



A report
by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee
on
the Management of Public Toilets

April 2007

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SUMMARY

This report sets out the process, conclusions and recommendations of the fourteenth investigation undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee. The subject of the investigation was the Management of Public Toilets.

The investigation took place during February and March, 2007. The Committee heard evidence from Aberdeenshire Council staff and external witnesses during five sessions. Committee members also conducted three site visits, two in Aberdeenshire and one in Perth and Kinross. The Committee considered all the evidence gathered and drew up its conclusions and recommendations at a meeting on 22 March, 2007.

Providing public toilets is not a statutory function of local authorities. However, public toilets are an important service for visitors and residents alike. The Council needs to continue to ensure that adequate public toilet provision is in place across Aberdeenshire.

At its formation in 1996, the Council inherited a mixed portfolio of public toilets, distributed unevenly across Aberdeenshire. Many of these public toilets are elderly and no longer meet accepted standards. The Council's traditional stand-alone public toilets are no longer the sole toilets available for public use. Supermarkets and others increasingly provide toilets for the public. Public expectations of what should be provided have also altered; for example, people now expect baby-changing facilities and the law requires disabled provision where practicable.

The Council runs a mix of attended and unattended public toilets. Some of Aberdeenshire Council's attended toilets, in particular, are excellent modern facilities, built and maintained to a high standard. The unattended facilities are prone to vandalism and misuse. These problems are much less in evidence in the attended toilets. Unattended toilets have running costs in the order of £4,400 to £11,900 per annum. Attended facilities cost in excess of £43,000 per annum to run. The Council cannot afford to convert more than a small proportion of its unattended toilets to attended facilities.

Facing similar problems to Aberdeenshire, Perth and Kinross Council adopted a strategy based on partnership with the private sector. In return for a payment and other benefits from the Council, businesses make their toilets available for public use. In effect, these are attended facilities. There are no major reported problems with vandalism in the Perth and Kinross scheme.

The Committee recognises the commitment and hard work of the staff that run Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets. The dedication of those volunteers involved with the community run toilets is also to be commended. The work required to keep public toilets running is not always recognised or valued as it ought to be – but it is an essential public service.

The Committee concludes that changes since 2001 mean that it is now time to revisit and update the Council's strategy for public toilet provision. As part of this, an audit is required, not only to encompass all toilets in the Council's ownership, including those in public buildings which could be signed as publicly available, but also

alternative provision which may be available elsewhere, whether in public or private ownership. Covering issues such as level of use, vandalism and other running costs, proximity to alternative facilities and the fabric of the buildings, such an assessment would allow an overarching strategy to be considered.

The Committee considers that, in a new strategy, there should be four different categories of toilet provision. The strategy should be based on a vision of continuous improvement, and provision based on need, not just the maintenance of existing operations. The four categories of toilet provision the Committee recommends are:

- Joint partnership provision – based on that provided by Perth and Kinross’ ‘Comfort Partnership’ – subject to the availability of suitable and willing partners;
- Community run facilities in rural locations;
- Existing staffed facilities; and
- Council unattended facilities.

The type of location will often dictate the category of toilet to be provided. Other relevant factors are the level of demand, the presence of alternatives and the sustainability of the Council’s existing facilities. Any strategy must include the retention of existing, staffed facilities in the bigger towns, and provision at the country parks as destination points.

The Committee is convinced that a strategy that makes full use of partnership arrangements can deliver a better provision of public toilets than what is currently available in Aberdeenshire. It ought to be possible to increase the number of publicly available toilets at the same or lower cost.

The Council’s website listing of public conveniences should be accurate and updated to include all publicly available toilets run by every Service. Those listed as accessible should be reviewed by disability experts to confirm that status.

In general, new toilets should not be stand-alone facilities, but should be incorporated into other developments (for example, as a separately accessible part of an upgraded village hall or tourism facility). If new staffed facilities are built, the layout should mirror that of attended toilets in Perth and Kinross, with a central entrance point controlled by the attendant.

The Committee believes that a range of improvements should be considered for the Council’s public toilets. For example, baby changing facilities, energy conservation measures, time-activated locks on unattended facilities, hooks for bags/coats in each cubicle and disabled provision which allows optimum space.

The Committee recommends the standardisation, as far as is possible, of all furniture and fittings. This would make maintenance easier, possibly cheaper, and minimise the closure of facilities for repair works.

The Committee strongly recommends, at the earliest opportunity, the provision, potentially through the conversion of existing facilities, of “Changing Places” style facilities in the north, south and centre of Aberdeenshire.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee

1.1.1 Within Aberdeenshire Council's Scheme of Delegation, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is empowered to:

- Review the effectiveness of Council policy implementation and Council service delivery and to identify potential improvements;
- Undertake an annual programme of reviews; and
- Make recommendations regarding improvements to the performance of Services.

1.1.2 In carrying out its reviews, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is able to:

- Call upon any officer of the Council or Chair/Vice-chair of the Council's committees to give evidence or provide written reports, as appropriate; and
- Call upon expert witnesses or members of the public to give evidence, where necessary.

1.1.3 The Committee operates according to the following principles of working:

Deliberative	Outward-looking
Investigative	Inclusive
Open	Influencing
Evidence based	Proactive
Transparent	Flexible
Accountable	Non-partisan
Responsive	

1.2 This investigation

1.2.1 After considering a range of topics in June, 2006, the Committee decided to conduct an investigation into the management of public toilets. The Committee chose this topic because of the high visibility of this service, used by visitors and Aberdeenshire residents alike. The Committee wanted to establish whether the provision was of a high standard and of a quality equal to that experienced in other parts of the country.

1.2.2 At its meeting on 13 December, 2006, the Committee approved the investigation brief for its investigation into the management of public toilets. It was agreed that the purpose and objectives of the investigation should be to:

- (1) examine the management of Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets, the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the systems in place, and the standards maintained in the facilities; and
- (2) make recommendations for improvements.

The detailed brief for the Committee's investigation is attached as Appendix A.

- 1.2.3 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee members who were involved in this investigation were Councillors MA Ford (Chair), P J Argyle, G M Barnes, D Cameron, J C Davidson, D S Duthie, T A Fleming, W Howatson, A Leitch, B J Luffman, A M Ritchie and J J Strathdee.
- 1.2.4 It has been agreed that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should appoint independent external experts to assist with its investigations where appropriate. For this investigation, no independent external expert was deemed necessary.

2 HOW THE INVESTIGATION WAS PROGRESSED

- 2.1 The investigation commenced on 7 February, 2007. The Committee undertook a range of different activities to enable it to carry out the investigation.
- 2.2 A range of background documentation was provided to the Committee at the commencement of the investigation. Amongst the internal documents provided were:
- Infrastructure Services Committee papers and minutes relating to public toilet provision from 11 May, 2000, and 25 January, 10 May, 16 August, and 4 October, 2001;
 - Aberdeenshire Council – Core Facts;
 - Aberdeenshire Council’s letter of contract with community organisations involved in the management of public conveniences;
 - Aberdeenshire Council – specification for the cleaning of public conveniences (attended and unattended); and
 - Aberdeenshire Council energy efficiency measures for public conveniences:
 - (a) Aqualogic;
 - (b) Quadring lighting; and
 - (c) Plushtap.
- 2.3 External documents provided to the Committee included:
- “Changing Places” toilet layout and design;
 - Loo of the Year awards: Judging criteria;
 - “Blue Light Blues : the use of coloured lights as a deterrent to injecting”, a project paper produced by KFx, a drug consultancy initiative;
 - Composting Toilets – extract from Wikipedia;
 - DT2006 Conference – summary and future prospects (a report from the 2006 international conference on Dry Toilets);
 - Inclusive Environments – good loo design guide;
 - Loo of the Year Awards 2006: inspection criteria; and
 - The Access Guide, a document produced by Scotland’s National Disability Information Service, providing information on removing barriers to help create an inclusive society for everyone.

