

**PROPOSED MODEL FOR FUTURE PROVISION OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES
ACROSS ARGYLL AND BUTE**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council considered a savings option to close public conveniences as part of the 2018/19 budget setting process. In light of public feedback, this option was rejected and officers were asked to explore alternative, sustainable options.
- 1.2 Since the Council's budget meeting of February 2018, officers have reviewed the public convenience asset group. This report has sub-divided that group according to the evidence available on footfall, and has presented members with individual options to consider.
- 1.3 The proposal is to adopt the principle of charging at high footfall facilities; install honesty boxes at medium footfall facilities; and actively pursue community ownership options at those facilities identified as low use.
- 1.4 There is a genuine option to look at this asset group differently, and to develop models which are focussed on long-term sustainability, to ensure continued access to public conveniences across Argyll and Bute.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

- Agree the principle of charging at the high footfall facilities, with a further report on cash-operated entry systems to come forward in the New Year;
- Agree that franchise options can only reasonably be explored once charging is in place at the high footfall facilities;
- Agree that honesty boxes should be installed at the medium footfall facilities for a trial period of one year ahead of a further review;
- Agree that the facilities identified as low use, along with those which are currently closed and those which are subject to third party management arrangements, be actively promoted for community ownership for a period of

one year ahead of a further review.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report provides members with an update on the work to date to explore alternative, sustainable options for the public convenience (PC) estate. The outcome of the review to date gives members options to look at this asset group in more detail.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

- 3.1 Agree the principle of charging at the high footfall facilities, with a further report on cash-operated entry systems to come forward in the New Year;
- 3.2 Agree that franchise options can only reasonably be explored once charging is in place at the high footfall facilities;
- 3.2 Agree that honesty boxes should be installed at the medium footfall facilities for a trial period of one year ahead of a further review;
- 3.3 Agree that the facilities identified as low use, along with those which are currently closed and those which are subject to third party management arrangements, be actively promoted for community ownership for a period of one year ahead of a further review.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 BACKGROUND

- 4.1.1 Argyll and Bute Council, and its predecessor authorities, has historically built, operated and maintained public conveniences across Argyll and Bute. There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide public conveniences; nor is there a specific allocation in the Council's funding from the Scottish Government for the ongoing operation and maintenance of these facilities.

- 4.1.2 As part of the 2018/19 budget setting process, the Council considered a

proposal to close over 30 of its public conveniences. This savings option was estimated at £10,000 in 2018/19; £24,000 in 2019/20 and £24,000 in 2020/21 via the removal of costs associated with the PCs proposed for closure, as well as via commercial opportunities. This proposal formed part of the overall budget consultations, with views on the option being:

% for	% no view	% against
22	28	50

4.1.3 The Council unanimously determined to take part of this option on the following terms:

No toilets closed. Progress sustainable models including turnstiles and franchising; establish simpler asset transfer process; progress update to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee by end 2018.

4.1.4 This report provides an update relative to the budget decision of February 2018.

4.2 PUBLIC CONVENIENCE ESTATE

4.2.1 The range of convenience facilities which are publicly available can be set out in the following general categories:

CAT	DESCRIPTION	COMMENTS	NUMBER
A	Amenity Services (PCs)	This is the group which has previously been proposed for closure.	39
B	Marine	This group is considered differently due to its proximity to the Council's strategic marine infrastructure. These PCs form part of the overall waiting facilities attached to piers and harbours.	20
C	Cemeteries and stadiums	These facilities are open to the public as they attend cemeteries and stadiums, with the result that they form part of those wider facilities.	9
D	Third party management arrangements	The Council retains ownership of this group, with third parties managing these with the aid of varying financial contributions from the Council.	6
E	Closed	On a case-by-case basis some facilities have been closed because they are beyond economic repair.	10
TOTAL			84

4.2.2 The review to date has focussed on the facilities classified as Cat A in the above table, with a view to broadly establishing their usage and then developing options from there. The Cat B (marine) PCs are managed via the Marine Account – any future proposals for Marine PCs will come forward for consideration by the Harbour Board. If the proposed model for Amenity PCs is successful, this could be replicated for Marine PCs.

4.3 FOOTFALL

4.3.1 In an attempt to ascertain the precise usage of these PCs, a dozen counters were purchased, with the intention of rotating over the course of the summer. Unfortunately the counters provided figures of such a huge variance that the data cannot be considered to be accurate, and it therefore not robust enough to form part of any decision making process.

4.3.2 As an alternative, officers utilised the knowledge and expertise of local operatives who are familiar with the PCs in their area (materials used; requirements for cleaning; complaints; damage etc.). This was a straightforward way to establish footfall into three broad categories – high; medium; low.

