

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 23 February 2021

Update on Re-opening of Public Conveniences

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended the Committee:

- 1.1.1 Notes the guidance for public conveniences published in June 2020 recognises the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is high in public conveniences and therefore requires enhanced cleaning, over and above what is normally in place is required, alongside measures to protect customers and staff to minimise the risk to public health in facilities which are open;
- 1.1.2 Approves the continued opening of seven public conveniences in the city, as those set out in paragraph 3.1;
- 1.1.3 Refers this report to Full Council for approval of continued funding from Council reserves to keep these seven public conveniences open; and
- 1.1.4 Notes that the strategy on public conveniences will be reported to the Transport and Environment Committee in April 2021.

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Update on Re-opening of Public Conveniences

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the current position on Edinburgh's public conveniences and arrangements going forward and provides an update on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current Community Toilet Scheme.

3. Background

- 3.1 In March 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 led to the closure of all of the Council owned public conveniences. On [9 July 2020](#) Policy and Sustainability Committee approved the opening of seven public conveniences, with appropriate measures introduced to maintain public health and in accordance with Scottish Government guidelines. The seven facilities are:
- 3.1.1 Pipe Lane, Portobello;
 - 3.1.2 Hope Park in the Meadows;
 - 3.1.3 Ross Bandstand in Princes Street Gardens;
 - 3.1.4 The Courtyard at Saughton Park;
 - 3.1.5 Bruntsfield Links;
 - 3.1.6 Hawes Pier, South Queensferry; and
 - 3.1.7 Cramond.
- 3.2 On [6 October 2020](#) Policy and Sustainability Committee reviewed the measures in place and agreed that they should be kept open over the winter months.
- 3.3 Committee decided that no further public conveniences could be opened at that time. However, they requested that this be reviewed in the new year with proposals for April onwards, based on the public health guidance at the time to be reported to Committee if normal operating arrangements cannot be reintroduced.
- 3.4 Further, Committee requested the following actions:
- 3.4.1 Work with park officers and ward councillors on wayfinding signage for the open public toilets and implement changes within the next three months;
 - 3.4.2 Provide a review of current facilities within the Community Toilet Scheme;

- 3.4.3 Consider opening times for toilets to address queuing before particular toilets are opened;
 - 3.4.4 An assessment of toilets and guidance to allow arrangements from April 2021 to be reported back in three cycles; and
 - 3.4.5 A revised Community Toilet Scheme including communications and signage campaign to be included in the public convenience strategy.
- 3.5 Committee also agreed the approach to developing a public convenience strategy and approved commencement of assessment of possible locations for new public convenience facilities. This will be reported to the Transport and Environment Committee in April 2021 and will also include:
- 3.5.1 Details of a revised Community Toilet Scheme, as requested in Section 3.4.5; and
 - 3.5.2 The Council's Equalities Working Group request to ensure the public convenience strategy captures the equalities angle and that access to conveniences across the city is considered.

Scottish Government Guidance

- 3.6 The Scottish Government released [guidance](#) on opening of public and customer toilets on 27 June 2020. This guidance recognises that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is high in public conveniences given the low levels of natural light, lack of ventilation, the number of surfaces to touch and the purpose of a toilet. These risks are deemed by officers to be higher due to the age and design of public conveniences in the city.
- 3.7 The guidance calls for enhanced cleaning, over and above what is normally in place, but is not prescriptive, recognising that the requirements at each location will vary depending on a number of factors, including footfall, infrastructure and physical distancing arrangements. There is also a need to ensure that the facilities can be appropriately managed to protect customers and staff.
- 3.8 To date, there has been no update to the guidance from the Scottish Government.
- 3.9 COVID-19 restrictions have remained in place since the outbreak in March 2020, with local protection levels introduced setting out what is permitted in each area. However, a further lockdown came into effect at midnight on 4 January 2021 and will remain in place until at least mid-February 2021.

4. Main report

Current position

- 4.1 During the current lockdown, people are only able to leave their home for essential purposes, which includes outdoor exercise.
- 4.2 The open facilities are in areas popular with people exercising therefore it is recommended that these facilities remain open.

- 4.3 As there has been no update to the Scottish Government guidance, public health colleagues have advised that the measures introduced in July 2020 to minimise the risk of transmission should be retained.

