
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

23 January 2024

Cabinet

Title: Public Conveniences

Purpose: To provide Cabinet with an update on the current position in relation to public conveniences in North Ayrshire and to make recommendations for their future operation.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approves the proposals for the future of the remaining Council-operated public conveniences as set out in this report; and
- b) Agrees to accept a further report in April 2024 to consider the results of the engagement in relation to community interest in five public conveniences.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 There are seven Council owned public conveniences currently in operation in North Ayrshire.
- 1.2 Opportunities to reconsider the model of operation of some of the public conveniences continue to be taken – through external funding and asset transfer. Many of the remaining public conveniences are subject to regular complaints from the public due to their aesthetic condition and age.
- 1.3 With the opportunity provided by the current closure of Melbourne Gardens in Saltcoats and exploratory work being progressed with Inspiring Scotland for an alternative model of provision in the town, and the recently completed refurbishment of the Gallowgate site in Largs, consideration should be given to the future options for the remaining public conveniences as presented in this report. These options have been designed to ensure that the Council and its partners continue to develop and operate a smaller number of better-equipped facilities within the local authority area.

2. Background

Previous Progress

- 2.1 At its annual budget meeting of 17th February 2016, the Council agreed to close the public conveniences (PCs) in Arran, Cumbrae, Irvine and West Kilbride with effect from 1st April 2017. This decision recognised the financial challenges being faced by the Council and the need to protect statutory services.

2.2 Every effort was made to agree alternative operating models with local community groups as valued partners. Officers continued to work with community groups to consider what support the Council could offer to enable them to take over the toilets, potentially through asset transfer or key holding agreement for communities to develop approaches to delivering the facilities in alternative ways. As a result:

- Coastwatch Scotland (Irvine) requested the asset transfer of the PCs at Irvine Beach Park.
- Cumbrae Community Development Company agreed to the asset transfer of all five public toilet facilities on the island.
- Community groups on Arran agreed to take over five of the nine public toilet facilities on the island (Blackwaterfoot; Brodick Green, Whiting Bay; Glen Sannox, Lochranza) through asset transfer agreements. The remaining four facilities at Kilmory, Sandbraes, North Sannox and Lamlash, closed from 31 March 2017.
- West Kilbride Community Council has a Temporary Occupational Licence (TOL).
- The Portal Leisure Centre became fully operational with public toilets available within the main entrance, facilitating the closure of the East Road, Irvine toilets in March 2017,
- The public toilets in Largs (Aubery Park, Broomfields, Mackerston, Gallowgate and the Pencil), and Saltcoats and Ardrossan (Braes, Melbourne Gardens and Ardrossan South Beach) remained open with alternative funding arrangements agreed by Council.
- The closure, removal and termination of the contract with JCDcaux of all automatic public conveniences (APCs) was completed with all utilities terminated and contracts ended. The APCs were situated at Saltcoats station, Saltcoats car park, Dalry, Kilbirnie, North Shore Ardrossan and Skelmorlie. None of these facilities remain.

2.3 The projected savings offered at the time, following this change, were as follows:

- Removal of £125,000 from the budget for 2017/18, for PCs
- Removal of £218,000 from the budget for 2017/18, for APCs

This saving was achieved with the complete removal of these PCs and APCs and their associated costs.

2.4 Communication on those planned PC closures included appropriate signposting to alternative facilities in other public buildings and work with local groups to improve awareness of the alternative facilities available in the area.

Current Position

Island Public Conveniences

2.5 A successful application to the Scottish Government's Islands Programme secured funding for the Islands Pit Stop project funding (£540,000). This will redevelop island toilet buildings owned by North Ayrshire Council into accessible "Visitor Pit Stops." These will be refurbished buildings offering visitors sustainable and efficient amenities with landscaped outdoors space where required. The project will be delivered by the community groups across the islands with groups receiving funding directly to support the redevelopment, in line with the needs of the community and visitors alike. Active

Travel infrastructure will be included at the sites alongside two additional motorhome waste disposal points across the islands. The locations are as follows: Blackwaterfoot, Brodick Green, Kilmory, Lamlash, Lochranza, Whiting Bay Foreshore, all on Arran and Crocodile Rock, Cumbrae Slip, and Fintry Bay, all on Cumbrae.