- 2.4 Additional written information was provided to the Committee during the investigation by an external witness:
- Perth and Kinross Council – Report to Environment Committee, 17 January, 2007: Policy for Public Toilet Provision.
- 2.5 Members of the Committee met a cross-section of Aberdeenshire Council officers involved in managing public conveniences. The Committee sought their views on the current provision, across Services, of toilets for public use in Aberdeenshire, their experiences of public expectation and an assessment of the main issues affecting the management of such facilities. Officers interviewed included: the Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services, the Area Managers for Formartine and for Kincardine and Mearns, the Area Supervisor – Cleaning Operations, the Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning and the Principal Landscape Officer – Policy. The full list of Aberdeenshire Council staff who appeared as witnesses during the investigation is given in Appendix B.
- 2.6 Individuals with relevant expertise from a range of organisations were invited to give evidence to the Committee. Amongst those who appeared before the Committee were: representatives of VisitScotland and local Tourist Information Centres, the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel¹, and three Community Councils which operate public toilets in Aberdeenshire. Officers from Highland and Perth and Kinross councils also participated in evidence gathering sessions. A full list of the external witnesses interviewed during the investigation is given in Appendix B.
- 2.7 Full details of the evidence given to the Committee by witnesses will be contained in the agenda papers for the Scrutiny and Audit Committee meeting on 7 June, 2007. These will be located on the Council's Arcadia intranet system and, as public documents, can be made available on request.
- 2.8 Site visits were held, by members of the Committee, on Wednesday 7 and Friday 9 February, 2007, to examples of staffed, unattended, community run and automated toilets across Aberdeenshire. A checklist proforma, based on the criteria used by the Loo of the Year awards, was completed for each location in order to allow comparisons between the facilities. A summary of the checklists is attached as Appendix C. In addition, individual visits to further locations were made by Councillors.
- 2.9 On Friday 16 March, 2007, the Committee visited publicly available toilets in Perth and Kinross and, on the way, further toilets in Aberdeenshire.

3 HISTORY OF PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION IN ABERDEENSHIRE

- 3.1 Aberdeenshire Council inherited, on its formation in 1996, a range of public toilets from its predecessor councils, in particular from Banff and Buchan,

¹ One of four panels across Aberdeenshire, a charitable organisation which works on behalf of those with a physical disability, as promoter, advocate, information provider and consultee on relevant issues of concern to people with a physical disability.

Gordon and Kincardine and Deeside District Councils. Many of these were stand-alone units. Some 'public toilets' were associated with facilities provided by Grampian Regional Council such as country parks, community centres and sports pavilions. The standard of facility and level of service provide varied greatly – some toilets were in elderly buildings; others were of a newer construction. Opening times and hours also varied. The toilets were distributed very unevenly across Aberdeenshire, reflecting different policies of the previous district councils. A large proportion of the toilets were in the former Banff and Buchan District area, with relatively few in the former Kincardine and Deeside District.

- 3.2 Under Aberdeenshire Council, the majority of the public toilets were initially placed in the Environmental Health and Consumer Protection Service, with their Contract & Support Services Section acting as client and the Waste Section as contractor. This arrangement continued until 2002 when the management and operation of the facilities was transferred to the Building Cleaning Section of Consumer Protection and Support Services within Planning and Environmental Services.
- 3.3 The public conveniences at the Country Parks were managed by the Landscape Services function of Transportation and Infrastructure Outdoor Services. Other facilities existed and were managed, in their smaller numbers, by particular Services, or linked to specific locations.
- 3.4 In 2000/2001, because of severe budgetary pressures for Aberdeenshire Council, cuts, amounting to £316,000, were made in the budget for public toilets operated by the Planning and Environmental Service, a cut of just over 50%. This saw 69 out of 105 toilets close initially. Some were subsequently re-opened after prioritisation by the Council's Area Committees, including a few under community management and operation. In the wake of these budget cuts, the Infrastructure Services Committee on 25 January 2001 agreed a new framework strategy for the future provision and maintenance of public conveniences throughout Aberdeenshire. The main features of the strategy included:
- the provision of supervised facilities in large towns and on recognised tourist routes;
 - the development of a major refurbishment programme;
 - the expansion of community initiatives to manage local facilities;
 - the provision of public conveniences within Aberdeenshire initiatives such as park and ride schemes;
 - the making available to the public, where practical, toilets within Council offices and buildings; and
 - the provision of public conveniences in partnership with local businesses.

To date (March, 2007), limited capital had restricted the refurbishment programme although significant improvements had been delivered to a number of facilities, most notably the upgrading to supervised facilities of the toilets at Banchory, Ellon and Stonehaven. Access problems and health and safety considerations had inhibited the opening up to the public of the facilities

in Council offices and buildings. No real progress had been made with exploring the potential for partnership provision with local businesses.

- 3.5 The discussions at the Infrastructure Services Committee in 2000–2001 focused principally on those toilets under the direct management of Planning and Environmental Services, and did not include those which were managed by other services such as Outdoors Services within Transportation and Infrastructure.

4 EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE

4.1 How many public toilets are there?

- 4.1.1 The Committee was advised that there was no formal definition of what constitutes a ‘public toilet’. The traditional stand-alone building containing a ladies and a gents facility was only one form of provision. There were publicly available toilets in a range of council buildings and at council facilities. Other public bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission provided toilets at sites they managed, as did private businesses such as supermarkets and visitor attractions. These toilets were either available to the general public or restricted to ‘customers’, although it was often unclear what the position was.
- 4.1.2 Several witnesses, including representatives of the Tourism industry and the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel, spoke of an increasing public use of toilets provided by commercial ventures such as supermarkets and garden centres. These were often chosen as a preferred option to the stand-alone traditional ‘public toilets’. This shift in perception should be considered in order to see the Council’s direct provision in a 21st century context.
- 4.1.3 Because of the lack of clarity about what constitutes a public toilet, it was not exactly clear how many public toilets Aberdeenshire Council had. There had been no formal census of the total number of toilets available to the public in Aberdeenshire. The Council provision comprised (as at March 2007) just under 100, with 83 managed by Planning and Environmental Services, 5 in country parks and 9 at other locations managed by Outdoor Services. A small number of these stand-alone toilets were operated on behalf of the Council by local community groups, with the Council giving a grant of £1,000 per annum to each group, subject to a service level agreement on what should be provided. In addition, the Committee became aware of other publicly available toilets, run by the Council, which were not counted as public toilets. These include those at locations such as the Ellon park and ride facility and those associated with parks and other recreational facilities which fall under Education and Recreation management. Yet these were also toilets provided by the Council for public usage. Most of the Council’s toilets were unattended and open all year round. Some units were seasonal, open between April and November.

