

## COUNCIL

22 JANUARY 2019

### REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (OPERATIONAL SERVICES)

#### A.2 PETITION: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES IN THE DISTRICT

(Report prepared by Ian Taylor)

#### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

##### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To enable Council to respond to a Petition reported at the meeting of the Council held on 27 November 2018.

##### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report places before Council a Petition, which was reported at the meeting of Council held on 27 November 2018, relating to public conveniences in the District and which has been investigated in accordance with the provisions of the Council's approved scheme for dealing with petitions.

Council can determine what action they wish to take having regard to the Petition, which will be presented by the lead Petitioner at the meeting.

##### RECOMMENDATION

**That Council determines what action they wish to take having regard to the Petition.**

#### PART 2 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

##### BACKGROUND

At the meeting of Council held on 27 November 2018, the Chief Executive reported the receipt of a petition submitted by Mr Mike LeCornu, on behalf of TenPAG and Unite. The petition is signed by 271 residents of the District and requests that the Council replaces public conveniences in the District that have been closed for being 'not fit for purpose'.

The front page of the Petition states:-

*"This is a joint petition from TenPAG (Tendring Pensioners Action Group) and UNITE community Clacton-on-Sea. Tendring District Council have been closing toilets that they say are impossible to maintain, open to abuse and not fit for purpose. These toilets were considered necessary in the past and should be replaced with new fit for purpose ones."*

In accordance with the Council's scheme this matter has been investigated and brought back to Council on the basis that it had contained over 250 signatures. Mr LeCornu, as the lead petitioner, is invited to address the Council, present the petition and outline the

action that the petitioners wanted the Council to take. Subsequently, Council will discuss the petition and decide what action, if any, should be taken. Mr LeCornu will be informed, in writing, of the Council's decision and the decision would also be published on the Council's website.

### **CURRENT POSITION AND RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION**

The aim of the Council's public convenience strategy for Tendring adopted in June 2017 was to provide accessible, safe, high quality public conveniences for residents and visitors.

The strategy proposed to achieve this aim by rationalising existing facilities that were considered to be operating from buildings that could no longer be maintained cost effectively, were located in areas which resulted in under use, or unacceptable levels of misuse and investing savings from closing such facilities into the refurbishment and improvement of remaining public toilets, bringing them up to appropriate standards.

A budget reduction impact assessment was carried out at the time which noted a potential impact on closing some public toilets on the elderly or disabled.

However the impact assessment acknowledged that closing some public conveniences would in turn be mitigated by a programme of significant refurbishments and service improvements, noting that the aim of the public convenience strategy was to provide enhanced and improved facilities in the locations they were most needed.

The assessment also noted that provision of public toilets is a discretionary and not a statutory service provided by the local authority.

The Council's public convenience strategy has ensured that all areas of the district that previously had public toilets would continue to be served by them and that by streamlining the service it would be possible improve the overall quality of the asset and the service thereby enhancing the Council's reputation.

To date the Council has closed ten out of its thirty nine public toilets and achieved a year on year revenue saving of £100,000.

At the same time the Council has refurbished facilities at:

- The Quay, Harwich,
- Rosemary Road Clacton-on-Sea
- Promenade Way, Brightlingsea

In addition the old public toilet at the Naze has been replaced with a new modern public facility in the Naze visitor centre.

The Council has also been able to introduce a further specialist Changing Place facility into Walton-on-the-Naze making a total of four such facilities throughout the District, all funded externally by grant aid.

The Council has further investigated and reviewed the toilets that were closed.

The Council remains with thirty public toilets and four specialist Changing Place facilities across the District, which compares extremely favourably with most other local authorities.

By adopting a strategy for public conveniences the Council has ensured that all areas of the District where public toilets were previously provided not only remain with public toilets, but also continue to benefit from a programme of improvements into the future.

All assets agreed for closure have been market tested by the Council's property service for continued use where viable.

It has been over a year since the public convenience strategy was adopted and High Streets continue as before and visitor / tourist areas of the District also continue to be well served by refurbished and improved public toilets.

The public convenience strategy has so far enabled the Council to invest over £200,000 into improving public toilets throughout the District.

The Head of Public Realm has previously met with the petitioners both in a meeting in the Council and at a meeting of the pensioner's action group whereby the Council's public convenience strategy was explained and discussed at length.

The claim that because toilets were once provided in a location means they should always continue to be provided precisely as before requires examination.

It is not possible or a prudent use of public money to continue to provide assets in areas that are no longer well used, or in buildings that are old and no longer capable of sustaining facilities to meet modern standards.

No area of the District that had previously been provided with public toilets has been left without one as a consequence of the public convenience strategy and of the toilets that remain a programme for continued improvement is in place.

#### **AVAILABLE COURSE OF ACTION**

There are several course of action available to Council, including:

- No action (with reasons as to why no action is proposed)
- Taking the action requested in the petition
- Undertaking research into the matters raised (this could include referring the matter to the relevant Portfolio Holder, or officer of the Council) and holding a meeting with the petitioners
- Referring the petition to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Holding a public meeting

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION**

- Petition submitted by Mr Mike LeCornu on 31 October 2018.