

SCRUTINY

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC CONVENIENCES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider the results of a questionnaire produced by the Task and Finish Group to ascertain the views of the public on the provision of public conveniences within the Borough.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A scrutiny form was completed by an Elected Member who raised concerns about public conveniences in the Borough, following which the Executive Director of Resources presented a report to Policy Scrutiny in January 2007, which outlined options in respect of the provision of public conveniences.
- 2.2 It was agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to investigate current usage of public conveniences and consider how to take this forward.
- 2.3 Rossendale has a significant stock of public conveniences with approximately 75% currently operational, the remainder having been closed over a long period of time. In addition, the facility on James Street in Rawtenstall would be replaced by a facility in the new shopping centre operated by the developer.
- 2.4 The condition of the current facilities are inadequate, as well as basic condition issues there is a significant requirement for additional disabled access work.
- 2.5 Members of the Task and Finish Group accept that as a result of vandalism, drug abuse or other inappropriate behaviour there had been a reduction in the number of people using these facilities and the closure of some public conveniences within the Borough.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 The Members of the Task and Finish Group are Councillor Cheetham (Chair), Councillor Dickinson, Councillor Eaton, Councillor Haworth and Councillor Neal.
- 3.2 The Terms of Reference were as follows:
 - To look at the provision of current public conveniences and make a preliminary assessment of their condition.
 - To review the current budget allocation for repairs and maintenance
 - To review access times for public convenience
 - To review the monitoring of future cleaning of the facilities
 - To review the feasibility of the reopening of the public conveniences in the Borough
 - To look at the possibility of working in partnership with local traders to provide a community service scheme on specific sites around the Borough

4. EXISTING SERVICES

4.1 At the first Task and Finish Group Members received evidence from the Property Services Manager on the schedule of facilities which already exist within the Borough. There are six operational facilities within the Borough

Rawtenstall Town Centre - new facilities would be provided within the new Valley Centre development.

Haslingden Market - after investigation by the Property Services Team, it was recognised that the facilities at Haslingden Market are now open Monday-Friday between 9am and 3.30pm. Times being dependent on when the cleaner opens and closes them.

Stacksteads, Waterfoot and Whitworth - were open 9am-4.30pm weekdays, again times being dependent on when the cleaner opens and closes them.

Whitaker Park - work had been undertaken to ensure DDA compliant

Three facilities were no longer operational – Edenfield, Bacup and Crawshawbooth.

4.2 As well as presenting significant financial issues, particularly in terms of disabled access, public conveniences present particular difficulties in relation to other current agendas which the Council must address across a full range of its service provision

- **Community Safety** – public conveniences tend to provide a relatively undisturbed enclosed, yet publicly accessible environment. This results in them often being used as the setting for various forms of anti-social behaviour and leaves them highly prone to vandalism.
- **Every Child Matters** - The Council has a duty to safeguard the well being of children and young people using facilities that it provides. Historically, unsupervised public conveniences have provided opportunities for incidents of child abuse to take place.

5. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

5.1 In considering how to take the work forward and how best to consult with the public, it was agreed to produce a press release through the Rossendale Alive Newsletter, distributed to all households in the Borough.

5.2 A questionnaire was produced and was available to download on the Council's website. (A copy of the questionnaire is attached as **Appendix A**).

5.3 Elected Members were all sent copies of the questionnaire to hand out to their constituents and local libraries agreed to have them available for the public to complete.

- 5.4 The Chair agreed to consult with numerous organisations including Age Concern, Help the Aged and some toddler clubs throughout the Borough.
- 5.5 Feedback was also received from local residents attending the September meetings of the Neighbourhood Forums.
- 5.6 The Chair made site visits to a selection of public conveniences within the Borough.

