

BRIEFING NOTE TOURISM COMMUNITIES CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

DATE: 23 JANUARY 2025

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| SUBJECT: | PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AND CHANGING PLACE PROVISION |
| REPORT OF: | INTERIM DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE |

REASON FOR BRIEFING

This Committee requested an update on the changing places programme, confirmation of the Council's existing provision and information on other public toilet provision, an update on revenue since introduction of charging, and information on Thornton Hough and possibility of reopening with charges.

BRIEFING INFORMATION

The Council holds a number of toilets that are accessed by the general public on a regular basis. This comprises of 78 toilets with public access and six changing places toilets. Seven toilets are managed by the Regeneration Directorate and the balance by the Neighbourhoods Directorate. Information on a site-by-site basis is set out in appendix A.

The majority of provision is managed as part of a wider asset, for example provision for bowling or football pavilions, parks, libraries and leisure centres. The provision associated with bowling and football provision is hired as part of the pitch provision and are accessed on that basis. Opening times are variable across the provision. Often this is dependent on the timings for opening of the asset they are associated with. The Council also has a number of changing place toilets as part of a wider provision across the borough.

A number of toilets have been closed and do not have a budget for their operation. Some toilets are a paid for provision, with a charge of 30 pence per use. This is due to budget decisions taken in previous years.

As part of previous budget savings toilet provision managed by the Council's Regeneration Directorate has been subject to charging. Charging does not occur for other toilet provision managed by the Council although some are let as part of arrangements for a wider sports provision.

These charged for assets are:

- West Kirby Marine Lake – Dee Lane West Kirby (Part of the Sailing School / Sail loft Building);
- Meols Parade Gardens, Meols Parade;
- Leasowe Common - junction of Pasture Road/Leasowe, Moreton;
- Harrison Drive, New Brighton

Thornton Hough public toilets are managed by the same service and have only one accessible toilet opened at weekends during the football season.

Changing places provision, provided by the Council, is also set out in the Appendix A. More information about changing places provision can be found at the changing places website <https://www.changing-places.org/find>. This web site can be used to identify all changing places toilets in the UK. This sets out 10 changing places locations within the borough. The changing places provision not in control of the Council include Happy Learners Activity Centre, Moreton, The Odeon, Birkenhead, Tranmere Rovers and Beechwood Leisure Centre. In addition to the above, there are a number of Council changing places facilities are identified as available across the Wirral, which are managed by the Neighbourhoods directorate, these are located as follows:

- Europa Pools;
- Leasowe Leisure Centre;
- Williamson Art Gallery;
- Birkenhead Park;
- Wirral Country Park; and
- Marine Point, West Kirby (due to open January 2025).

There are no live applications for changing places grants. It is noted that Marine Point has been delayed due to pressure of work on other assets by the service that manage capital projects.

Four toilets have closed over the past few years. There is no budget currently available to operate these assets.

The following public conveniences have closed over the past few years:

- Meols Parade (at junction of Bennett's Lane);
- Thornton Hough (Neston Road);
- West Kirby (Concourse Plaza); and
- Woodhead St, New Ferry

Although access to public toilets provide a valuable asset for the community, they can also provide a focus for wide range of anti-social behaviour, although this tends to be location specific and is managed on a case-by-case basis.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

For the 2023/2024 financial year, the Asset Management service has an expenditure budget of £110,000 used to manage and maintain the public conveniences within their area of responsibility, with a £30,000 income target. These include operational toilets and those that have been previously closed.

It was anticipated that 100,000 visits at 30 pence a visit would generate this income needed to support the income target. Since the introduction of charging in June 2023 until November 2024, an income of £3,797.10 was generated, which is significantly below the income target set. The overall cost to operate these assets includes costs of opening, closing, cleaning and day to day maintenance. It is noted that the revised charging mechanism at some of the assets have had problems during the introduction of charging and this has affected the income available to the Council. Historic income pre pandemic was in the region of £8,500 per annum.

There is no specific budget allocated for public convenience provisions managed by the Neighbourhoods directorate. To understand the cost of operation of these assets a more detailed cost analysis would be required for each provision.

The toilets in Birkenhead Market and Pyramids Centre are managed as part of those assets.

Based on the information within this report it is not likely that the introduction of charging at Thornton Hough would cover the whole cost of managing this asset effectively.

It is noted that the Council faces significant financial challenges in relation to balancing its budget for the 2025/26 financial year and beyond and as such, it continues to review its operational costs whilst also focusing on how it best serves Wirral residents, in line with the Council Plan.

WARDS AFFECTED (if applicable)

There are no specific ward implications as this is a briefing paper only.

RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, EQUALITY, ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING, HR, LEGAL ETC)

There are no specific risks and implications associated with this briefing note.

The report identifies the locations of publicly accessible Changing Places facilities available in the Borough, provided at council owned sites. These toilets meet the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis.

A public consultation was carried out in 2022 when decisions around toilet provision was last taken.

NEXT STEPS

There are several steps that the Council could take regarding to toilets accessed by the public in its control. This may differ depending on the specific circumstances of each location.

- **Retain.** This is a do-nothing option, where the Council would continue to operate this service as it does now. For most of the assets where the provision is complementary to other service provision this would be logical unless the Council chose to alter a wider service provision. The cost of operating the asset would remain and without investment it is clear over time that the quality of the provision would deteriorate.
- **Charge.** This could allow income to be generated to support the provision of toilets, although there would be a capital cost to implement this. Unless there is a high footfall, charging is not likely to cover the whole cost of management and future investment in the asset.
- **Cease to Operate.** The Council has already taken the step to close some public toilets. Generally, the reasons for closure of toilets can be lack of use, poor repair, anti-social behaviour and or cost savings. This could generate savings for the Council; however it may also have impacts for certain groups.
- **Transfer.** Community Asset Transfer does generate an option to explore in certain instances, however, that this is not likely to be suitable in all instances.
- **Develop business partnerships.** Engage with businesses to allow the public to use their toilet provision. This offers the opportunity for increased engagement, however it is likely that supporting businesses with funding to cover increased costs and publicity would be needed. It does present opportunities for increased provision but is dependent on business participation and that the location of those businesses would be where need was.

Given that the Council has previously made decisions to reduce the number of public toilets, reopening closed toilets has not been considered. There would be a cost implication to this approach, both in terms of bringing the assets back into use and also to operate them.

Should the Council wish to deal with the issue of toilet provision in a comprehensive way then there would be a need to commission the relevant surveys and reports, which are currently not funded.

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BACKGROUND AND SUBJECT HISTORY

REGENERATION & PLACE BUDGET SAVING CONSULTATION OUTCOME (PUBLIC TOILETS