

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CP/30/23

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 29 November 2023

Report Title: Update on Public Convenience Provision

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The provision of public conveniences is highly valued by Highland communities and service users. It supports the tourism economy, and provides an essential amenity for our residents, businesses, and visitors.
- 1.2 This report updates Members on the current provision, challenges faced, and improvements delivered and planned for the future.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the contents of the report;
 - ii. **Note** the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25;
 - iii. **Note** the challenges faced running the public convenience service including financial challenges;
 - iv. **Note** the community support and involvement including progress with community asset transfer and leasing to communities;
 - v. **Note** the staff accolades; and
 - vi. **Agree** the closing protocol when required to close any particular Public Convenience.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The Council currently operates 76 Public Conveniences throughout the Highlands. The function has a revenue budget of £939k, an income target of £221k and capital of £167k for 2023/24. The capital programme for 2024/25, approved by Council on 14 September 2023 includes £34k for public conveniences and further annual provision of £33k for the following 4 years to 2028/29.

3.2 **Legal**

The Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide or operate public conveniences.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)**

The provision of public conveniences is valued by communities and travellers and is viewed as an integral part of villages and towns, especially in areas that experience high volumes of tourists. Disabled access units are available at 47 sites.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever**

The cleaning materials used are ecofriendly and contribute towards the Council 's Net Zero targets. Low energy hand driers and motion sensor lighting has been installed at most sites. Mobile routes have been optimised to minimise miles travelled and emissions. Further information is provided in Section 8.

3.5 **Risk**

There are no risks arising from this report.

3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)**

There are no health and safety risks arising from this report.

3.7 **Gaelic**

Any signage advertising public conveniences comply with the Gaelic Strategy.

4. **Background**

4.1 The provision of public conveniences is a non-statutory and highly valued function by communities and service users.

4.2 The function was redesigned in 2018, a key principle was that there was not more than 15 minutes by car between remaining sites. It is important that where practicable, sites are open 24/7/365. With the exception of Achmelvich, Old Shoremore, Reay and Tarbet, sites are open all year round with the exception of those opened and closed by the communities. Unfortunately, some sites are closed due to vandalism and this matter is discussed in more detail later in this report.

4.3 There have been 16 asset transfer and leases since 2018. The Service does encourage this as it does provide benefits for all. Indeed, this approach for example has worked well for Drumnadrochit, Thurso Harbour, Lybster, Sheildaig and Kinlochewe and the enhancements community groups have been able to make include upgrading facilities, painting, and new baby change facilities.

4.4 To supplement the Council owned sites, a Comfort Scheme is also operated. This is a scheme where the Council pays local businesses and community groups to open up their facilities to non-customers. The scheme has been expanded in recent years with support from the visitor management funding between 2021-2023. A detailed report on the scheme, including a comprehensive survey of providers, was presented to the Communities and Places committee in May 2023 and this included further expansion of the scheme from 42 to 55.

5. Current Situation

- 5.1 The Communities and Place Service provides and manages 76 Public Conveniences sites. These vary in terms of age, building condition and facilities offered. 47 sites offer disabled sites although the older properties tend not to offer such.

Access to the disabled facilities is generally by way of a RADAR key which is operated in line with the recommended practice of keeping these units locked to prevent vandalism.