6. FINDINGS

- 6.1 There was no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to provide public conveniences and the Government did not see the introduction of legislation to require the provision of public conveniences as the way forward.
- 6.2 In the absence of legislation specifically relating to the provision of public conveniences there are however pieces of legislation that Local Authorities need to consider in providing the service. These are:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – which required that the Council makes the public conveniences it provides accessible. Where this does not occur, the Council will in the future leave itself open to challenge.

The Public Health Act 1936 – which merely gives the Local Authority the power to provide public conveniences.

- 6.3 Members of the Task and Finish Group considered replacing the existing facilities with 'superloos', but the Group agreed that this option would be too costly.
- 6.4 The Community Toilet Scheme was an option to consider, working in partnership with local traders, which would operate through the payment of retainers to selected traders.

7. WHERE PUBLIC CONVENIENCES ARE NEEDED

- 7.1 It was recognised that both Rawtenstall and Bacup were the main areas in need of public conveniences, with the provision of the facilities at the present time in Bacup being non-existent.
- 7.2 As Rawtenstall attracts the most shoppers to the area, and if the Council were to promote Rawtenstall as a tourist area, there was a need for better public conveniences in the town centre.
- 7.3 The facilities at Crawshawbooth were closed over three years ago following a fire which had destroyed a single integrated unit. Members heard from an Officer of the Property Services Team that it would cost £2,500 to re-open them.

7.4 Edenfield public conveniences were closed on police advice, due to inappropriate behaviour. The Chair indicated that there is a cycleway through Edenfield, which is well used by cyclist at weekend, with no public convenience facilities being available. Apparently, the electrical supply to the closed facility had been cut off.

7.5 The facilities at Bacup had been closed due to inappropriate behaviour but an Officer of the Council indicated that the facilities had been inspected and appeared to be adequate.

8. COSTINGS

8.1 The Task and Finish Group were advised that if they decided on the option of completely ceasing to deliver the service, there would be a revenue saving of £36k, with significant capital spending being avoided, although some capital spending would be required to demolish the current structures.

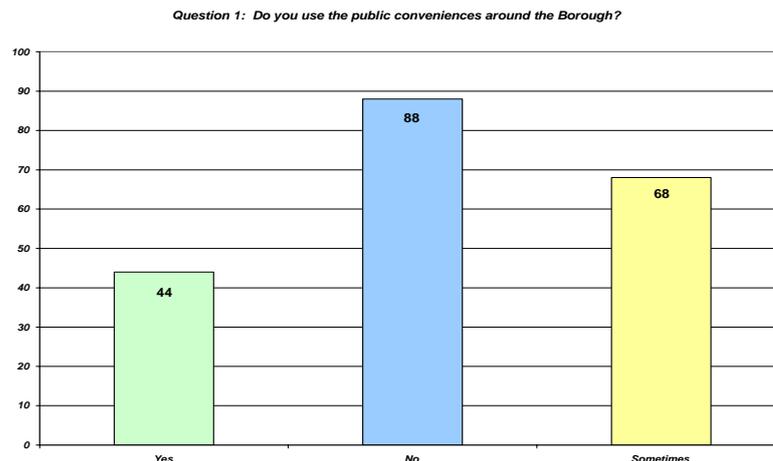
8.2 To invest in the current services would require capital investment of £148,650 and a revenue impact of between £76,000 and £129,000 equating to a Council Tax at Band D of between £2.60 and £6.43.

9. VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC

The views of the public which were included within the questionnaire are attached at **Appendix B**