4.2 The standard of provision

- 4.2.1 The Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services advised the Committee that the current portfolio of public conveniences across Aberdeenshire was an historic accident which did not necessarily reflect either usage or need. He stressed that the provision of public toilets, although not a statutory function, was an important service. Times had changed from when local authorities could be seen as the sole provider of public conveniences, with 'publicly available' toilets, albeit with restricted access, now provided in many shops and other buildings. To date, there was little formal recording of usage of Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets. The only information available was that which could be deduced from use of consumables, water, entrance fees (for those attended facilities) and anecdotal reporting by cleaners. This made it difficult to take an informed review of the level and type of convenience to be provided in a particular location.
- 4.2.2 The Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services spoke of the difficulties in reconciling public expectation of what facilities should be provided where and to what standard, with the challenge of maintaining with limited resources, the multiplicity of toilets inherited, in varying conditions of fabric. Generally Aberdeenshire Council's unattended toilets were opened by cleaning staff at 8am and closed at 8pm in the summer, with reduced opening hours in winter months. The eight staffed toilets were open similar hours Monday to Saturday but opened at 10.00am, closing at 5.00pm, on Sundays all year round. The Council's five superloos were 24-hour facilities.
- 4.2.3 The Area Manager (Kincardine and Mearns) spoke of local management as being essential to ensure local responsiveness and flexibility in the opening hours of public toilets. This would be beneficial, for example, in opening toilets outwith their standard operating schedule to cover community events such as New Year celebrations.
- 4.2.4 All toilets were, on occasion, closed while repairs or maintenance was carried out, and problems were particularly being experienced in sourcing parts for repairs to the superloos as the automated units aged. The Aberdeenshire Council owned toilets being managed by Community Councils were run to the same standard as those managed directly by council staff, although there could be local variations in the opening hours. (See sections 4.5 and 4.6).
- 4.2.5 The Area Manager (Formartine) and the Area Manager (Kincardine and Mearns) suggested that the toilets were often the first point of contact for visitors. Whilst a good standard of provision would not generally be remarked upon, bad provision would be remembered. This would impact on the perception of Aberdeenshire as a whole. The Area Manager (Formartine) reported a noticeable reduction in the number of complaints about public toilets in those areas which had staffed facilities, but agreed that such improvement was difficult to achieve where toilets were unstaffed, with a single daily cleaning. Both Area Managers believed that staffed, all year round, facilities should be ideally provided in all tourism and main centres.

Provision should also be considered on key transport corridors and at locations which would serve local needs.

- 4.2.6 The Customer Services Manager, VisitScotland, Aberdeen and Grampian, advised members of a high volume of complaints about the toilets provided by Aberdeenshire Council. There was a public expectation that each reasonably sized settlement should have publicly available conveniences, but the Council did not necessarily have to provide the toilets itself. The tourist information staff believed that visitors would not mind paying for facilities, as long as these were of good standard. Prime factors for consideration were cleanliness, availability of toilet paper and hand dryers/towels, baby changing facilities and toilets accessible to the disabled. The representatives of the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel said that, from a disabled person's perspective, supermarket and other private sector toilets were generally of a better standard and more fit for purpose than those provided by councils.
- 4.2.7 Reference was made by the Principal Landscape Officer – Policy, to recent visits by the Keep Britain Tidy campaign to several Aberdeenshire toilets. The assessment of facilities provided at several beach locations, visited for national beach awards, had given good feedback on the toilets visited, whilst agreeing that the buildings were 'tired'.

4.3 Location

- 4.3.1 From its site visits, the Committee found most toilets to be in appropriate locations, either on main streets, in car parks or at 'destination' sites. Generally, approach-kerbs were lowered and disabled parking provided very close by. Most toilets had their own external lighting or benefited from the proximity to street lighting.
- 4.3.2 Some locations evidently catered for more demand than others. At some toilets, the members of the Committee were clearly the first to enter for some time. At other locations, such as Macduff Harbour, the toilets were evidently well used.
- 4.3.3 The representatives of the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel suggested that private sector provision of disabled toilets such as by supermarkets was often in very convenient locations. Although supermarket toilets were particularly good, there could be the problems with the able-bodied drivers using disabled parking spaces. As private ground, the car parks were not covered by the legislation on disabled parking provision, making enforcement a difficulty.

4.4 Buildings

- 4.4.1 The Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services advised the Committee that, given the pressures on council budgets as a whole, and with the total budget allocation only allowing one toilet per year to be substantially upgraded, it was a constant struggle to keep public toilets at an acceptable standard. Over the last five years, the Council had upgraded public toilets in Banchory, Ellon, Inverurie and Stonehaven to staffed facilities. The

improvements at Inverurie had largely been achieved through a developer contribution. The upgrading of the other three toilets cost £178,000 from a capital budget which, for 2006/2007, was £149,000. Annual running costs for attended toilets was approximately £43,500 per annum per facility, with income for 2005/06 reported as less than £3,000 at both Inverurie and Banchory. For unattended toilets, running costs of between £4,000 and £11,000 per annum were typical. In addition, £48,000 was allowed for repairs and maintenance to Planning and Environmental Services' public toilets across Aberdeenshire. With costs ranging between £500 and £1,000 per unattended toilet to cover standard repairs and those associated with vandalism, there was little scope for general improvements as the Service struggled to maintain its existing facilities at their current standard. As a result, many of the buildings and some of the automated toilets were at the end of their useful life. Older units, such as the automated toilet at Kintore, were more prone to breakdown and harder to reopen in an acceptable timescale.

- 4.4.2 From its site visits, the Committee noted that despite an obvious range in age of buildings and timescale of improvement works, the fabric of the buildings was generally in fair to good condition, as was the decoration. Some facilities had obviously not been upgraded for some considerable time, but were clean and tidy and of an acceptable standard.
- 4.4.3 Some improvement works had not had the intended effect. The Area Supervisor – Cleaning Operations, reported that, for example, weather conditions at the time of the application of new anti-graffiti paint in Echt meant that the surface was now cracked and peeling, looking rundown despite its recent application.
- 4.4.4 It was clear from the Committee's site visits that vandalism was obviously an issue in many toilets, with damage ranging from minor graffiti to extensively damaged fabric and evidence of repeated fire setting. At one location, up an alley from the main street, the sky lights in the roof had been damaged to such an extent that there was water penetration to the building. This was a modern building yet it bore the scars of repeated acts of vandalism to it and its contents. A second Aberdeenshire public toilet, in a small rural village, was adjacent to car parking, on a public transport route and well signed, but evidently subject to repeated vandalism, primarily graffiti and minor damage. When the Committee members visited, the toilets were blocked with towels and toilet rolls and were not fit for use because of this.
- 4.4.5 The Committee heard from the Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services about the various initiatives pursued to try to counter vandalism, including the application of anti-graffiti paint, improved lighting, the provision of stainless steel sanitary ware and, where it could be afforded, the conversion of unstaffed to attended facilities. Despite these efforts, doors, windows, toilet seats, cubicle locks and exposed pipes continued to be broken, toilet pans were blocked and fittings wrenched from the walls. In addition, there were repeated incidents of fire and smoke damage and graffiti

was persistent in many locations. On one occasion, a stainless steel sink had been stolen.

- 4.4.6 At Alford, which might be considered as a destination point for tourists, a considerable amount of public funding had been spent, over many years, in attempts to provide a vandal-proofed facility capable of providing a reasonable standard of service to groups of visitors. The capital cost of reconstruction of the Alford toilets, in 2000, had been over £72,000. Despite the repeated efforts, the toilets were often closed to users as a result of misuse with additional repairs required to address the damage. Visits by members of the Committee confirmed that damage to the toilets was extensive. This situation was by no means unique as other unstaffed public toilets had been also been upgraded at considerable expense only to fall victim to repeated vandalism.
- 4.4.7 The location of facilities was a clear factor in vandalism, the most visible tending to be in better order. The Area Supervisor – Cleaning Operations advised the Committee that, on occasion, the occurrence of vandalism had been dramatically reduced when there had been a change of cleaning staff. The approach of the new member of staff had allowed the local community to develop some ‘ownership’ of, and therefore pride in, having a facility in their area. This had minimised both graffiti and attacks on the property. A similar ‘ownership’ effect could also be seen in relation to the lack of vandalism at community run toilets in Aberdeenshire. The members of the Committee visiting the community run toilets at Whitehills were impressed not only by the homely touches and user-friendly additions, but also by the existence of an external donation box, clearly undamaged and with evidence of use.
- 4.4.8 Repairs following vandalism were clearly problematic. The site visits revealed several instances of non-lock-fast doors and missing plugs which, although minor repairs, would have a great impact on users. The lack of plugs, together with the warnings of “caution – very hot water”, raised safety and hygiene concerns. In some toilets, for reasons that were unclear, there was no hot water available at all. On the site visits, the Committee had observed that most toilets were provided with consumables, some of which were evident fodder for misuse. Bins were often missing, improvised or damaged. Both issues suggested that there may be difficulties maintaining standards between visits by cleaning staff, in accessing replacement equipment and in the undertaking of minor repairs.
- 4.4.9 The Site Support Officer confirmed that, on occasion, minor repairs appeared to take over long between being reported and repaired. This had a detrimental effect on staff morale, in addition to its impact on the usability of the facilities. Information subsequently provided by the Property Service suggested that this may be more an issue of perception than reality, as their records showed that most repairs were undertaken within the prescribed timescale determined by the Property Service.
- 4.4.10 The Committee heard from the energy efficiency staff of various initiatives pursued in respect of energy efficiency, with the intention to reduce the

running cost of toilets and also to make their operation more sustainable. By using low energy light bulbs, timers and sensor systems, electricity and water use was expected to be reduced. Immediate savings in terms of both money and energy were anticipated, paying for the equipment installation within three years at most. The works had been undertaken through the Central Energy Efficiency Fund. Savings could not be accurately estimated for the 60 unstaffed units being fitted with sensors, since the number of people using these toilets was unknown. For water, there was an estimated potential 75% saving (£48,000) through the use of misers and sensor systems.