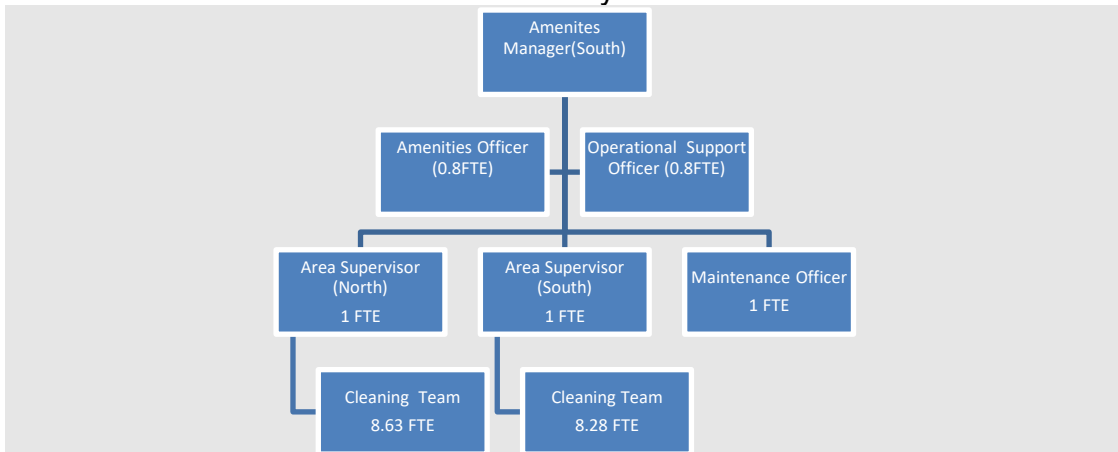
A map detailing the sites is available on the Council's website.
www.highland.gov.uk/publictoilets

QR code



5.2 Staff Structure

Included in the role responsibilities for the Amenities Manager (South) is public conveniences. The service is delivered by:



5.3 Current Asset Transfers/Leases

Currently the function is working with communities in:

- Ardersier
- Broadford
- Keiss
- Aultbea
- Poolewe
- Achiltibuie
- Laggan
- Raasay

6. Finance

6.1 The budgets for the Public Convenience service for 2023/24 are:

- Revenue £939k (net)
- Capital £167k

Looking ahead, the function has a capital allocation of £34k for 2024/25 and £33k each year to 2028/29. In addition, there have been occasions where Ward budgets have contributed toward repairs when core funding has not been available or insufficient, for example, Golspie and Dornoch.

6.2 Income

There is a charge of 50p to enter some sites. Where Public Conveniences have been vandalised, this can result in both reparation costs and adversely affect income receipts. The cost of vandalism can exceed £50k and is discussed later in this report. Charging equipment is regularly damaged by people trying to access facilities without paying. Charging units are expensive to install. Paddle gates were recently installed at a site at a cost of £11,300 for one paddle gate. Coin box door operated units can cost £12,800 for 2 doors including supply of charging equipment, power installation and equipment installation. Thus, reparation costs are not insignificant and service delivery practices are continually reviewed to ensure services can be delivered wherever practicable within the challenging financial environment in which we all work.

6.3 Honesty boxes

Instead of charging, honesty boxes are demonstrating that they are useful way of generating income and are less likely to be vandalised. During 2022/23 £3.3k was generated via honesty boxes; for the first 6 months in 23/24, £9.7k has been generated thus the Service is on track to deliver against an approved income target of £20k. Repurposed parking meters have been shown to make effective honesty boxes.

Honesty Box Installed	Planned Installation 23/24
Achnasheen	Bettyhill
Aviemore	Bonar Bridge
Beauly	Clachtoll
Brora	Dornoch
Cromarty	Durness
Drumbeg	Dunnet
Dunbeath	Gairloch
Dunvegan	Lochcarron
Fort Augustus	Golspie
Ballachuillish	Kinlochbervie
Corran Ferry	Kylesku
Glencoe	Rhiconich
Station Brae Fort William	Rogie Falls
Viewforth Fort William	Strathpeffer
Kessock North	Storr
Lochinver	Tongue
Portree	Wick
Scourie	Ullapool
Smoo Cave	Glenmore

Some sites also have enhanced facilities, such as showers. There is a charge of £2 for five minutes. These sites are: Aviemore, Kingussie, Grantown, Ullapool and Wick.

7. 2022/23 and 2023/24 Improvement Projects

- 7.1 Improvements have been delivered using several funding sources including Ward funding, visitor management funding, Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funding (RTIF), Coastal Communities funding and capital allocation. Most projects are funded by several funding sources and have taken place over 2 financial years due to procurement and order fulfilment durations. To provide Governance, a Project Board has been established to lead and support on these projects and changes. The Board is chaired (and sponsored) by the Head of Community Operations and Logistics with the Amenity Services Manager (South) fulfilling the Lead role, and representatives from Services including Housing & Property attending as required.
- 7.2 **Appendix 1** lists the significant number sites that have seen improvements delivered or ongoing.
- 7.3 As well as managing the Council's own improvement programme to our Public Conveniences, support is also offered to community groups to upgrade their facilities. An example is Coigach Convenience Refurbishment, Achiltibuie, where the staff from the Communities and Place Service function has assisted with funding and contract management.