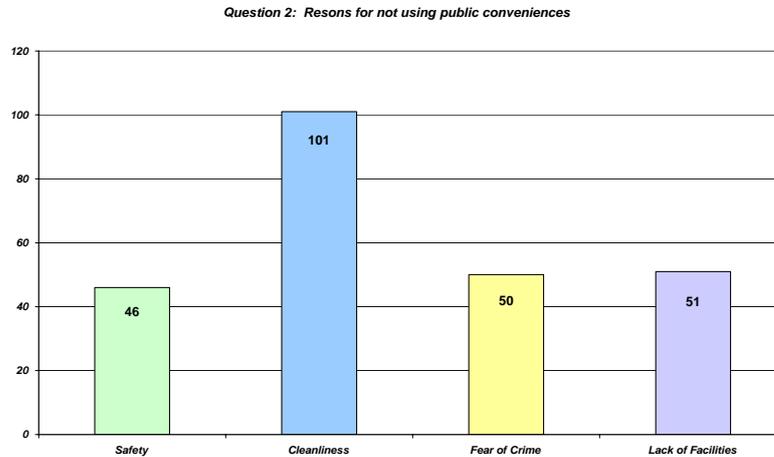
10. RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Figure 1. When asked ‘Do you use the public conveniences around the Borough?’



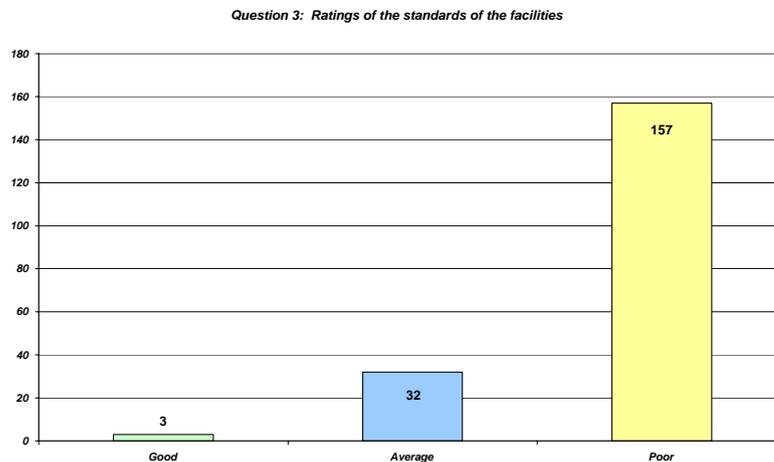
From the above graph 44 (22%) of respondents said ‘Yes’ they do use public conveniences with 88 (44%) respondents indicating ‘No’ and 68 (34%) of respondents said ‘Sometimes’

Figure 2. Reason for not using public conveniences



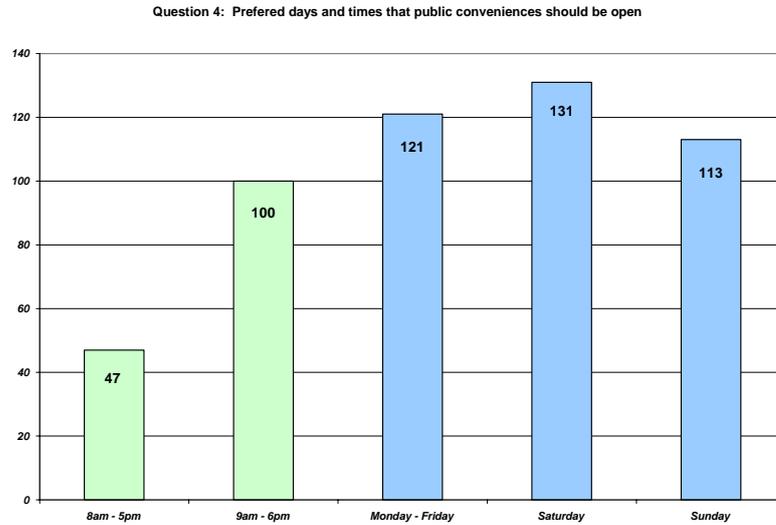
From the above graph 46 (18.5%) of respondents indicated that they did not use the public conveniences because of Safety, 101 (41%) because of cleanliness, 50 (20%) because of fear of crime and 51 (20.5%) because of lack of facilities.

Figure 3. Ratings of the standards of the facilities



From the above graph only 3 (1.5%) of respondents rated the standard of facilities as 'good', 31 (16.5%) rated them as 'average' and 157 (82%) indicated that the facilities were 'poor'.