4.5 Disabled provision

- 4.5.1 The representatives of the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel found the provision of toilets, and particularly those deemed to be suitable for disabled use, to be haphazard across Aberdeenshire. There was a lack of clarity about opening hours, incomplete signage and occasionally inadequate parking adjacent to the facility.
- 4.5.2 Assessment of the current provision by appropriate experts/users should be a priority, as in some cases there were 'quick fixes' which would greatly improve the facilities at a minimal cost. This included the application of contrasting colours to aid vision-impaired users, and standardising the provision of lever taps and lever door handles.
- 4.5.3 It was suggested that all accessible toilets should be part of the national RADAR key scheme, open to all on provision of a written statement of need, whilst restricting access to bona fide users. This, it was believed, would minimise potential misuse.
- 4.5.4 If new build were proposed, it should be stressed that the space standards given in the building regulations BS 8300 were neither minimum nor maximum, but optimum. A 'more generous' layout, providing additional space between features, may actually be counter-productive, making the facility's use by a disabled person more challenging. For example, wash hand basins, hand drying facilities and toilet roll should all be accessible while seated on the toilet in terms of both hygiene and ease of use. Concerns were expressed by the Access Panel representatives, in the context of reported incidents of interference with pacemakers, at the increasing use of stainless steel toilet furniture. In all instances, it would be preferred that the provision be of a single uni-sex disabled facility, with adequate space for both user and carer. This would remove the difficulties of having to choose to use either the ladies, or the gents, where the carer and the disabled person are not of the same gender.
- 4.5.5 The Access Panel would support the further development of community run or business partnership facilities as long as these adhered to best practice and were regularly monitored. Such initiatives might also allow the opportunity for local businesses such as plumbers to sponsor a toilet, in return for advertising being displayed at the facility.

- 4.5.6 From its site visits, it seemed to the Committee that the level of use of the disabled facilities may be slight – anecdotal evidence later heard suggested that the replacement schedule for soap, toilet rolls and paper towels was slow, indicating a low volume of users. The Committee noted that current furniture and layout were generally acceptable, but that greater use of contrast to highlight grab rails and handles and to differentiate between the various items would be of benefit. In one toilet visited, a matter of concern was the obvious corrosion of the support rails, suggesting that their provision in ferrous metal was inappropriate to the sea-side location. Greater consistency would be of benefit in the provision of easy closure/locking mechanisms and user friendly lever taps. In some facilities, there was no handle to pull open the door to the disabled toilet, and users would struggle to use the RADAR key to achieve the required leverage.
- 4.5.7 The Committee was provided by the Access Panel representatives with a video and publications produced by the charity, PAMIS². The video demonstrated, through the use of real life stories, what may be involved in trying to use the facilities provided for disabled adults and their carers. The campaign hoped to allow them greater access to what most people think of as everyday activities and community life. No such facilities were available in Aberdeenshire, and very few across Scotland, with the known exceptions of PAMIS in Dundee, Lifestyle in Glasgow and the Murray Owen Centre, East Kilbride, each of which was a winner in the 2006 Loo of the Year Awards.
- 4.5.8 The North Aberdeenshire Access Panel representatives stated that appropriately sized accommodation, already available within the existing disabled toilets at venues such as Peterhead Community Centre and Stonehaven Swimming Pool, could be converted to fully accessible, “Changing Place” style facilities. While the total cost for such a facility was estimated to be in the region of £6,000–8,000, inclusive of VAT, the Committee heard that the conversion costs for the locations identified above would be significantly less, between £3,000–6,000, requiring merely the provision of a hoist and an adjustable changing bench. These locations were venues already used by disabled adults and fitted the category of venues for which such type of provision was recommended.

4.6 Cleaning regime

- 4.6.1 Aberdeenshire Council’s policy provided for daily cleaning of public toilets during the period which they were open. The Committee was advised by the Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning, that in the attended facilities, staff undertook regular checks and carried out any cleaning required immediately. For unattended public toilets, cleaning staff were generally given 1 hour per day, to include opening and shutting the premises as well as cleaning. This meant there were no opportunities for immediate cleaning during the day. An hour per day per cleaner per toilet was not always long enough in some

² An organisation which works “*In partnership with people with profound learning disabilities and their carers*”. Based at Dundee University, the charity campaigns on the need for adult changing facilities in accessible toilets, or “Changing Places”.

situations and may be over-generous in others. In ten locations, which had a higher level of usage, a greater number of hours was allowed, ranging from 8 at Strichen (White Cow Woods) to 21 at Braemar. The Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning, said that it was often challenging for staff to clean toilets in instances of severe vandalism and where the fabric of the building was generally poor. One-off cleaning could be undertaken by a mobile squad in very extreme cases. A large part of the running costs for unattended public toilets is the cost of employing a cleaner. In 2006/07, revenue costs for unattended public toilets ranged from £11,942 at Ballater to £4,447 at Sandend. Other variations related primarily to the use of consumables, itself related to the number of people using the toilets.

- 4.6.2 Cleaning procedures at the community run toilets varied. The Tap o' Noth and Whitehills community councils used volunteers to clean their premises daily. At Lumphanan, it had been decided to use the funds allocated to them by the Council to pay an honorarium to a dedicated cleaner, whose hours duplicated those expected by the Council of its own staff.
- 4.6.3 The Customer Services Supervisor, Ballater Tourist Information Centre, advised the Committee that, at tourist 'hot spots', the volume of patrons could be such that more frequent cleaning would be beneficial. Although she believed that the Ballater toilets were cleaned twice a day, this could be inadequate on a day with usage by several bus parties in close sequence. Similarly, the Area Manager (Kincardine and Mearns) suggested that there should be repeated cleaning visits at high use locations.
- 4.6.4 During site visits to toilets in Aberdeenshire, the Committee noted that cleanliness varied across the premises visited. In staffed and the community run facilities, the standard was very good. In unstaffed toilets, cleanliness varied. Some were clean; others were dirty; a few were disgusting. Two of the three automated toilets were clean, but the third was blocked and appeared to have been for sometime. This should, perhaps, have been marked as closed for repair, with would-be users directed to nearby alternative facilities. Disabled facilities were cleanest in the staffed facilities, although it was clear that those protected by the restrictions of the RADAR key scheme were also generally of a better standard of cleanliness than the toilets with unrestricted access. Also, it appeared that the level of usage of the disabled facilities was fairly low.
- 4.6.5 The representatives of the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel felt that, in any cases, standards of hygiene were poor at disabled facilities where hygiene may be of greater than normal concern. Often the consumables provided fell far short of what might be expected.

