

ANGUS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMITTEE
23 MAY 2000

BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW - PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

ABSTRACT

The programmed Best Value Service Review examining the issues related to Public Conveniences has been completed. The outcomes of the Review are now available for consideration by the Committee.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) note the content of the Best Value Service Review Team Report.
- b) support the initiative by the Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection to seek Corporate spend funding to close four of the least used Automatic Public Conveniences by buying out the remaining portion of the lease agreements.
- c) Call for a further report into rationalisation of provision of the unattended basic toilet blocks prior to the 2001/02 Budget exercise.
- d) Support the continued provision of attended Superloos in each of the town centres.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The current standard of provision of public toilets in Scotland both in terms of numbers availability and quality of facilities offered is very variable.

In the main this is due to the absence of any statutory obligations on Local Authorities to provide public toilets.

With the continuing improvement in the general quality of life in Angus the requirement to provide higher standards of public toilet provision and management is increasing not only from the general public but from those groups of Angus citizens who have special needs, health care professionals and the tourist industry.

In addition to the general ground swell for continuous improvement in the Service the Council's participation in the Loo of the Year Award Scheme competition organised by the British Toilet Association assists the Departments involved in the Service to focus on the Superloo provision.

- 2.2 The present Public Convenience Service is provided through the provision of a twenty four hour service through the lease of Automatic Public Conveniences (APCs) and this is augmented by the provision of manned Superloos and unmanned facilities during the day. There are however seasonal variations depending on the location of the facility.

3. COST OF THE SERVICE

The overall cost of the Service for 1998-99 was £496,461 with an income received of £49,821 resulting in a net expenditure on the Service by the Council of £446,639. This figure includes the cost of the lease of the Automatic Public Conveniences which was £107,366.

4. STAFFING

The Service directly employs approximately seventy members of staff but a proportion of the staff are part-time or seasonal and are involved in the delivery of other service areas as well as the Public Convenience Service.

5. CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS

As a result of a lack of consultation with customers prior to this Review and in accordance with the corporate model the Review Team undertook a number of consultation exercises during the Review and these were as follows.

1. Exit Survey of customers using the Superloos.
2. A postal questionnaire.
3. Consultation of staff in three departments involved in the Service.
4. Disability Access.

The Review Team decided quite early in the Best Value Review process to use the questionnaire as the vehicle to gather relevant data from staff and customers. A methodical approach was used to structure the questionnaires to elicit the required information.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

- 6.1 Toilet facilities for the use of the public are provided by private organisations eg a Restaurant or Coffee Shop providing toilets for the use of customers.

The present Building Regulations require that if a business provides toilets for the use of the public then disabled facilities are required to be provided as well. The growth of supermarkets, restaurants etc in the last ten years have increased the provision of toilet facilities which the public have access to. Generally these facilities are of the same level of provision as that provided by the Council's present Superloo or APC facilities. The Team were of the opinion that provision of public toilet facilities in Supermarkets should be included in any future review of the Council's Service to prevent duplication of facilities in any specific location.

- 6.2 To the Team's knowledge there is no benchmarking activity taking place regarding the Public Convenience Service.

- 6.3 The Team however, decided to benchmark with a neighbouring authority with a similar rural/urban mix and a vibrant tourist industry. Details of the Terms of Reference used for this exercise and a summary of the results and a comparison to the Council's Service is contained in Appendix 10 of the full Review.

- 6.4 From the financial information provided it would seem at first glance that the approximate spend of £300,000 by this Authority was well below the cost of that provided by Angus Council. In analysing the data further it is apparent that the Authority has considerably fewer unmanned Public Conveniences and no APCs in their facility mix. The Authority however, has a total of nine Superloos but three of these are seasonal. If the cost of the APC provision is subtracted from net expenditure of the Council on the Service ie £339K, the costs of the two Services are similar.

- 6.5 The present provision of the Council amounts to forty nine public conveniences compared with the other Authority's provision of thirty two. Angus Council has therefore, 53% more public conveniences than the adjoining authority which has a greater area and larger population.