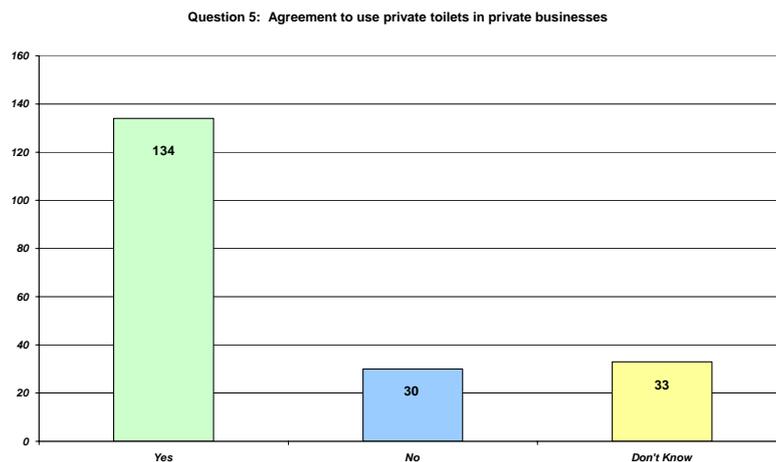
Figure 4. Preferred days and times that public conveniences should be open



From the above graph 100 (32%) of respondents indicated they would prefer the public conveniences to be open between 9am-6pm and 47 (68%) respondents would prefer 8am-5pm.

When asked what days they would like to see the public conveniences open 121 indicated Monday to Friday, 131 wanted them to be open Saturday and 118 on a Sunday. (percentages not applicable to these, as respondents could answer more than one option).

Figure 5. Agreement to use private toilets in private businesses



When asked whether they would use private toilets in private businesses 134 (68%) indicated this as a preferred option, 30 (15%) indicated they would not use this facility and 33 (17%) answered 'don't know'.

This scheme enables local businesses like pubs, restaurants and shops to work together with the Council to make a more clean, safe and accessible toilets available to the public.

Members of the public can use toilet facilities during the premises opening hours without the need to make a purchase.

If it was agreed to proceed with this scheme, a leaflet would need to be produced which provides details of the different premises who have agreed to participate in the scheme.

11. CONCLUSION

The Task and Finish Group were faced with a number of options as follows;

- a) Close the facilities and use the Community Scheme – 44% do not use the facilities and yet 134 indicated they would use the community scheme.
- b) Open all the facilities at a cost to the Council – If the Council spent money on the facilities, perhaps people would use them.
- c) Combination of options a) and b) – keep them open in some areas of the Borough and offer community scheme to others.

It was felt that although there were budgetary issues, the most important factor was to ensure that public conveniences were accessible to everyone in the Borough and that the condition of the facilities needed to be addressed, including those in Bacup, Edenfield and Crawshawbooth.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet consider the following recommendations of the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group.

1. That public convenience opening times be extended to include, at least, Saturdays
2. That those facilities which were at present non-operational, be re-opened.
3. That the public conveniences in Rawtenstall be given priority consideration for upgrade as an interim until the new Valley Centre is developed.
4. That consideration be given to asking the traders of Bacup Market to allow the public to use their facilities.
5. That a six month pilot of the Community Toilet Scheme be considered for both Rawtenstall and Bacup and that the Property Services Team approach the Queens Public House and the Crown Public House in

Rawtenstall and the Traders, REAL and Little Queens Public House in Bacup.

6. That consideration be given to a rolling programme of painting and upgrading all public conveniences within the Borough, with a budget of £20,000 be given to the Property Services Team to begin the upgrading of public conveniences and consider using the probation service as a form to assist with any work needed.
7. That consideration be given to the future Management of these facilities.

Membership of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Cheetham (Chair)

Councillor Dickinson

Councillor Haworth

Councillor Neal

The Group would like to thank Michael Forster and Lee Childs from Rossendale Borough Council's Property Services Team