8. Climate Change

- 8.1 Key within the improvement programme has been the commitment to implement changes that provide environmental benefit. The initiatives include:
- Researching toilets that require less water and where possible including those in refurbishment projects;
 - Changing flushing system on urinals to use less water;
 - Amended the cleaning regime to include more sustainable cleaning materials;
 - Installing low energy usage technology such as LED PIR lights, and low energy, ecofriendly hand dryers;
 - Installation of green technologies (such as solar panels);
 - Switching to more environmentally friendly consumables (soap, toilet paper);
 - Reducing hot water usage;
 - Replacing taps from standard to compression; and
 - Hybrid vehicles for mobile cleaning teams.

9. Vandalism

- 9.1 It is regrettable that vandalism continues to affect this service area which diverts essential revenue budget away from improving sites to fixing deliberate destruction. All incidents of vandalism are reported to the police and some costs are recoverable from the Council's insurance.

Examples of vandalism include:

Site	Description of Damage	Cost to Repair	Site Open or Closed
Golspie	Doors damaged, damage to cistern causing flooding	£300	Open
Ballachuillish	Flooding by overflowing toilet pans, handles ripped off doors, removed trim from around sink, removed signs, smashed hand dryers, fixtures removed and broken	£1,600	Open
Ardersier	Doors kicked in, entire site smashed up	£50,000	Closed
Whin Park	Gents set on fire	£2,000	Closed
Kessock South Bound A9	Main door broken, tiles broken, toilet roll holder broken	£600	Open
Nairn Courthouse Lane	External bin rubbish thrown everywhere, graffiti, smashed bottles and glass	£30	Open

In addition to this more significant damage, it is unfortunately common for additional cleaning to be required to remove wet tissues thrown on to walls and ceilings, to unblock toilets stuffed with debris or remove graffiti from walls. It is important to note that the costs of vandalism often outweighs the approved capital budget provided for 24/25 (onwards).

- 9.2 The Associations for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) carried out a survey across its membership and issued its finding in June 2023 - *Local authority public convenience provision 2023*. When asked what the greatest challenges are in providing public toilet facilities, 81.4% of respondents reported vandalism and antisocial behaviour. This is an increase from the 2022 survey, 70.37%. This challenge is also considered and reported greater than budgetary pressures, 74.42%. The link to the report can be found at: <https://www.apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2023/23-27-local-authority-public-conveniences-provision-2023/>
- 9.3 It is our experience that closed circuit television does not act as a deterrent to vandals.

10. Community Support and Involvement

- 10.1 Closing a site due to vandalism is sometimes essential. This can be due to the extent of the damage done and sourcing funding to repair and getting the work done to reopen the site, safely. Closing a site is a last resort.

Support from the community to keep a site safe and open can be very important and very helpful including when dealing with regular vandalism. This approach has worked well where the community undertake to open the building the morning and lock it at night. This is a significant commitment but, unfortunately at times, an essential one to keep these sites open safely and the Council is very appreciative of the efforts of these volunteers. Sites currently opened/closed by the community are:

- Golspie
- Tain
- Beaully
- Strathpeffer
- Dornoch
- Thurso

11. PC Closure Protocol and Procedure

- 11.1 It is necessary from time to time to temporarily close a site. This can be due to maintenance requirements or vandalism. Where possible, only the affected unit will be closed and alternative arrangements put in at the site.

A Closure Protocol has been developed to provide Members with clarity around the steps the function will take when having to close or partially close a site. The proposed Closure Protocol is attached at **Appendix 2**.

12. Staff Awards

- 12.1 In addition to the improvement work delivered and ongoing as discussed earlier, senior leaders/managers in the Service are also active in seeking opportunities to support staff including promoting the work the team does and the talent within the Service.

Recent examples include:

- Staff Quality Award 2023, the team were nominated twice for these Awards;
- APSE Rising Star Award 2023, Silver Award for Nicole Hardie as Operational Support Officer for the team; and
- APSE Building Cleaning category, the team were finalists at the 2023 Annual Awards.

