

REPORT

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Cllr Brown Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES:

Cabinet will recall that at its meeting on 7th April, a report (attached for information) regarding the management of the Public Conveniences at the Market Square and Central car park was considered (agenda item 19). This report was subsequently deferred pending some further information regarding the following:

- 1 Financial implications of charging 20p at both facilities:

As mentioned in the report, at current income levels doubling the charge at both sites will potentially increase income by approximately £33,000 p/a but Officers have reservations as outlined at points 6.2 & 6.3 of the report. This figure is also only likely to accrue in full if the changes to hours highlighted in the report at 7.1 is adopted. Any variance from these suggested hours may have a detrimental impact on the figure. It should be noted that the variance to hours suggested in the report is to delete the times when there is often little or even no usage, and therefore we are incurring staff costs but virtually no income to offset them.

- 2 Can the opening hours at the Market Square be extended on market days to the hours the market traders are on site (Tuesday & Saturday)?

The Market Square facility currently opens at 8-30am and closes at 6-00pm, 7 days a week. The major reason the service is overspending each year is down to a combination of the number of staff needed to cover these hours and the problems associated with the management/collection of monies. To cover the market trader's hours would mean increasing the hours to 6-00am to 6-00pm. The increase in staff costs to cover these additional hours would be approx £1540-00 p/a, with no increase in income to offset this as the market traders have free use. More of an issue would be the problems in attracting somebody to cover these early hours as existing staff are not contracted to start till 8-30am. The Market Square facility does have a 24hr free toilet available when the main facility is closed. However this isn't cleaned until the toilets currently open at 8-30, and sometimes they can be less than appealing.

- 3 Para 6.6 from the original report, further detail was requested regarding the staff employed on temporary contracts and details of the staffing levels at the facilities and on the cleaning rounds.

Since the original report was written, those staff on short term contracts have been transferred to permanent contracts at SCS. In terms of staffing at the facilities on current opening hours, there is a requirement to cover 195 hours per week between the two sites - this equates to 5.25 full time equivalents (FTE). The cleaning rounds are staffed by 4 FTE

operatives. In reality the number of staff employed is greater, though on shorter hour contracts.

- 4 Allowing for the reduction in hours suggested in the report (para 7.1), but taking into account the increase in hours to cover the market trader's request, what would be the nett effect?

The reduction suggested in the report equates to 12 hours per week per site (24 hrs total). By adding back in the 6hrs to meet the market trader's request at the Market Square, the nett reduction is 18 hours. It is likely however that the cost of the 6 hours will be proportionately more than the 25% it represents because of the need to offer enhanced rates to cover the unsocial hours.

- 5 What would be the cost implications of contracting out the whole public convenience service?

There are lots of Local Authorities (LA's) who have contracted out the public convenience service as well as many who undertake it "in house". From initial investigations however, all run at significant costs to the local taxpayer. There are a number of procurement options available should Cabinet wish to go this route. However, neither the Best Value review of Public Conveniences undertaken in 2001, nor the Best Value review of Street Services undertaken in 2003/04 recommended that the procurement of this service should be looked into as part of the relevant SCIP's. Whenever public surveys have been carried out, this service has consistently had much higher than average satisfaction levels.

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1. Introduction:

- 1.1. The Environmental Services Department manages 17 public convenience blocks around the City and District area.
- 1.2. All are managed to a specification approved by the relevant Committee. This covers issues such as cleaning frequencies/regimes, opening/closing times and staffing levels etc.
- 1.3. Two sites are attended (Market Square and Central Car Park), all the others are unattended.
- 1.4. There is currently an overspend of approximately £15,000 on the Public Conveniences cost centre which is likely to continue, or get worse, over the coming years.
- 1.5. The management of the two attended sites in particular offers a range of options to remove the budget overspend.
- 1.6. Cabinet has identified that for financial planning, Public Conveniences are categorised as a desirable service.

2. Background:

- 2.1. Both attended sites are open from 8-30am to 6-00pm, Monday to Sunday including Bank Holidays but excluding Christmas Day. These hours do vary slightly when necessary to cater for Christmas late night shopping, the annual fair etc.
- 2.2. Both sites require payment of a charge to enter (currently 10p per person). This charge hasn't altered since the units were opened many years ago.
- 2.3. The original specification required that an attendant be employed at each site to manage and clean the sites as well as collect the monies etc.
- 2.4. In reality, the collection and management of monies has proven to be very problematic and costly to manage, and has necessitated the employment of additional attendants.

3. Current Finances:

- 3.1. The cost of attending the Market Square and Central Car Park sites to the hours specified is estimated at ©£100,000 in 2003/04.
- 3.2. The income target for 2004/05 is £43,350. However the income target is very optimistic and actual income is highly unlikely to exceed £33,000.
- 3.3. A charge of £5,300 is also incurred annually to cover the cash collection service.