Ardrossan South Beach

- 2.6 Following a successful Community Asset Transfer, including the public conveniences, work is underway at Ardrossan South Beach by the Ardrossan Community Development Trust to deliver a café and community hub supporting their wider place-based regeneration project for this area. This has been part funded by the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund and the Council's Community Investment Fund.

Melbourne Gardens

- 2.7 Based on estimates from the Council's Property team and the loss adjuster, £130k has been reserved for reinstatement on a like for like basis for the Melbourne Gardens site. Discussions are progressing with Inspiring Scotland regarding potential community interest in the development of this site. A visioning meeting was held in June with active community partners, Council services and Elected Members to discuss the site and aspirations for a wider community impact. Inspiring Scotland has been successful in their application to the Repurposing Property Grant Fund and their appointed architect is currently undertaking a feasibility study of the facility and wider site. This would enhance the group's ambitions for wider community considerations such as the use of the beach and future plans for the restoration of the outdoor swimming pool. It is envisaged that this facility would be transferred to the community group to operate. Payment on entry options could also be considered at design stage. This would also hopefully ensure the new build facility was protected to some degree from vandalism as well as generating a small income to contribute to running and repair costs. Support will be provided to Inspiring Scotland to investigate potential sources of funding to support community led delivery of any recommendations arising from the Study.

Gallowgate, Largs

- 2.8 Gallowgate toilets have recently been refurbished with paddle gates installed at this site with a contactless pay on entry facility. It is also an accessible "Changing Places" space.

Other Council-owned and operated public conveniences

- 2.9 The remaining Council-owned and operated public conveniences currently in operation are listed below.
- 2.9.1 Most are subject to regular complaints from the public due to their aesthetic condition and age. Other frequent complaints focus on issues caused by constant vandalism which make the facilities unusable by other members of the public. Facilities Management (FM) and Property Management & Investment (PMI) respond to these issues as soon as they are reported or noticed by staff. Orders for replacement equipment are made and installed as quickly as possible. However, new equipment is regularly destroyed shortly thereafter.

These are:

- **The Braes, Saltcoats.** This facility is subject to frequent vandalism and subsequent closures. A high-level estimate provided by the Council's property team last year suggested that c.£215k would be required for future investment at the Braes. Non-

domestic rates, utilities and repairs currently cost c.£12k per annum. Staff time and cleaning supplies cost an additional c.£22k per annum.

- **Broomfields, Aubrey Park, Mackerston Place, Pencil Point in Largs.** Aubrey Park, Mackerston Place and the Pencil are all closed between October and March. Aubrey Park only provides male facilities due to long term issues with repairs to the female block which has no prospect of being fixed due to the close proximity to a pond making costs prohibitive. The estimated current required investment in the toilets at Broomfield is £62,000, Mackerston Place is £73,000, and the Pencil is £60,000.
- **Eglinton Country Park** is linked to the Tournament Café facility and therefore not in scope.

Budget

- 2.9.2 Facilities Management's full year running costs for the PCs (excluding Eglinton Park) during 2022/23 was c.£80k. The annual income received from the Largs car park fund to support the Largs facilities is £35k. Other costs such as utilities, non-domestic rates and repairs of c.£50k will be in addition to this £80k. Running costs can fluctuate significantly year to year depending on the level of repairs, cleaning supplies, additional staffing, utility charge charges and on the level of vandalism at sites. As an estimate, the total employee costs and cleaning supplies is circa £60k per annum. This does not include the ad hoc call outs for additional staff presence following an incident or complaint at the sites which could equate to c.£2k - £3k.
- 2.9.3 There is currently no Council capital funding available to invest in the public conveniences. Should the properties be transferred to community ownership, external funding opportunities could be investigated and pursued by community organisations to support future investment. Potential sources of funding include the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund and Communities and Place Fund.