4.3.3 The following table gives the detail of this review:

	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Mid-Argyll	Inveraray; Lochgilphead; Tarbert	Ardrishaig; Tayvallich; Kilmartin	Crinan
Kintyre		Machrihanish; Southend; Bolgam Street	Clonaig
Islay	Bowmore; Bridgend; Port Ellen		Portnahaven
Lorn	Ganavan	Pulpit Hill	Taynuilt
Mull		Bunessan; Calgary	Salen; Ulva
Tiree		Scaranish	
Bute	Chapel Hill; Port Bannatyne	High Street	Kilchattan Bay
Cowal	Colintraive; Glenmorag; Sandbank; Tighnabrauaich	Innellan; Kames; Lochgoilhead; Sandy Beach	Carrick; Glendaruel
Helensburgh and Lomond	Helensburgh Pier		Rhu
TOTAL	14	15	10

4.4 HIGH FOOTFALL PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

4.4.1 Applying a charge for access to public conveniences is an established principle across Scotland – over 50% of Scottish local authorities apply some level of charge for access to their public conveniences, and other public bodies such as national parks do the same. What is clear is that applying charges at high footfall PCs is an effective means of generating income to contribute towards the overall running costs of those facilities.

- 4.4.2 This is also an established principle in Argyll and Bute, with charges having historically been applied at Inveraray; Tarbert and Lochgilphead.
- 4.4.3 It is proposed that the principle of charging at the PCs identified as high use in the table at 4.3.3 be accepted by the Committee, with officers to scope in detail the best options for cash collection at these sites. This scoping work would involve benchmarking against other local authorities to understand the resource commitments and funding opportunities for various different entry/cash collection mechanisms – the costs of install; the reliability; effectiveness; maintenance implications; opportunities to reduce staff input and to prevent vandalism etc. This scoping work would culminate in a business case which considers the costs of install versus the potential income benefits, on a site-by-site basis.
- 4.4.4 Specific future proposals on PC charging would either form part of the budget setting process for 2019/20, or be considered by an appropriate future committee (any changes to the Council's fees and charges would require approval from the Policy and Resources Committee)
- 4.4.5 In terms of franchise options, it is considered that robust options can only really be developed after charging is in place and there is some income information to track and monitor.

4.5 MEDIUM FOOTFALL PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

- 4.5.1 It is considered that the limited likelihood of garnering significant levels of income from the medium footfall facilities, when balanced with the potential cost of installing cash operated entry systems, means that this group should not be put forward for charging.
- 4.5.2 The evidence would suggest that these facilities are used to an extent that a level of need can be reasonably assumed. The fact remains, however, that the operation of these facilities is a revenue pressure for the Council. With that in mind it is proposed to trial, for one year, honesty boxes in medium use PCs.
- 4.5.3 Any contributions gathered via the honesty boxes will be tracked and monitored, and then used to inform future proposals for this asset group.

4.6 LOW FOOTFALL PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

- 4.6.1 The evidence to date would suggest that the footfall at these sites is limited to such an extent that even the installation of honesty boxes may not be cost effective, and would certainly not constitute a long-term, sustainable solution.
- 4.6.2 Whilst there is a statutory process for asset transfers as outlined in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, the Council does not require to utilise it unless a formal asset transfer request is submitted. The process can be complex and lengthy. A shorter process can be utilised, using the principles of the legislative outline as a guide, which can allow the same outcome to be achieved – a community asset transfer. This process would, amongst other things, address the key principles of the statutory process. It

would also enable the Council to have a degree of flexibility in its approach, be alive to potential opportunities and also consider an economic return for assets where appropriate. Such a process may be outlined as:

- the asset being surplus to the Council's requirements with no proposed alternative use or benefit to the Council;
- the use being by a recognised community group with a clearly defined benefit to the community;
- the group formed with a recognised constitution;
- there being a clearly identified use for the asset with a funded and sustainable business case;
- there being an agreed valuation of the asset.

This criteria could form the basis for an assessment of property that is surplus to the Council's requirements that has no proposed alternative purpose and that would demonstrate a deliverable benefit to the community on an affordable and sustainable basis.

4.6.3 It is proposed that these low footfall PCs be actively promoted for potential community ownership, with that active promotion extending for the period of one year, in advance of a further review. As part of this promotion, the simplified asset transfer process be considered specifically in relation to public conveniences to see if there is any opportunity to further simplify it.

4.6.4 It is further proposed that the active promotion for community ownership be extended to include those PCs which are currently closed/mothballed, and those which are currently subject to third party management arrangements.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 This report has sought to present members with realistic options which are closely aligned to the evidence of footfall at particular facilities. This presents a genuine opportunity to look differently at public access to welfare facilities across Argyll and Bute, with a focus on sustainable models for future provision.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy - none

6.2 Financial – none at this stage

6.3 Legal – none

6.4 HR – none

6.5 Equalities/Fairer Scotland Duty – none

6.6 Risk – none

6.7 Customer Service – none

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Appendices

Appendix One – Public conveniences by category