- 3.4. There appears to be great scope for on-going revenue savings by re-assessing the manner in which these 2 sites are managed.
4. Options:
- 4.1. There are a large and varied number of potential options available to achieve a more cost effective service at these sites if so desired. With the exception of continuing as existing, all the ideas either in isolation or combined will lead to savings of some degree.
- 4.2. The issues that could be considered include;
- Changing the charging policy - increase the charge significantly at one or other or both sites, make one site free and thereby reduce staff requirements, make both sites free, etc.
 - Changing the opening hours - single status has meant that weekends (and Sundays, Bank Holidays in particular) are very expensive to cover. Should consideration be given to only opening the Market Square for markets, special events etc? (leaving the current overnight cubicles open at all times).
 - Re-assessing the attendance requirements - are they needed at all? Should there be attendant cover split between the 2 sites? Should one site have an attendant and not both etc.
5. Option Implications:
- 5.1. The following give a feel for the levels of savings which could be accrued:

| | Option Implication | Potential Saving (£) p/a |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| a | Scrap charges altogether - Increases bottom line overspend by | (2,300) |
| b | Double charge at Central car park, scrap charge at Market Square | 14,000 |
| c | Double charge at both sites | 33,000 |
| d | Reduce opening hours at both sites on Sundays/Bank Hols from 8-30am-6-00pm to 10-00am-4-30pm | 5,750 |
| e | Reduce routine Monday to Saturday opening hours at both sites from 8-30am-6-00pm to 9-00am-5-00pm | 8,000 |
| f | Close Central car park on Sundays/Bank Hols only, open Market Square from 10-00am-4-30pm | 11,650 |

6. Practical Implications:
- 6.1. Any potential savings must be weighed up against the high user satisfaction levels currently experienced at these 2 sites (with the Central Car Park the highest). Savings will only be accepted by users if there is little or no discernable drop in standards - especially in regard to cleanliness.
- 6.2. Any approved option which includes the continuation of charges at one or both sites, may incur a one-off cost initially in order to bring the management of monies at the site(s) up to an acceptable standard. Depending upon decisions made, the scope and extent of these works will need to be balanced against the perceived risks.
- 6.3. Whilst doubling the charge at both sites appears at face value to be the easiest and quickest way to achieve a substantial saving, Officers are concerned that income at the Market Square will actually diminish proportionately as people will object to paying 20p to

use what is basically an underground Public Convenience of limited quality. In addition, managing and reconciling the monies and entry counter systems at this site is extremely problematic due to the volume of free entries given to market traders.

- 6.4. Scrapping the charges altogether will show a marginal increase in the operating cost of the service, this does not take account of the significant "hidden" cost savings relating to managing monies, staff related issues etc.
- 6.5. Not having attendants at the sites at all is a potential further option which would accrue potentially substantial savings p/a. The cleaning and maintenance would then be absorbed into "mobile rounds" as set up for all the other Public Convenience sites. However both these sites (and the central car park in particular) were designed to be attended with the fittings and finishes chosen for their quality and appearance, rather than their vandal resistance. Officers would therefore strongly advise against pursuing this option.
- 6.6. Knowing that there would probably be a re-assessment of the services at these 2 sites, there are currently a number of Salisbury Commercial Services staff employed on short term temporary contracts. These contracts have been renewed on a number of occasions now and to be fair to them, and to ensure the Council does not compromise its legal position with regard to employment legislation, it is important to give clarity as regards the future direction.

7. Officer Recommendations:

- 7.1. The potential number of combinations of service provision changes at these 2 sites is immense, from minor tinkering to large scale sweeping alterations to the manner in which these services are provided. Officers believe that the following suggestions offer a reasonable balance between maintaining standards and running the service in a more cost effective manner:
 - Delete the charges at the Market Square altogether and double the charge at the Central car park to 20p (though please see point 6.2 above)
 - Change the opening times at both sites on Sundays and Bank Holidays to 10-00am - 4-30pm.
 - Change the opening times at both sites on all other days to 9-00am - 5-00pm.
 - Continue a permanent attendant at both the sites.
- 7.2. This "package" will lead to an estimated £27,700 p/a on-going reduction in the operating cost of the service without, we believe, a noticeable reduction in the quality of the service provided.

8. Recommendations:

- 8.1. It is recommended that the package of proposals highlighted at 7.1 above are approved, and that,
- 8.2. The impact of the proposals be monitored and a report be re-submitted to the Cabinet in 6 months time accordingly.

9. Implications:

- 9.1. Financial: Contained in the report. The final financial impact will be determined by the decisions made. Any reduction in the operating cost of the service will help offset the shortfall in income as highlighted in 3.2 above.

- 9.2. Legal: There is no statutory obligation placed upon the Council to provide Public Conveniences. Issues such as opening hours, attendance, charges etc are at the discretion of the Local Authority
- 9.3. Personnel: Contained in the report
- 9.4. Human Rights: Contained in the report.
- 9.5. Environmental: Nil
- 9.6. Community Safety: Nil

Ward(s) Affected: The Central Car Park facility is within the St Edmund & Milford Ward, the Market Square is within the St Martin & Milford Ward. Users however come from all Wards and beyond.