

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

COMMUNITY TOILET WORKING GROUP - FINAL REPORT

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the outcome of the Community Toilet Working Group, and highlights some of the key conclusions regarding public toilet provision.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On 8 March 2011, Scrutiny Committee - Community decided to establish a Member Working Group to examine the merits of a community toilet scheme in the overall context of public toilet provision (Minute 23 refers).
- 2.2 At the first meeting in June 2011, the Working Group agreed that it should adopt a broad remit with a comprehensive examination of issues, and not limit its deliberations solely to community toilet schemes.
- 2.3 It adopted the following terms of reference:

“To suggest the most appropriate and cost effective toilet provision for the City, including determining whether a community toilet scheme should be considered for any future provision.”

- 2.4 It was also determined that there was insufficient time to carry out a proper examination of all issues and feed any meaningful recommendations back into the Autumn 2011 budget setting process; an interim report on progress was made to this Committee in March 2012.

3. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The group examined a number of highly relevant documents on public toilet provision, and from that review, determined that there was great merit in inviting views from a variety of people who either had particular expertise in the area of public toilet provision, or could represent the diverse views of various parts of the community (Appendix I).
- 3.2 The group sat as an inquisitorial-style panel and invitees were asked to express their views and answer questions in a non-adversarial environment (Appendix II).
- 3.3 Lastly it was agreed to examine a comparator local authority where a community toilet scheme had been implemented, and for that purpose the group visited Oxford City Council on 30 March 2012, meeting key officers and the Portfolio Holder for Environment Services (Appendix III).

4. KEY FINDINGS

The Working Group covered a wide number of issues in meeting their terms of reference. The findings of the group are contained in Appendices II and III, with the overarching findings as follows:

- Public toilets are an important and valuable public resource and the Council is right to make appropriate provision, but needs to address the public expectation about improvements in cleanliness, maintenance and opening times.

- Generally, people would be happy to pay a small admission fee so long as standards of cleanliness, etc., were high and maintained that way – charging was strongly associated with improved standards. However, there are concerns about the potential degradation in access caused by charging mechanisms, both in terms of a physical barrier (e.g. paddle-gates) and in practical terms of not having the right change of coin.
- High quality public toilets are an important part of the visitor experience to a location, and conversely, poor provision can have a negative impact; the strategic importance of public toilets in the context of how it links with and influences visitor dynamics and experience of a place, or how it encourages beneficial use of parks and open spaces, should be recognised.
- A community toilet scheme should not be seen as a replacement to existing public toilet provision, but has merit in complementing this provision; the model operated by Oxford City Council offers a pragmatic and low-risk method of extending public toilet provision in Exeter.

5. TAKING THIS WORK FORWARD

- 5.1 The Council is about to embark on two key pieces of work. One is the development of a City Centre Strategy, in which public toilet provision has been identified as an important element of this in terms of how the quantity and quality of provision can help the visitor experience and in turn assist business. The second piece of work is a systems review of the purpose of 'keep my city safe and looking good', and the part that public toilet provision plays in this will be an important element to examine.
- 5.2 Both these pieces of work are planned for Autumn 2012, and it is anticipated that action plans listing identified improvements for implementation will be at the conclusion of this work.

6. RECOMMENDATION

That Scrutiny Committee Community:

- 1) support the findings of the Working Group; and
- 2) agree that the forthcoming systems review of the purpose of 'keep my city feeling safe and looking good' should strive to achieve improvements in public toilet provision as one of its key outcomes; and
- 3) agree that the work of the forthcoming City Centre Strategy should encompass public toilet provision as an integral part of the review, and should explore the potential to develop a community toilet scheme along the same model as Oxford City Council; and
- 4) subject to the successful development of a community toilet scheme in the city centre, to build upon this experience and seek to extend the scheme to other parts of the City in order to supplement existing provision in other wards.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT