

The Highland Council
Community Services Committee

21 August 2014

Agenda Item	20
Report No	COM/28/14

Public Conveniences – Comfort Scheme Progress

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report provides Members with details of the progress in delivering comfort schemes and invites Members to approve the current programme of rationalisation of Highland Comfort Schemes.

The report also invites Members to approve proposed alterations to the Highland Comfort Scheme rules which would facilitate a Highland-wide strategic approach to the provision of public convenience facilities.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The provision of toilets is not a statutory function; however the Council has recognised their importance to the tourism industry and continues to invest in a programme of replacement/refurbishment of public toilets at strategic locations.
- 1.2 To supplement the provision of Council-owned facilities the Highland Comfort Scheme was introduced in 1996, which allows payment to a third party for provision of an agreed publicly accessible public convenience facility. The agreements and process were formalised by TECS Committee on 23rd September 2010 (TEC/79/10).
- 1.3 The Council currently provides some 110 public toilets of which Community services fund and service 99. The other public toilets are separately funded from Development & Infrastructure, Ward Discretionary Budgets and other sources. There are also 28 Highland Comfort Schemes funded by Community Services.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on the rationalisation of the Highland Comfort Schemes in accordance with report (TEC/79/10).

2 Rationalisation progress and programme.

- 2.1 A full list of the 28 Highland Comfort Schemes, with agreement dates and progress towards revised agreements is shown in **Appendix A**.

- 2.2 There are agreements in place for 20 of the 28 Highland Comfort Schemes, of which 8 are due for renewal over the next 18 months.
- 2.3 There are 13 agreements where payments have been brought into line with the agreed policy.
- 2.4 It is intended to review all agreements by March 2016, either to bring them into line with policy or confirm that on expiry the policy will be applied.
- 2.6 It is estimated that completion of the programme of rationalisation of agreements and payments will reduce expenditure by £10k per annum. It is expected that 50% of this will be realisable from April 2015, with the remainder achieved by March 2016.
- 2.5 Where previously agreed monthly payments are higher than those permitted under the agreed policy, a provider may decide to withdraw from the scheme. Area teams have and will continue to work with Ward Members, Community Councils and local businesses to identify alternative providers. This process is ongoing and in certain locations where long term leases have been agreed, it is not expected to be completed until after March 2016 and will realise additional savings.

3. Highland Comfort Scheme policy.

- 3.1 From April 2011, the monthly payment to an operator of a Highland Comfort Scheme was set between £200 and £300, with no indexation. Many of the providers shown in **Appendix A** are Community Councils and Hall Committees.
- 3.2 It is proposed that indexation of the monthly payment of £200 to £300 is applied from April 2015 in accordance with RPI and that indexation is applied annually thereafter.
- 3.3 Under the agreed “one out – one in” policy it is only possible for a Comfort Scheme to be promoted if an existing public convenience in the vicinity is closing. Additionally there is a locally based requirement which has been found to prevent Comfort Schemes being brought forward in areas where there is identified strategic need.
- 3.4 It is proposed that the “one out- one in” locally based approach is amended such that:

A Comfort Scheme can be developed if there is a closure or amendment in opening of an existing public convenience such that a minimum saving of 10% of the reduction in the public convenience operating cost is realised.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The proposal to permit a maximum of 90% of the operating costs to be reallocated to fund Highland Comfort Schemes would ensure a minimum 10% revenue saving is realised on closure or amendment of a Council-operated site.

5. Other implications

- 5.1 There are no resource, financial, legal, equalities, climate Change/Carbon Clever; risk, Gaelic or rural implications associated with this report.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- i) Note the progress on unifying the formal agreements for the Highland Comfort Scheme; and
- ii) Approve the proposed alterations to the Highland Comfort Scheme rules as set out in section 3 of this report

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 30th July 2014

Author: Robin Pope

Background Papers:

Appendix A – List of Highland Comfort Schemes

District	Name	Location
Inverness	Foyers	Foyers
Inverness-shire	Cannich Hall	Cannich
Inverness-shire	Dores Inn	Dores
Sutherland	Ardgay	Ardgay
Mid & West Ross	Lochcarron, Garage	Lochcarron
Mid & West Ross	Coigach Community Coucil	Achiltibuie
Mid & West Ross	Gairloch & Lochewe Action	Aultbea
Mid & West Ross	Gairloch & Lochewe Action	Poolewe
Skye & Lochalsh	(Plockton former PC's (Harbour CIC)	Plockton
Skye & Lochalsh	Saucy Mary's	Kyleakin
Skye & Lochalsh	Community Hall	Staffin
Skye & Lochalsh	Community Hall	Ardvasar
Skye & Lochalsh	Community Hall	Glenelg
Skye & Lochalsh	Minginish Hall, Portnalong	Minginish
Badenoch & Strathspey	Laggan	Laggan
Badenoch & Strathspey	Boat Hotel	Boat of Garten
Badenoch & Strathspey	Community Centre, Dell Road	Nethybridge
Badenoch & Strathspey	Glenmore Forest Visitor Centre Toilets	Glenmore
Lochaber	An Laimhrig, Eigg Trading Limited	Isle of Eigg
Lochaber	Ice Factor Ltd	Kinlochleven
Lochaber	Ardgour Inn	Ardgour
Lochaber	Community hall	Kilmallie
Lochaber	Community hall	Glenluig
Lochaber	Community hall	Invergarry
Lochaber	Lochaber Action on Disability	Caol
Lochaber	Strontian Stores	Strontian
Lochaber	Community Hall	Mallaig
Lochaber	Arisaig	Arisaig (EX-HC)