

Minutes of the Meeting of the **PUBLIC CONVENIENCES**
BEST VALUE REVIEW WORKING GROUP held at the
Town Hall on **Monday, 12th March 2007** at **9.30 a.m.**

Present:-

Councillor M. Pratt – Chairman
Councillor C. Bright
Councillor Mrs C. Gainsborough

Also in attendance:-

Mr A. Leeson	Town Clerk
Dr M. Ayres	Assistant Town Clerk
Mr G. Brookes	Operations Manager
Mrs A. Holmes	Tourist Information Centre Manager

1) **Chairman**

In the absence of the Town Mayor it was proposed by Councillor Bright, seconded by Councillor Mrs Gainsborough and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:
That Councillor Pratt Chair the Meeting.

Councillor Pratt assumed the Chair.

2) **Apologies**

Apologies for his inability to attend the meeting were received from the Town Mayor, Councillor G.M. Suttle.

3) **Review of Minutes of the Meeting held 5th February 2007**

Further to minute 3)i) the need to consult the Sandpit Field User Groups in relation to the provision of public toilets was highlighted. The possibility of again positioning temporary toilets on Shore Road for the peak summer season was discussed. The importance of access to the drinking water taps was noted.

It was recorded that the action points under minutes 3)ii) and 3)iii) remained outstanding.

Further to minute 4), the Operations Manager reported that some of the existing signage had been removed from the public toilets as a temporary measure.

In relation to the possible provision of showers on Shore Road, raised under minute 5), the Operations Manager stated that one could be erected outside Shore Road toilets and another at Battlegate. The cost of each unit, including installation, would be in the region of £900 to £1,000. It was noted that the original request had been for a foot shower on the beach, near to the Mowlem slipway. It was noted that this could not be accommodated because of environmental concerns over grey water being discharged onto the beach. It was reported that the amount of water used could be limited by a push-button system and that the units could be removed in winter to prevent vandalism.

4) **Best Value Review Framework**

i) **Compare**

It was acknowledged that there was nothing further to report at the present time.

ii) Consult

The Information Centre Manager agreed to devise the questionnaire required under item 4)iii) of the minutes of the Meeting of the Public Conveniences Best Value Review Working Group held on 5th February 2007 and liaise with the Swanage and Purbeck Holiday Accommodation Association.

iii) Challenge and Compete

The Meeting considered Step 4 of the Best Value Review Framework. It was noted that the service enhances living and working in the town by supporting the tourist industry, thereby helping to fulfil one of the Town Council's key objectives.

It was acknowledged that the service was not financially sustainable without direct support from the Town Council. Although the Town Council currently has a policy to charge the public for the use of new facilities, the importance of considering the introduction of charges to the Town Council's existing public toilets was noted and it was AGREED:

That the possibility of charging for the use of the Town Council's public toilets be put either to a future Policy and Resources or Finance and Performance Management meeting for further consideration.

The service is provided for the benefit of tourists, visitors and local residents. It supports tourism and deters public health hazards and elements of anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless it was noted that the Council has no legal obligation to provide the service, although there are specific public health requirements for the public conveniences themselves. In terms of quality of provision there is a perception that this is sub-standard in places. A survey of other local authorities was noted as outstanding. Alternative methods of service delivery exist in the private sector, including through pubs and the Mowlem Theatre.

The users of the service were listed as including a cross-section of the community including parents with babies, children, the elderly and disabled. The results of the questionnaire referred to in 4)ii) above were awaited before an assessment could be made of the extent to which the service meets their needs. It was noted that visitors may not be aware of the location of some of the conveniences because of poor signage. Restricted hours of opening meant that there are gaps in service provision and unmet needs at specific times.

It was AGREED:

That the 'Current structure' section from the Best Value Review Framework be assessed and discussed at a future meeting of the Working Group.

In considering an options appraisal for this service it was acknowledged that it would not be cost effective to commission an independent benchmarking report, and that this should be carried out in-house.

The possibility of changing the method of service provision by contracting out to the private sector was considered at length. A key test of whether this should be done was identified as determining if the service could be provided to

a higher standard, at a lower cost to the Town Council. It was noted that private investment could also potentially be used in refurbishment schemes. The need to explore these issues further was highlighted.

The station toilets were identified as an example of partnership working and the development of partnerships with the Coastguard Agency at North Beach and the Emmanuel Baptist Church at Herston was noted.

It was acknowledged that as yet the improvements that could be gained under these options had not been compared with the improvements that could be achieved through the current method of service delivery.

5. Any other matters

Concern was expressed over the possible closure of Battlegate toilets over the summer season due to the instability of the adjacent walls. After lengthy discussion it was AGREED:

That the Operations Manager investigate alternative arrangements for the provision of toilets in the vicinity of Battlegate if the public toilets are to remain closed during the summer season.

6. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that members of the Working Group be informed of the date of the next meeting following the acquisition of further data.

The Meeting closed at 10.50 a.m.