

9. **Public Conveniences-Service Review**

Purpose of the Report

To provide the Executive with the background to the Public Conveniences Service, so as to consider proposals both to deliver the financial savings required of this service and to consider other options for change. The report sought agreement to:

- (a) A rationalisation of facilities to provide a level of service that could still be delivered with the reduced level of staffing and resources.
- (b) A reduction of staffing numbers.
- (c) A move to contactless payments on all charging facilities, which would be in addition to cash payments.
- (d) Charging event organisers / seeking imposed cost recovery for the use of facilities.
- (e) Continue to consult with appropriate disability groups with the aim of moving away from Radar Key access, which was currently abused to a modernised system. It was emphasised this system would be available to use by visitors to Lincoln.

Decision

That approval be given to the proposals and savings, as set out in the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The section's finances had been considered in detail, but owing to the budgets largely relating to staff and site costs, savings could only be achieved by reductions in staff and facilities in tandem, as set out in the report.

Reasons for Decision

The Council's medium term financial strategy 2021-26 required a significant reduction in the Council's net cost base, to ensure it maintained a sustainable financial position. A programme of individual reviews was being developed which included a review of the net cost of the Public Conveniences Service, with a requirement to reduce the net cost by circa £82,000 (plus annual inflation).

It was highlighted that the proposals contained within the report had been subject to public consultation in early 2021, with significant feedback received. This feedback largely related to access for disabled users, which had been taken into consideration when developing the proposals.

The Legal Services Manager advised that the Council had received a petition on 24 June 2021 relating to an element of the proposals contained within the report, entitled *Save Our Loos – We demand the reopening of Westgate Loos in Lincoln*, which contained 902 signatures. In accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the petition would be presented to a meeting of the Council for debate.

It was emphasised that the changes to the services were not extensive closures, as had been portrayed in some quarters, with provision clarified as being: Sincil Street (ladies), which would be replaced with a new improved (modern unisex) facility within the proposed refurbished market; Westgate would remain open for Radar key access only and the full facilities could be used for events; Lucy Tower would move to events only, and the two Victorian urinals would close, owing to suitability and hygiene concerns. The proposed new service provision was summarised in the table on pages 156-158 of the agenda pack.

The report had been considered by the Policy Scrutiny Committee on 15 June 2021. The Committee accepted the reasons for the review. The Committee requested that the signage of the facilities within Lincoln was improved and expressed concern that the closure of the urinals could lead to an increase in antisocial behaviour. They also noted a potential strategic gap in services between the Castle and the city centre but recognised that investment was not an option at this time. The Committee asked for this to be revisited in the future, along with options for the urinals. The Assistant Director Communities and Street Scene advised that the Council would be in discussions with Lincolnshire County Council in relation to signage and Lincoln BIG to suggest businesses encouraged customers to use facilities prior to leaving their premises.

The Executive stressed that a review of these services was not the Executive's preference. However, owing to the current financial position of the Council and the future uncertainties over funding, as discussed under Minute 3, it was unavoidable. It was highlighted that the provision of toilets was not a statutory service and should the Council's financial position improve in future years, this non-statutory provision would be reviewed.

The Executive sought confirmation that relevant disability groups would be consulted on any proposed replacement of Radar keys. It was also reiterated that the Westgate facilities would remain open to Radar key users all year round, with the option to open the full facilities for events.

10. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

These items were considered in private as they were likely to disclose exempt information, as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. No representations had been received in relation to the proposal to consider these items in private.

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Decision

That approval be given to the proposals and savings, as set out in the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The section's finances had been considered in detail, but as the budgets largely related to staff and site costs, savings could only be achieved by reductions in staff and facilities in tandem, as set out in the report.

Reasons for Decision

The reason for the decision is set out at Minute 9 above.