilities for users. Such places include café’s, clubs, pubs, visitor attractions and the like.

2. PROPOSALS

2.1. Following the budget reductions agreed by Council in February this year the waste management team has reduced staff numbers and its operational budget. Therefore we are not in a position to re-instate any of the former public conveniences unless a long term commitment through third party funding can be agreed to enable us to reopen those in Egremont and Whitehaven (Cleator Moor’s being held under a lease, now terminated, from the Masonic and Civic Hall would require additional work). As a non-statutory function the Council has made the policy decision to stop the provision of public conveniences against an extremely challenging financial climate and at a time when the governmental agenda is to reduce the public sector to the bare minimum whilst ‘encouraging’ residents and businesses step into the gap left by public sector cuts. Many Councils have similarly reduced their commitment to the provision of public conveniences and in this respect the Council is not alone. Accordingly the proposal is that the Council’s policy towards public conveniences remains unchanged.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

3.1 The revenue budget to be increased to maintain all these areas to previous standards, a requirement of some £48,000.

5. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 5.1 The Monitoring Officer's comments are: Council Procedure Rules require petitions to be reported to next available meeting of Executive or relevant committee. No other comments.
- 5.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: The cost of public conveniences was removed from the current year budget as part of the £1.7m savings identified by members to allow a balanced budget to be set.
Re instating these costs will require an additional, sustainable saving of equivalent value to be found.
The spending review announced on 26 June 2013, indicated a further cut of 10% to our funding which has resulted in a funding gap of circa £1m for 2014/15. The council is having to make hard choices in order to deliver its statutory duties within the available resources.
- 5.3 EIA Comments - A Full EIA was carried out prior to the policy decision being agreed as part of wider budget proposals.
- 5.4 Policy Framework Comments - As referred to in the report at section 2. The proposal supports the Council's Policy Framework.
- 5.5 Other consultee comments, if any: None

6. WHAT MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OR OUTPUTS WILL ARISE FROM THIS REPORT?

- 7.1 If the recommendation is accepted the Council's saving requirement of the Waste Management Department remains on target.

List of Appendices: None

List of Background Documents: Whitehaven Needs Public Toilets Petition – a hard copy is tabled for this Executive meeting.