4.7 Staffing

- 4.7.1 The Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services advised the Committee that the current management of the toilets, in his Service, was two members of staff, each of whom had 60% of their time allocated to public toilets. This meant that the service was often forced to be reactionary and not

proactive in its management of public conveniences. The Principal Landscape Officer – Policy reported that officers in his Service undertook the toilets’ management in addition to their mainstream duties.

- 4.7.2 Both Area Managers (Formartine and Kincardine and Mearns) suggested that staff in the attended facilities could also be considered as an underused resource. Hourly inspection and cleaning regimes, coupled with the need for a visible permanent presence, may make for repetitive and unrewarding routines which could have a negative impact on staff morale. It was considered that, as first point of contact with visitors, staff could also have their information provision/welcome role formalised in a way which might make their jobs more rewarding. This could also be done through having flowers in the toilets, potentially funded through the use of a petty cash system, uniforms in addition to the currently issued protective clothing, consideration of allowing staff to carry change for the admission locks and the stocking of tourist literature. If possible, further off-site use could be made of the staff during the day to check nearby unattended facilities. A local award scheme might also be considered to reward staff performance (cf. paragraph 5.2.3).
- 4.7.3 The Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning, believed that staff in the attended facilities should not carry change as this may, in some locations, make them vulnerable to attack (cf. paragraph 5.2.3).
- 4.7.4 Representatives of the cleaning function administration within Planning and Environmental Services spoke of the recruitment issue for staffed and unattended toilets, where it was much easier to recruit for the attended facilities rather than appoint local cleaners for the unstaffed toilets as the wage was basic, working hours limited and with no opportunity for bonus.
- 4.7.5 The Committee heard from representatives of Lumphanan, Tap o’ Noth and Whitehills community councils of their experiences operating public toilets in place of the Council. The community councils believed that this partnership agreement had been very successful and that there was evidence, in each location, of continued community participation and support. Whilst aware of the success to date of community run toilets, the Area Manager (Kincardine and Mearns) expressed concern that continuity in their management may be lost with future changes in personnel. It would be hard to safeguard against this. Partnership provision with local businesses should be investigated as potentially being more secure – even if the ownership of a business changed, in most instances the purpose, and therefore public interface, would remain.

4.8 Signage, website and other information sources

- 4.8.1 At the Aberdeenshire site visits, the members of the Committee noted that at some locations the signage was incomplete or in need of update. Not all toilets were provided with advance directional signs, and there were great differences in the signage on the buildings themselves. On one occasion, the building’s form was the sole guide to its function. This contrasted with the

Perth and Kinross site visits, where a complete suite of signs, moving from general directional to specific location, appeared to be in place.

- 4.8.2 The Area Manager (Formartine) raised the issue of signage and, in addition to suggesting that efforts be made to ensure adequate and standardised provision across Aberdeenshire, including of temporary closures, proposed that formal signage should also be introduced for those facilities in council buildings which were already open to the public. This would include those at sports centres, offices and civic buildings. Also, information on the toilets should be included in tourist literature.
- 4.8.3 From the tourism representatives, the Committee heard that information on the location of toilets could be included in tourist literature. Signage to, and at, toilets could also be improved, especially for travellers arriving by other forms of transport than bus.
- 4.8.4 The list of toilets shown on the Council's website as accessible was inaccurate in some instances, according to the North Aberdeenshire Access Panel representatives. Some of the facilities listed were not suitable for all categories of the disabled and the list included one which no longer existed. They believed that the Council's website list should be completed by adding reference to all toilets under the Council's operation, including those at locations such as Peterhead Community Centre, Aden Country Park and Peterhead Lido, which had good disabled facilities but were not generally known to visitors and residents as being available.

5 THE APPROACH IN OTHER AREAS

- 5.1 Officers of Perth and Kinross and Highland Councils advised the Committee of two very different strategies adopted in the provision of public toilets. For both areas, as for Aberdeenshire, tourism was very important and it was understood that public conveniences were part of this.

5.2 Perth and Kinross Council

- 5.2.1 The Traffic and Road Safety Manager, Perth and Kinross, clarified the relevance of his presentation to the Committee by explaining that he had been chosen, as a person whose usual sphere of operation was distant from the management of public toilets, to lead a Council working group established to take a fresh look at a perennial challenge. He advised the Committee of his council's decision that, although toilets were not a statutory function of local government, there needed to be some provision. The difficulty was ensuring adequate coverage by facilities which were less prone to vandalism, warm, clean, stocked with consumables and had their condition regularly checked by staff. Prior to 2000, there had been 24 unattended and 9 attended public toilets across Perth and Kinross; now there was a total of 36 publicly available toilets. These comprised 7 attended, 8 unattended and 21 'Comfort Partnerships'. The last involved agreements with local businesses to make, in

return for payments and other benefits from the Council, their customer toilets available to the general public.

- 5.2.2 The Comfort Partnership scheme, from a pilot three years ago, had recently been confirmed as Perth and Kinross Council's preferred way forward. It involved a formal agreement between the Council and partners who were providing toilets for the use of their patrons, that these conveniences be signed as publicly available. This was intended to remove the cultural obstacles which might otherwise discourage the general public from using facilities in businesses such as hotels, shops and petrol stations, and achieve public access to an existing provision, without the need to consider new build or council staffed facilities.
- 5.2.3 One of the reasons for Perth and Kinross adopting this strategy was that the costs of vandalism at unattended facilities had grown to unsustainable proportions, costing up to £5,000 per annum per toilet for repairs. New attended toilets cost in excess of £200,000 to build, and had ongoing revenue costs of £30,000 per annum, so even with a charge of 30p per user this still left a deficit. It was not affordable to replace all unstaffed public toilets with attended facilities. In addition, when looking to where toilets would require to be located, the Perth and Kinross working group had noted the availability of duplicate facilities in close proximity and had sought formal agreement with the businesses concerned to make these generally available. Partnership toilets were generally less prone to vandalism and, at a cost to the Council of between £1,300 to £2,000 per location, excluding signage, this was an effective means of utilising the public pound to provide an important service.
- 5.2.4 Details of the Comfort Partnership agreement were provided by the Traffic and Road Safety Manager, Perth and Kinross (see Appendix D). He advised the Committee that the scheme was not appropriate to places such as bus stations, park and ride facilities and 'destination locations', where more traditional provision would be required.
- 5.2.5 For the Comfort Partnership to work, appropriate signage was vital and Perth and Kinross Council had recently confirmed the signage format (see Appendix E). In addition, criteria had been established for the number of Partnerships appropriate to different sizes of settlements (see Appendix F).
- 5.2.6 Subsequent visits to two staffed council facilities in Perth and Kinross demonstrated many of the features recommended by the witnesses for consideration at existing attended toilets in Aberdeenshire – the design of the buildings encouraged the "welcoming face" of attendants, wearing clothing bearing their Council logo. Welcoming mats – again with the Council logo – and domestic touches such as the provision of fresh flowers in the male and female toilets, made the facilities attractive to users, beyond their functional provision of services in a very clean environment.
- 5.2.7 Visits to the Comfort Partnership scheme by the Committee identified that although signage had not been fully installed in each case, it was generally adequate. The premises were easy to find and members of the Committee

were able to enter unchallenged. At all locations, the toilets were found to be warm, provided with consumables and running hot water and to be a safer environment than may otherwise have been experienced. Discussions with staff in several partnership facilities heard of relatively little vandalism. All locations were happy to continue in the partnership provision with the local authority. As in any system, output would need to be continuously monitored to ensure that provision was maintained to the requisite standard.

