

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	March 14 th , 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Barry Mellor, Lead Member for Environment and Transport / Tony Ward, Corporate Director: Environment & Economy
Head of Service	Paul Jackson: Head of Highways & Environmental Services
Report author	Paul Jackson / Tony Ward
Title	Public Conveniences Savings Proposal

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. This report is about a proposal to remove the DCC budget for Public Conveniences to generate a revenue saving.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. Public Conveniences are on the list of Major Savings Proposals that has been circulated to Members and discussed at various Budget Workshops.
- 2.2. To detail a potential for saving from the budget allocated for Public Conveniences and to highlight the potential impact of implementing that savings proposal.
- 2.3. To enable Members to fulfil their scrutiny function in relation to this proposal.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. For Scrutiny Committee to note the content of the report, and to raise any issues that can be factored into the development of the proposal prior to any future Cabinet decision.
- 3.2. That Scrutiny Committee read this paper in conjunction with the Well-being Impact Assessment, attached at Appendix 1.

4. Report details

- 4.1. The financial challenge faced by the council is unprecedented, and all services are therefore required to deliver significant savings in order to meet that challenge.
- 4.2. The proposal to review the Public Convenience (PC) service has come out of the corporate process to identify savings proposals as part of the 2-24/25 budget setting process. It is one of the major savings proposals that has been shared with Members and was discussed in the various budget Workshops. It was also the subject of a Member Workshop via Teams on 24th January 2024.
- 4.3. The provision of PCs is a non-statutory duty. Many Local Authorities ceased providing this service many years ago. Some neighbouring authorities still provide this service in certain areas but have reduced it in recent years and/or are currently looking to reduce this provision.
- 4.4. We currently have 20 Public Convenience sites across the county. Some are free to use, and some have a facility to charge users. None of the sites break even financially. A full list of locations and financial data is available as Appendix 2 and 3, respectively.
- 4.5. The proposal is to remove the budget attached to the PC service. The budget is c.£270,000. The upshot of this would be that DCC would no longer own or operate PCs. However, because we know that the provision of PCs in our communities is important, we will be looking to transfer as many PCs as possible to other groups or organisations (e.g., City, Town & Community Councils) so that they continue to operate but at no cost to DCC. We are currently in the process of transferring PCs in Corwen to Corwen Town Council, and this provides a model for what we would like to see happening elsewhere. Under this proposal, it is assumed that any PCs that we are unable to transfer to another owner would be closed.
- 4.6. An additional way to mitigate against the impact of this proposal is to support local businesses by expanding the Community Toilet Grant scheme. Under this scheme, DCC can pay local businesses a grant (currently £500 per annum) if they allow members of public to use their toilet facilities free of charge. This scheme would be reviewed, re-branded and promoted to businesses as part of the proposal. It is believed that some businesses would be receptive to this offer because it would

increase footfall for their business, and some people would probably feel obliged to buy something at the same time.

- 4.7. It is understood that this proposal will not be popular, and that it could be viewed as contrary to other strategic aims in the areas of tourism and regeneration. However, declaring our intention to remove the budget for our PCs is likely to be the best way to identify potential alternative operators.
- 4.8. The estimated saving associated with closing all PCs is c.£200k. The budget is c.£270k, but we have taken a conservative approach to estimating the likely saving as there may be some one-off costs to consider. For example, there are likely to be some decommissioning costs if any sites need to be closed; there could be some ongoing NNDR and insurance costs should we be unable to transfer all of the facilities; and some cash/capital may be required to undertake refurbishment to help facilitate transfer. Also, we need to retain an element of revenue budget to fund the Community Toilet Grant scheme.
- 4.9. We are currently in the process of undertaking a needs analysis within the County and this will form part of a subsequent review of (and consultation on) the DCC Public Toilet Strategy.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

- 5.1. The removal of the budget for PCs (if we are unable to transfer PCs to other operators or create alternative provision through the Community Toilet Grant scheme) could have a negative impact on the following Corporate Plan themes:
- A prosperous Denbighshire: negative impact on tourism and regeneration.
 - A healthy & happier, caring Denbighshire: negative impact on our ability to enable people to live independently.
 - A fairer, safe, and more equal Denbighshire: negative impact on people with some protected characteristics (e.g., older people, disabled people, etc.).

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. A redundancy process will need to be pursued, so Finance and HR support will be required for this.
- 6.2. Redundancy costs are difficult to estimate, due to the complexity of the changes, costs to be confirmed upon receipt of information from Payroll. More detail on the chosen model will be available to inform a future Cabinet decision. Currently, 7.7fte staff are employed in the service.
- 6.3. A communications plan has been developed and support from the corporate team will be needed to support the implementation of any decision.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. Score for the sustainability of the approach: 2 out of 4 stars, actual score 17/36. See attached WBIA, Appendix 1.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. The proposal was discussed at CET on 20th November and then at the CET & Cabinet Budget Workshop on 21st November. Staff were informed of the proposal on 15th January. A Member Workshop was held via Teams on 24th January 2024. There is a statutory requirement for us to consult publicly on a new PC Strategy, and that consultation will begin once a needs analysis has been completed. Until then the current PC Strategy will remain in place pending full review.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1. The Council is facing severe real terms reductions in funding over the next few years, alongside increases in cost and demand. This will require all services to make savings which will result in reductions in service. Cabinet and Council approved proposals to set a balanced budget for 2024/25 Including the public conveniences proposal. Although obviously there are a wide range of factors to consider for each and every proposal it is important that the wider financial context for the next 3 years

is taken into account when decisions are taken. Savings that are not delivered will need to be replaced..

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. Risk that making cuts will impact negatively on our Corporate Plan (see Paragraph 5.1. This would be mitigated by efforts to transfer PCs to other operators and to expand the Community Toilet Scheme.

10.2. Risk that the proposal will lead to adverse publicity for the council. This can be mitigated (to some extent) by a robust communications strategy.

11. Power to make the decision.

11.1. Local authorities are required under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs.