

## **REPORT TO THE CABINET**

17 January, 2017

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor John Wynn Jones

**Subject:** Provision of Public Convenience in Gwynedd

**Contact Officer:** Gwyn Morris Jones, Head of Highways and Municipal

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### **Decision Sought**

- I. To achieve the £244,000 cuts to the service by implementing the Partnership Scheme with Town and Community Councils in order to keep the majority of the existing public toilets in the County open in the future.
  - II. Authorize the Head of Highways and Municipal to ensure formal agreements with the Town and Community Councils that have expressed an interest in partnering.
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### **Introduction**

Following the Gwynedd Challenge engagement exercise, the Council in its meeting of 3 March, 2016 recommended making cuts which included 'closing 50 out of 73 public toilets in the County'. The decision as to which toilets to close would likely be based on an appraisal of the 'importance' of the toilets as developed by the Environmental Committee Task Team in 2008/09.

In its meeting of 7 June, 2016, the Cabinet supported the recommendation of the Communities Scrutiny Committee, to amend the decision to cut £244,000 from the service by first seeking to establish partnerships with local communities in order to avoid closing the facilities whilst achieving the same amount of savings.

The relevant Department has consulted with Town and Community Councils in order to establish if there is support to the Partnership Scheme and an update is provided in the form of an Appendix to this Report.

## **Reasons for recommending the decision**

The Partnership Scheme offers the possibility of keeping significantly more toilets open in the future when compared to that anticipated with the previous option for cuts.

In implementing the Partnership Scheme it is anticipated that at least 52 public toilets can be kept open with the support and co-operation of Town and Community Councils. This is possible despite the cuts to the Council's relevant budget.

There are other advantages to the Communities and this Council in implementing the Scheme e.g. the possibility of developing alternative arrangements for maintaining the provision in future with at least 35 toilets having the potential for the community to take more responsibility for their maintenance (5 within the first year of implementing the Scheme).

## **Relevant Considerations**

Under the Partnership Scheme, up to 21 toilets are under threat of closure.

It should be noted that two of these toilets are near Blue Flag beaches and that their closure could lead to losing this status.

It should also be noted that at least 4 other toilets under threat of closure are at locations of importance to tourists. At these locations it is recommended that partnerships with other establishments be sought in order to maintain the provision in future, or to seek alternative provision at the location.

The table in the Appendix notes where alternative provision is available by means of the Community Toilet Grant Scheme at the locations where toilet/s are under threat of closure. The table also notes other possible alternative options should the Council decide to contribute and extend the Grant Scheme.

## **Equality Assessment**

Before making a decision, every individual in the public sector has a duty to consider the likely effect of the decision on people with characteristics protected by the equalities legislation (Equalities Act 2010). In presenting this saving to the Cabinet and Council in March, an equalities impact assessment was prepared and which identified the possible effect of the original scheme.

This was taken into account in making the decision on the level of financial cuts. This equality assessment has been reviewed in consideration of the effect of implementing the Partnership Scheme (see the Appendix to this Report). The intention of the scheme is to provide Community Councils with the opportunity to maintain public conveniences in their area. This is again an attempt to mitigate the possible effect of the cuts on public provisions. To date, it appears that the scheme continues to address and mitigate the effect of the cuts in view of equalities. The assessment will be kept under review as the scheme develops.

### Public Health Bill

This draft bill was presented to the Senedd in its meeting of 7 November, 2016. This is the first stage (the General Principles) of four stages required before it is made legislation. In terms of public conveniences, the overall aim of the legislation is to ensure that all local authorities assesses the needs of its community in relation to the provision, and that it takes a strategic and transparent approach to how citizens can be provided access to public toilets in the County. Obviously, in consulting and seeking partnerships with communities in the County, and in seeking to ensure provision where there is a strategic need, implementing the Partnership Scheme is likely to meet the relevant aims of this proposed bill.

### **Next steps and timetable**

On receiving the approval of the Cabinet to implement the Partnership Scheme to achieve the £244,000 cuts it is expected:

- i. that the Department will contact every Town and Community Council that contributes to being partners to confirm that the relevant toilets will remain open, and to thank them for their efforts in ensuring this.
- ii. that the Department seeks other establishments to share the responsibility for toilets of importance to the County and in instances where the Town or Community Council has not responded to the request for partnership.
- iii. that the Department continues to hold discussions with the community and others with regard the future of the other toilets under threat of closure, and to accept that some toilets will have to be closed if a partnership arrangement is not possible.

- iv. that the Cabinet Member provides a further report on progress with the Scheme to the Cabinet in its meeting in June, 2017.

### **Opinion of the Statutory Officers**

#### **Chief Executive:**

It appears that this alternative scheme realizes the savings that have to be achieved in terms of the Council's financial strategy and, with the assistance and co-operation of the relevant Community Councils manages to safeguard a significant proportion of the County's public toilets. Obviously, some instances remain unclear. However, I support the recommendation in the report and I am grateful to those Community Councils for responding in such a supportive way.

#### **Monitoring Officer:**

There are numerous matters to consider in developing this scheme. These have been addressed in a balanced way in the report and in the recommendation as to the next steps in developing and realizing the scheme.

#### **Chief Finance Officer:**

I welcome the alternative scheme of partnering with Community and Town Councils. This would mean keeping the provision open and operational, as well as maintaining the employment of cleaning workers. Doubtless not every Town and Community will take advantage of the opportunity to keep all facilities open; I understand that the Community and Town Councils who do wish to be part of the scheme have now adapted their precepts for 2017/18 as necessary. The scheme offers another way of achieving the savings of £244k that have already been decided upon as part of the 'Gwynedd Challenge' savings and the 2016/17 - 2017/18 financial strategy.

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