5.3 Highland Council

- 5.3.1 In contrast to the approach taken by Perth and Kinross, Highland Council was more traditional in its management of publicly available toilets. The Council operated over 120 toilets of three types: seasonal unattended, whole year unattended and attended. A political decision, taken following local government reorganisation in 1996, had been that the toilet provision inherited from predecessor authorities be maintained as far as possible. The Committee heard from the Principal Services Support Officer, Highland Council, that the authority had maximised public access to toilets in its own buildings. It also operated a comfort scheme, mostly with local halls, although including two businesses in Inverness, to allow public access to their facilities. In return, signage and cleaning costs were underwritten by the Council. This scheme was particularly successful at several Millennium Halls, where lottery funded improvements to village halls had, incorporated into their design, toilets available for public use without necessitating disturbance to the day to day use of the hall.
- 5.3.2 In Highland Council's scheme, the unstaffed facilities were generally those serving local communities, while the staffed facilities tended to be at 'destination locations' such as the big settlements, specific tourist hot spots or at the ends of main routes. The needs of those making long journeys were a big issue in the consideration of the location of toilet facilities. Charges were levied at the 11 attended facilities, which were acknowledged as costly both to provide and to operate. Some staffed toilets, in locations of high footfall, generated a surplus of £2,000–5,000 per annum, and included additional charged facilities such as showers and lockers for which there was an evident demand.

5.4 Tourist Information Centres and visitor attractions

- 5.4.1 In supplementary evidence later provided, the Customer Services Manager, VisitScotland, Aberdeen and Grampian, cited the Stirling/Loch Lomond area, where five Tourist Information Centres/visitor attractions operated and managed public toilets. There was no reason why similar arrangements could not be pursued in Aberdeenshire. Any facilities of this kind would need to be governed by an appropriate service level agreement, stipulating basic requirements in terms of cleaning regimes and hours of operation. In the Stirling/Loch Lomond area, the public toilets provided in visitor attractions achieved high ratings in the Loo of the Year awards; in 2006, four of the five had been awarded 4 stars, with the Old Town Jail, Stirling, rated as 5 star.

Where VisitScotland operated toilets on behalf of the local authority, such as at Aberfoyle, all costs were recharged to the council.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 General

6.1.1 Aberdeenshire Council has around 100 public toilets – in the traditional sense of stand-alone dedicated buildings – distributed unevenly across Aberdeenshire. Many are elderly and no longer meet accepted norms. Some of the Council's attended toilets, in particular, are excellent modern facilities built and maintained to a high standard. Publicly available toilets, of good quality, are also provided by the Council within a range of facilities, such as the Ellon park and ride. Supermarkets and others also increasingly provide toilets for the public.

6.1.2 The Council's unattended public toilets are prone to vandalism and misuse. These problems are much less in evidence in the attended toilets. Clearly, however, the Council cannot afford to convert more than a small proportion of its unattended toilets to attended facilities.

6.1.3 The Committee wishes to record its appreciation of the commitment and hard work of the staff that run Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets. The dedication of those volunteers involved with the community run toilets is also to be commended. The work required to run public toilets is not always recognised or valued as it ought to be – but it is an essential public service.

6.2 What are the issues?

6.2.1 The Committee identified a number of key issues in relation to the management of public toilets in Aberdeenshire:

- that the provision of public toilets, although not a statutory function, was an important service;
- that public expectation of what could, and should, be provided had altered;
- that times had changed from when local authorities could be seen as the sole provider of public conveniences, with other publicly available facilities at many locations;
- that the inherited portfolio of ageing buildings was increasingly hard to maintain to a standard acceptable to the public and had a scattered distribution, possibly not well matched to either use or need;
- that there were extreme variations in standards of building, facilities and signage across Aberdeenshire;
- that costs for both repairs and anti-vandalism measures were considerable, particularly in unattended toilets;
- that the costs of providing staffed facilities make it impossible to convert many toilets to attended facilities;
- that automated toilets suffer from built-in obsolescence;

- that some little used and expensive to maintain toilets were not a good use of public money and better could be provided for less; and
- that the Council could – and should – do better, not necessarily as direct provider, but through its role to enable, coordinate and ensure provision.

6.2.2 After considering the evidence, the Committee concluded that changes since 2001 meant that it was now time to revisit and update the Council's strategy for public toilet provision. As part of this, an audit would be required, not only to encompass all toilets in the Council's ownership, including those in public buildings which could be signed as publicly available, but also alternative provision which may be available elsewhere, whether in public or private ownership. Covering issues such as level of use, vandalism and other running costs, proximity to alternative facilities and the fabric of the buildings, such an assessment would allow an overarching strategy to be considered.

6.2.3 The Committee considers that, in a new strategy, there should be four different categories of toilet provision. The strategy should be based on a vision of continuous improvement, and provision based on need, not just the maintenance of existing operations. The four categories of toilet provision the Committee recommends are:

- Joint partnership provision – based on the 'Comfort Partnership' model developed by Perth and Kinross Council – subject to the availability of suitable and willing partners;
- Community run facilities in rural locations;
- Existing staffed facilities; and
- Council unattended facilities.

The type of location will often dictate the category of toilet to be provided. Other relevant factors are the level of demand, the presence of alternatives and the sustainability of the Council's existing facilities. Any strategy must include the retention of existing, staffed facilities in the bigger towns, and Council provision at the country parks as destination points.

6.2.4 The Committee is convinced that a strategy that makes full use of partnership arrangements can deliver a better provision of public toilets than what is currently available in Aberdeenshire. It ought to be possible to increase the number of publicly available toilets at the same or lower cost. Once the new strategy is in place, decisions might then be taken to declare surplus to requirements and dispose of redundant toilet buildings currently held on the Council's asset register. Alterations to the existing provision should not be undertaken without consulting local communities, including offering them the opportunity to manage toilets on the Council's behalf.

6.3 What to provide?

6.3.1 The Committee is sceptical of the continued use of automated toilets, given their built-in obsolescence and high installation and running costs. It recommends that no more be purchased by Aberdeenshire Council.

- 6.3.2 The Committee recommends that works be undertaken to existing toilets to make them more fit for purpose (see paragraph 6.4.1). However, investment decisions should not be progressed in advance of checking that the toilets are in the right place and that the spend represents good value for money.
- 6.3.3 The Council's website listing of public conveniences should be accurate and updated to include all publicly available toilets run by every Service. Those listed as accessible should be reviewed by disability experts to confirm that status. An assessment of current disabled toilets, including those in other council run premises, should be undertaken to analyse 'quick fixes' which may improve their usefulness in both the short and long term.
- 6.3.4 There may be advantages in giving staff from attended facilities a role in monitoring nearby unstaffed premises. Issues with transportation and travel would have to be addressed if any such proposals were to be pursued. A wider role for toilet attendants would allow better use of staff and make for a more varied daily routine, with possible benefits for morale. This suggestion does not work if the Council were to adopt the approach of Perth and Kinross Council of having attendants collect money from patrons (see paragraph 6.3.5).
- 6.3.5 In general, new toilets should not be stand-alone facilities, but should be incorporated into other developments (for example, as a separately accessible part of an upgraded village hall or tourism facility). If new staffed facilities are built, the layout should mirror that of attended toilets in Perth and Kinross, with a central entrance point controlled by the attendant.
- 6.3.6 Consideration should be given of increasing the charges for admission to the staffed conveniences to the level in Perth and Kinross. Current deficits in the region of £30,000–40,000 per annum per attended toilet are unsustainable. Evidence was heard, and observed, that users were happy to pay for the provision of better services.
- 6.3.7 The Committee firmly believes that signage needs to be improved. As an initial step, action should be taken to sign, as publicly available, toilets in all possible council buildings, including Community Centres, sports facilities, and park and ride transport interchanges. The signs, perhaps based on the model used in Perth and Kinross to direct users to Comfort Partnerships could indicate opening hours/days. The same sequence of signage should be applied across Aberdeenshire:
- Directional signage from main routes;
 - Directional signage within settlement;
 - Locational signage at the building; and
 - Facilities signage on appropriate entrances.