Overview of sites and recommendations

- 2.10 Due to the situation outlined above, the following is recommended:

Saltcoats

- 2.10.1 **Melbourne Gardens:** continue to work with Inspiring Scotland and community partners to achieve an upgraded and valued facility which complements community aspirations at the shore front in Saltcoats.
- 2.10.2 **The Braes:** begin a two-month period of community engagement from February 2024 to identify potential interest community asset transfer or close thereafter.

Largs

- 2.10.3 **Gallowgate:** continue to support this upgraded high-quality facility through the Largs Car Park Fund and through the contactless pay on entry facility.
- 2.10.4 **Broomfields:** begin a two-month period of community engagement from February 2024 to identify potential interest community asset transfer or close thereafter.

- 2.10.5 **Aubrey Park:** begin a two-month period of community engagement from February 2024 to identify potential interest community asset transfer or close thereafter.
- 2.10.6 **Mackerston Place:** begin a two-month period of community engagement from February 2024 to identify potential interest community asset transfer or close thereafter.
- 2.10.7 **Pencil Point in Largs:** begin a two-month period of community engagement from February 2024 to identify potential interest community asset transfer or close thereafter.

Staffing Implications

- 2.11 If the above proposals are accepted, one site in Council ownership would remain in Largs. The FM staffing requirement or work pattern would be reviewed to reflect the site requirements. There are however, current and ongoing challenges with recruitment, particularly with posts which involve weekend working and split shifts, therefore future staffing poses a risk and the service would rely on voluntary additional hours from existing staff to service the facility at weekends.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Approves the proposals for the future of the remaining Council-operated public conveniences as set out in this report; and
 - b) Agrees to accept a further report in April to consider the results of the engagement in relation to community interest in five public conveniences.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 The proposed asset transfers or closures would result in savings of c.£87k per annum on utilities, FM operational costs, repairs and maintenance:
- Savings in relation to FM costs would be c.£43k per annum (assuming full cost recovery for Gallowgate for FM resourcing and cleaning supplies).
 - Savings attributed to ad hoc call outs for FM staff responding to complaints would be c.£2k - £3k per annum.
 - Savings on utilities and ad hoc repairs would be c.£37k per annum.

Cost avoidance would be circa £400k if capital investment is not required in the five public conveniences recommended to be offered for community asset transfer.

If the report is agreed and the above recommendations are implemented, an update will be provided on implications for the Largs Car Park Fund.

Human Resources

- 4.2 A review of hours and work patterns would be required to service the remaining public conveniences.

Legal

4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 Under the proposals, one central, high-quality site would remain open in Largs with an accessible “Changing Places” space. A community asset transfer and the associated proposals being pursued for Saltcoats would ensure a high quality, accessible provision in this locality. Both sites would be of a good quality and would present a more accessible and welcoming visitor experience than can currently be achieved at the remaining buildings.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 New buildings or improvements to existing sites would incorporate climate and sustainability considerations.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 These proposals will address all four Council plan priorities:
- Wellbeing – to transition to a wellbeing economy, delivering prosperity, wellbeing, and resilience for local people.
 - Communities and Local Democracy – we will have active, inclusive, and resilient communities.
 - Climate Change – achieving net-zero by 2030.
 - A Sustainable Council – a Community Wealth Building Council that is efficient and accessible, maximising investment and focusing resources towards our priorities.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 High quality local facilities will be achieved through these proposals, and community organisations will be supported to achieve their aspirations. The repurposing of under-utilised facilities through community asset transfer would contribute to the land and assets pillar by bringing them into productive use for community benefit.

5. Consultation

5.1 Discussions have taken place with Inspiring Scotland, Elected Members and community groups regarding the Melbourne Gardens site. Extensive negotiations have taken place in relation to the Gallowgate improvements, including with Elected Members. This report proposes further consultation in relation to those five public conveniences detailed above to ensure community interest has been explored before the Council makes a final decision in relation to them.

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Background Papers

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