Signage

- 4.4 Following October's Committee, a survey undertaken by parks officers reviewed the signage for the open public conveniences in the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links as concern was expressed by Elected Members and local people about the signage in these locations.
- 4.5 An additional 18 waymarking signs will now be installed on lighting columns in the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links to direct people to the nearest open public conveniences.

Community Toilet Scheme

- 4.6 The Community Toilet Scheme was set up in 2015 and includes toilets available in over 60 Council and Edinburgh Leisure buildings and a number of local businesses across the city.
- 4.7 Businesses that choose to participate in the scheme allow members of the public to use their toilet facilities without expecting them to make a purchase. In exchange, the Council makes an annual payment to each business of £500. In 2015 hospitality businesses were approached in the locations where ten public conveniences were being closed and, at the time ten businesses (cafes and pubs), signed up to the scheme.
- 4.8 As detailed in the October 2020 report, the pandemic has significantly impacted the Community Toilet Scheme. With the closure of libraries, community centres and Edinburgh Leisure sites the toilets within them are no longer available to the public.
- 4.9 As some facilities started to re-open during the autumn the ability to promote the toilets within them was reviewed by the relevant parties. Unfortunately, the difficult decision was taken that the facilities could not be promoted as being publicly accessible due to the additional measures that would be required to keep them COVID secure.
- 4.10 These facilities are now closed again with the new lockdown arrangements and therefore the Community Toilet Scheme cannot be promoted at this time.
- 4.11 Current businesses which participate in the scheme have been contacted and most have confirmed that they would like to remain members. However, many have been unable to provide facilities to non-customers due to the restrictions which they have had to implement to adhere to the public health requirements arising from COVID-19 and most are currently unable to provide any facilities due to the lockdown restrictions.
- 4.12 It is not expected that further businesses will be willing to sign up for the Community Toilet Scheme at this time. An update on the Scheme will be reported to Transport and Environment Committee in April 2021 as part of the strategy for public conveniences.

Flexible opening times

- 4.13 Demand at the open facilities has been extremely varied, mainly based on the weather. On wet or cold days, demand has been low. It is difficult to predict usage therefore managing staffing on the basis of demand is not possible.
- 4.14 Staff start at the toilets half an hour before they are due to open to ensure everything is in order. They have been asked to monitor whether any queues are forming and if there are, and it is safe to do so, they will allow members of the public to use the facility before the stated opening time.

Arrangements for public conveniences from April 2021

- 4.15 It is not possible currently to predict the situation from April 2021 so it is proposed that the situation continues to be monitored. Should circumstances change these will be reported back to Committee with an outline of how the opening of public conveniences is impacted.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The guidance from Scottish Government will continue to be monitored. Should circumstances and guidance change the guidance, the measures in place will be reviewed. If these changes affect the opening of public conveniences and impact on the measures currently in place, these will be reported to Committee.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The costs for reopening the seven public conveniences have been met from Council reserves since July 2020.
- 6.2 The cost of reopening the seven facilities from July 2020 is forecast to the end of this financial year to be £563,468.
- 6.3 The cost of staffing to keep the existing facilities open for a further period is expected to be £7,600 per week. In addition, there will be costs for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It is requested that Committee approve the retained opening of these facilities and to refer this report to Council to consider the on-going use of reserves.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 It is acknowledged that equality issues remain an important consideration; disabled people may be particularly disadvantaged if public toilets are not reopened. However, whilst COVID-19 public health measures remain in place it is difficult to minimise the impact. The re-opened toilets which do have disabled toilets are clearly indicated on the Councils website.

- 7.2 There are also wider local environmental impacts if public toilets are not reopened, in areas where people are congregating.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Re-opening of Public Conveniences - Policy and Sustainability Committee of [6 August 2020](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Measures required to open public convenience facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix 1: Measures required to open public convenience facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current measures associated with reopening public conveniences include:

- Adequate staffing to maintain public health;
- Legionella flushing (as the facilities have not been used for so long);
- Installation of public health signage;
- Deep cleaning of facilities;
- Minor remedial repairs to enable the facility to reopen (e.g. installation of hand sanitiser dispensers, hand towel boxes, replacing toilet seats); and
- Internal adjustments (e.g. closing cubicles if more than one to maintain physical distancing).