In addition, the out-dated signs on toilet doors, directing users to local Environmental Health Offices and Tourist Information Centres, should be removed. Consideration should be given to providing directional information

to the next nearest operating facility and giving a general contact telephone number for such guidance. This would require to be kept as up-to-date as possible to be valid and would necessitate input from cleaners, coordinated at a central point, to allow prompt notice of temporary closures. Redirection signage should also be made available to the staff for immediate display on occasion of vandalism or other cleaning difficulties which might impact on the operation of a toilet.

- 6.3.8 In respect of current staffed facilities, the creation of an in-house annual award is recommended, in order to boost staff morale. A similar scheme should be considered to mark the efforts of volunteers running community facilities.
- 6.3.9 More should be made, in press releases, of successes in awards such as Loo of the Year, in order that the public may be aware of improving standards in Aberdeenshire.

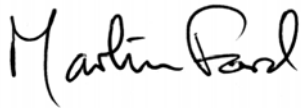
6.4 A new standard

- 6.4.1 The Committee believe that a range of facilities should be considered for all public toilets. If possible, there should be:
- Baby changing facilities – either in a shared common location or in both male and female toilets;
 - Energy conservation measures – including automatic taps/flushes and lighting;
 - In unattended locations, stainless steel fitments, subject to appropriate regular electrical earth-bonding testing; ceramic furniture in staffed facilities;
 - Time-activated locks on unattended facilities, to maximise operating hours without requiring additional staff time;
 - Plugs which cannot be detached – or a reduced water temperature to remove the need for plugs at all;
 - Hooks for bags/coats in each cubicle;
 - Disabled provision to allow as much room as possible (subject to the optimum space standards of BS 8300), utilising colour contrast throughout and with easy-use levers on taps and doors and, ideally, a pull-down shelf;
 - Adequate provision of both sanitary and general waste bins;
 - The standardisation, as far as is possible, of all furniture and fittings. This would make maintenance easier, possibly cheaper, and minimise the closure of facilities for repair works; and
 - Uniforms, not just protective clothing, provided for staff.
- 6.4.2 The Committee strongly recommends, at the earliest opportunity, the provision, potentially through the conversion of existing facilities, of “Changing Places” style facilities in the north, south and centre of Aberdeenshire. This would make the Council a leader in Scotland in providing facilities for disabled adults and their carers, allowing them greater access to what most people

think of as everyday activities and community life. Formal support by the Council for the PAMIS campaign is also recommended.

7 THANKS AND INVITATION FOR FEEDBACK

- 7.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee would like to record its appreciation of the co-operation and assistance it received from internal and external witnesses, and the support provided by Council officers.
- 7.2 Each investigation that is undertaken is part of a learning experience for the Committee and it would welcome any feedback or comments from participants or interested individuals on the investigation process and this report.



Cllr Martin Ford
Chair,
Scrutiny and Audit Committee



Cllr Bruce Luffman
Vice-Chair,
Scrutiny and Audit Committee

APPENDIX A – Investigation Brief

Subject to be reviewed	Investigation No	14
Scrutiny and Audit Committee – Investigation Brief		
Management of Public Toilets		
Purpose and objectives of investigation		
<p>1) To examine the management of Aberdeenshire Council's public toilets, the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the systems in place; and the standards maintained in the facilities.</p> <p>2) To make recommendations for improvements.</p>		
Investigation methodology		
Background documents/ evidence/ research	Public Convenience Strategy, reports to ISC on Public Convenience provision and other related documents.	
Witnesses to be invited to provide evidence	<p>External</p> <p>Other Rural Councils</p> <p>Crathie and one other Tourist Information Centre staff</p> <p>VisitScotland</p> <p>Disability Representative</p> <p>Chief Officers</p> <p>Director of Planning and Environmental Services</p> <p>Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services</p> <p>Staff</p> <p>Archie McDougall, Rab Birnie, Andy Hickling, Kevin McDonald.</p> <p>Area Managers</p> <p>Community who have taken over running of toilets (e.g. Rhynie, Lumphanan, Pennan)</p> <p>Staff actually cleaning and running toilets</p>	
Site visits	Visits to staffed, unstaffed, automatic and community run public toilets	
Consultation process		

Trade Unions Contribution	Trades Union representatives will be advised of the investigation and asked if they want to be involved
Project Team (officers)	Jan McRobbie, CE Service and Alison Cumming, Law and Administration
Other estimated costs	
External expert	No external expert
Investigation timetable	February - March 2007
Agreed by Committee	13 December 2006- updated 13 February 2007.

APPENDIX B – Investigation Programme and Witnesses Heard

Date	Time	Witnesses
7 Feb	9.00	Site Visits to toilets across Aberdeenshire
9 Feb	9.00	Site Visits to toilets across Aberdeenshire
14 Feb	10.15	Meeting with Senior Officers Bill Cassie, Head of Consumer Protection and Support Services; Rab Birnie, Area Supervisor – Cleaning Operations; Yvonne Bertram, Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning; Andy Hickling, Principal Landscape Officer – Policy; Kevin McDonald, Principal Energy Management Engineer; Alasdair Hamilton, Energy Conservation Assistant; and Emma Donaldson, Energy Management Engineer.
	1.45	Meeting with Representative from Perth & Kinross Council Charles Haggart, Traffic & Road Safety Manager, Perth and Kinross Council.
	2.45	Meeting with Representative from Highland Council Brian Donnet, Principal Services Support Officer, Highland Council.
28 Feb	10.15	Meeting with Area Managers William Munro, Area Manager, Kincardine and Mearns; and Keith Newton, Area Manager, Formartine.
	11.30	Meeting with Disability Representatives Linda and Tony Miller, Aberdeenshire North Access Panel.
	1.45	Meeting with Community Councils Ross Balharry, Whitehills and District Community Council; Irene Thomson, Lumphanan Community Council; George Beverly, Tap o' Noth Community Council; and Paul Manning, Tap o' Noth Community Council.
5 March	1.30	Meeting with VisitScotland/TIC staff Judi Graham, Customer Services Manager, VisitScotland, Aberdeen and Grampian; Pat Crawford, Customer Services Supervisor, Ballater Tourist Information Centre; and Deirdre Thain, Customer Services Assistant, Crathie Tourist Information Centre.
	2.45	Meeting with Council Staff Yvonne Bertram, Assistant Area Supervisor – Cleaning; and Sandra Kaczmarek, Site Support.
16 March	9.30	Site Visits to toilets in Braemar and Perth & Kinross
22 March	2.00	Wrap Up Session

APPENDIX C – Overview of Site Inspections to Aberdeenshire Toilets

(A) AUTOMATED

FACILITY	SUITABLE LOCATION	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	ANTI-VANDAL	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ACCESS/ APPROACH	PARKING	SIGNS	CLEANLINESS	ODOUR	FABRIC	VANDALISM	CONSUMABLES	LIGHTING	BINS
Brig o Feuch	Y	G	Y	N	G	Y	Car park/ B'ding	G	G	F	N	Y	Y	Y
Kintore	Y	G	Y	Y	G	On Street	B'ding Only	P	P	F	Graffiti	N	Y	Y
Potarch Green	Y	G	Y	?	G	Y	B'ding only.	G	G	F	N	Y	Y	Y

COMMENTS: Good hooks for coats/ bags and shelves. Contrast in three facilities between older at Kintore and more recent at other two locations.

(B) COMMUNITY RUN

FACILITY	SUITABLE LOCATION	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	ANTI-VANDAL	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ACCESS/ APPROACH	PARKING	SIGNS	CLEANLINESS	ODOUR	FABRIC	VANDALISM	CONSUMABLES	LIGHTING	BINS
Whitehills	Y	G	Y	Y	G	On Street	Street B'ding Only	G	G	F/G	N	Y	Y	Y

Comments: Very welcoming facility, with personalised touches.