Senior leaders/managers in the Service are also considered as leaders in this area nationally and are being routinely invited to present at national forums such as:

- APSE conferences and events; speaking at these to spread the word on what Highland Council are doing, sharing good practice and ideas, and how the function is being delivered; and
- Scottish Local Authority Group; lead a quarterly group meeting of all Scottish Local Authority Managers with responsibility for PCs, discussing current issues and challenges and sharing best practice

Designation: Head of Community Operations and Logistics

Date: 10 November 2023

Author: Caroline Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics; Debbie Sutton, Amenity Services Manager (South)

Background Papers:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/81614/8_public_conveniences_and_comfort_scheme_agreements_2023%E2%80%932026

Appendix 1

Summary of Improvements Delivered / Ongoing

Facility to Upgrade	Budget ('m) from all funders***	Improvements	Date Improvements Delivered	Comments
Achilitibuie	0.025	Refurbishment	Ongoing	The Council is supporting the community to deliver their project
Gairloch	0.004	Replumb	30/09/22	
Castletown (VMP*)	0.002	Painting	16/03/22	
Portmahomack (VMP)	0.003	Painting	30/09/22	
Ullapool (VMP)	0.014	Replumb	16/03/23	
Aviemore (VMP)	0.007	Shower upgrade	30/09/22	
Dunbeath (VMP)	0.003	New doors	31/10/22	
Gairloch (VMP)	0.003	New doors	31/10/22	
Glencoe	0.110	Refurbishment	12/05/23	
Glenmore	0.125	New unit	Ongoing	
Whitechapel	0.395	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Rhiconich	0.075	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Scourie	0.108	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Lochinver	0.093	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Kinlochbervie	0.081	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Dunvegan	0.095	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Ballachuillish	0.095	Refurbishment	29/08/23	
Whin Park	0.110	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Durness	0.120	Refurbishment	Ongoing	
Achmelvich	1.047	New PC	Ongoing	The Council is supporting the community to deliver their project
Total Investment 2022-2024	2.512			

*** Funding sources include Council Capital and VMP, RTIF, Coastal Communities, Community Regeneration Fund, Partners (e.g. Cairngorms National Park Authority for Glenmore), Ward funding.

Appendix 2



PC Closure Protocol and Procedure

Introduction

The Highland Council operate over 70 public conveniences.

There are occasions when a site must be closed or partially closed. Closure could be due to the facility requiring a routine repair, some maintenance work, due to vandalism, or a refurbishment project.

Maintenance

When maintenance work, reactive or planned, is required at a site, it is important that this is conducted as quickly as possible to minimise disruption to users. This can be dependent on costs and availability of labour and materials.

Where possible, only the facilities requiring maintenance will be closed. i.e., the ladies, the gents, or where provided the disabled facilities. Signage will be displayed with alternative arrangements for users. If a site must close, signage will direct users to the nearest alternative public convenience.

Vandalism

Sites being closed due to vandalism causes unnecessary distress to service users, communities and the Council resulting in significant reparation costs the funds of which could otherwise be used for site investment / improvement.

Where a site has been vandalised a record of the vandalism and cost to make good will be maintained. Unlike other routine maintenance works where we will try to keep open part of the facility, when a site is vandalised we will consider closing the whole facility based on risk.

The threat of further damage can be high where a site is being specifically targeted and the most effective way to reduce further damage to the facility is to implement a full closure.

If the damage caused is significant the site will be closed immediately and will remain closed pending discussion with Ward Members including how the site can be operated sustainably in the future.

In addition to Ward Members, Officers will also liaise with community groups and discuss alternate options including a community asset transfer (CAT) or lease, which allows communities to manage and run the facilities within the community. This also enables the Council to then offer a Comfort Scheme payment that can contribute towards the running costs of the facilities.

Staff in the Communities and Place Service will be responsible for advising the Community Development Manager of any closures, permanent or otherwise and when sites re-open.

Corporate Communications will lead on all communications and messaging to the public.

Draft: 10 November 2023

Document owned by: Head of Community Operations and Logistics