The Team were of the opinion that there is at present over provision and a number of the unmanned units and APCs may well be duplicating the provision of Superloos and public toilets provided by other Departments of the Council and private organisations. It is therefore recommended as a result of the benchmarking exercise that the existing provision of public conveniences in Angus is reviewed and the number of APCs and unmanned toilets are substantially reduced.

- 6.6 To enable informed decisions to be made as regards the closure of APCs and unmanned facilities. Appendix 11 to the full Report contains details of unmanned facilities which could be considered for closure or transfer to another Department with an explanation for this action.

The closure of APCs should be based on the usage rate of the facility. To enable decisions to be made on an informed basis details of usage rates and cost per individual use are attached to this report as Appendix 1.

If a closure programme is devised it is recommended that some of the savings are used to continue the Superloo Programme as defined in report No 369/82 of a Superloo facility in each of the main Burghs.

It is also recommended that a partnership with a private company or organisation may be beneficial in providing a Superloo in Carnoustie.

- 6.7 The Team were unable to ascertain if the Scottish Executive had issued guidance regarding the Service. However, the British Toilet Association have issued a charter on which they base their Loo of the Year Award. This defines the standard to be met by the Superloo provision see Appendix 13. The Superloos in Angus have won awards from the Association since the early nineties.. It is obvious from the long list of awards that the Superloo provision is of a high standard in terms of this National Award Scheme.
- 6.8 Public Conveniences which are not part of a shopping complex, sporting venue etc are generally provided by Local Authorities. The market is therefore, very much orientated towards the concept of a Public Service for the benefit of the community. From the details of Report No 354/96 relating to a survey of Scottish Public Toilets the charging of 20p by the Council for APCs and Superloo use appears to be the market rate, ie 20p.
- 6.9 There are no Performance Indicators defined for this Service and the members of the Review Team were unaware of relevant statistics published by other bodies. A search of some Local Authority Sites on the Internet however indicated that there are some performance indicators used by Authorities however, these define number of toilets, disabled facilities, baby changing facilities etc, of any of the sites visited, the provision in Angus is as good if not better than most.

7. KEY CONCLUSIONS OF THE REPORT

- 7.1 The Superloo aspect of the Service gained support from customers and staff however the other two types of facility failed to gain substantial positive support. It would appear from the consultation exercises that the public have an aversion to using the APC. This type of facility however, provides twenty four hour Service but in terms of service delivery appears to be expensive.

The final facility in the Service mix is that of the unmanned toilet facility. These facilities continue to be vandalised and misused. However, these facilities may be the only economic solution to meet social needs outwith the main Burghs. The review team would recommend that a review of the provision of facilities in rural areas is carried out with the objective of reducing misuse by opening facilities on a more seasonal basis.

The Service Review Team have made recommendations regarding the future rationalisation and closure of these unmanned toilets. As arrangements for this year in terms of staffing/cleaning etc have been put in place it is proposed that a report will be prepared as part of the 2001/2002 budget preparation exercise which after due consultation with local elected members will be placed before the Committee.

- 7.2 The Benchmarking exercise whilst limited to a degree indicates that the Council may be providing too many public conveniences. The Review team is of the opinion that the provision should meet the standard as defined by the British Toilet Association.
- 7.3 The consultation exercise undertaken by the Review Team clearly indicated that customers demanded more Superloo facilities. It would be advantageous prior to providing additional facilities that a policy is devised regarding the siting and type of facility to prevent the apparent ad hoc growth of public conveniences noted by the Review Team.
- 7.4 The Superloo facilities cannot meet all the requirements of the customer or general social need for the Service provision and therefore a mix of facilities will be required to be provided. It is the Review Team's opinion that a review of the present mix of facilities and their number must be

undertaken. If the Superloo facilities are to be expanded then savings must be made from closing unmanned and APC facilities to pay for the expansion.

7.5 A copy of the Action Plan to the report is attached as Appendix 2.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A bid has been made by the Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection to the corporate spend to save initiative for funding to buy out the lease of the four least used Automatic Public Conveniences. This would lead to a saving of 52K per annum. The cost of this buy out is currently being negotiated with the APC leasing company.

9. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Law and Administration, Director of Finance, Contract Services Manager, Director of Property Services and Director of Recreation Services have been consulted on the content of this report.

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

S R Heggie
Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection

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