(C) STAFFED

FACILITY	SUITABLE LOCATION	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	ANTI-VANDAL	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ACCESS/ APPROACH	PARKING	SIGNS	CLEANLINESS	ODOUR	FABRIC	VANDALISM	CONSUMABLES	LIGHTING	BINS
Banchory	Y	G	Y	Y	G	Y	B'ding	G	G	G	Minor	Y	Y	2/3
Banff	Y	F	N	Y	G	G	Car park / b'ding	G	G	G (roof issues)	N	Y	Y	Y
Ellon (Market Road)	Y	G	N	Street lights?	G	G	From town centre, b'ding not car park	G	G	G	N	Y	Y	Y
Ellon (Park & Ride)	Y	G	N	Y	G	G	N	G	G	G	N	Y	Y	Y
Inverurie	Y	G	Y	Y	G	F/G	B'ding	G	G	F/G	Minor	Y	Y	Y
Peterhead	Y	G	N	Y	G	Y	From street/ town centre b'ding.	G	G	G	Minor	Y	Y	Y
Stonehaven	Y	G	Y	Street lighting	G	F	From town centre/ on b'ding.	G	G	G	N	Y	Y	Y

Comments: Vending machines in some locations. Commend dual flush options in newer units. Tourist literature good idea.

(D) UNSTAFFED

FACILITY	SUITABLE LOCATION	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	ANTI-VANDAL	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ACCESS/ APPROACH	PARKING	SIGNS	CLEANLINESS	ODOUR	FABRIC	VANDALISM	CONSUMABLES	LIGHTING	BINS
Alford-Haughton Country Park	Y	G	N	Y	G	Y	Directional And on b'ding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Braemar	Y	G	N	Y	G	G	From street and on b'ding	G	G	G	N	Y	Y	Y
Boddam	Y	F	N	Y	G	Y	From street and on b'ding	G	G	F	N	Y	Y	Y
Cruden Bay	Y	F	Y	Y	G	Y	From main road and on b'ding	F	G	F	Minor	Y	Y	Y (impro)
Echt	Y	F/G	Y	Y	G	Y	On doors only	G	G	G	Minor	Y	Y	Y (impro)

FACILITY	SUITABLE LOCATION	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	ANTI-VANDAL	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ACCESS/ APPROACH	PARKING	SIGNS	CLEANLINESS	ODOUR	FABRIC	VANDALISM	CONSUMABLES	LIGHTING	BINS
Macduff (harbour)	Y	F	N	Y	G	Y	From main road- on b'ding-no directional	F/G	G	F/G	N	Y	Y	Y
Mintlaw- The Square	N?	P	Y	Y	P	N	From street on b'ding	P	P	P/F	Y	Y	Y	N
Mintlaw- Aden Courtyard	Y	G	N	Y	G	Y	From main car park	F/G	F	F/G	N	Y	Y	Y
Oldmeldrum	Y	G	Y	Y	G	Y	From town centre on b'ding	G	G	F/G	Minor	Y	Y	Y
New Byth	Y	F	Y	Y	G	Y	From main street only.	G	G	F/G	Minor	Y	Y	Y
New Pitsligo	Y	F/G	N	Y	G	G	From main street	P	P	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Stonehaven – Harbour	Y	G	N	Y	G	G	Not from town centre- harbour area only and on b'ding	G	G	G	Y	Y	Y	N
Torphins	Y	G	N	Y	G	G	Directional from main street- on doors	P/F	P	F	Y	Y	Y	N

BINS	LIGHTING	CONSUMABLES	VANDALISM	FABRIC	ODOUR	CLEANLINESS	SIGNS	PARKING	ACCESS/ APPROACH	EXTERNAL LIGHTS	ANTI- VANDAL	OUTWARD APPEARANCE	SUITABLE LOCATION	FACILITY
Y (impro)	Y	Y	Minor	F	G	G	From main road- not from shopping centre. Signs on doors	G	G	Y	Y	F/G	Y	Westhill

Comments: Great variations in standard of fabric/décor/cleaning- across and inside toilets. Signage also variable.

APPENDIX D – Perth and Kinross Comfort Partnership Agreement (Information provided on Perth and Kinross website)

1.2.1.1 What do I get from the Partnership?

Confirmed income at several stages throughout the year, when at the moment people may be using your toilets for no additional income.

- More potential customers (mostly tourists or other visitors) coming into your premises who may buy something from you.
- Good publicity - your business will be advertised via the Council and Perthshire Tourist Board as a Comfort Scheme location.

1.2.1.2 What do I have to do?

Not much more than you do at the moment! Keep the toilets available, keep them clean, display signage and in return we pay you.

1.2.1.3 How much money can I expect from a Partnership?

Each premise is assessed by a Council Officer and a financial offer is made depending on how many, the standard and types of facilities you have, and your opening hours. If you are successfully placed on the scheme you will be paid 3 times a year.

1.2.1.4 Who pays for the extra running costs?

The money you receive from the Perth & Kinross Council is intended to pay for the extra costs incurred by offering the Comfort Scheme.

1.2.1.5 How long must I enter into a Partnership for?

It is preferable that you enter into a 3 year agreement. This is mainly to cut down on the inconvenience of re-organising the Partnerships every year. However this is negotiable if you do not want to enter into a 3 year agreement.

1.2.1.6 How many people can I expect to be using my toilets?

It is impossible to say, but it is hoped that in busier towns there may be several Partnerships, as well as existing Council Public Toilets, to help spread the demand.

1.2.1.7 Am I expected to allow trouble makers in to use my toilets?

Although we would expect your toilets to be publicly available, you are entitled to expect the same standards of behaviour as you would from customers in your shop, pub or restaurant. If someone there is causing trouble, you would be entitled to ask them to leave and in extreme cases bar them from entry. The same applies to people using your toilet facilities.

1.2.1.8 I run a Licensed Premise, will letting children in to use the facilities affect this?

No, children can enter the bar area to travel to your toilets, as long as they do not stay.

1.2.1.9 How will this affect my insurance?

We strongly suggest you advise your insurers that you are entering the scheme. As a business which admits the public, you will already require to have public liability insurance. The advice we have from the insurance industry is that there is no reason why you should be prevented from entering the scheme.

In a minority of cases, your insurance company may slightly increase your premium. If that is the case, we are happy to discuss this with you.

1.2.1.10 What happens when the Partnership is set up?

A Minute of Agreement is signed by both the provider and Perth & Kinross Council to formally set up the Partnership. Signage is organised and an official start date established.

1.2.1.11 Are my premises inspected on a regular basis?

A dedicated Officer is available to offer advice and they will inspect your premise routinely.

1.2.1.12 I am interested in the Comfort scheme, what do I do next?

If you have not already been contacted by a Council Officer, please telephone the Environment Services Helpline on 01738 476476 for further information.

1.2.1.13 What if I want to be released from the Partnership?

Although you may sign up for the Partnership for 3 years, you can withdraw at any time by giving 2 months written notice.

APPENDIX E – Perth and Kinross Comfort Partnership Signage



Sign Dimensions: Width 700mm, Height 330mm, Area: 0.23sq m
PKC logo: Height 110mm, Width 76mm
Character Height 70mm, max width 63mm.
Colours: Black on White; PKC logo Blue on Aqua
Material: BS EN 12899-1 ClassRef 2 (was BS 873 class 1)



Sign Dimensions: Width 1005mm, Height 475mm, Area: 0.48sq m

PKC logo: Height 160mm, Width 111mm

Colours: Black on White; PKC logo Blue on Aqua
Material: BS EN 12899-1 Class Ref 2 (was BS 873 class 1)

Comfort Scheme Partnership

The proprietors have
kindly agreed to
make the toilets in
this building available
for public use



APPENDIX F – Perth and Kinross Comfort Partnership Settlement Criteria

- Less than 400 population No Partnership;
- 400- 1000 population 1 - 2 Partnerships;
- 1000- 2500 population 2 - 3 Partnerships;
- 2500 – 5000 population 3 - 4 Partnerships;
- 5000 – 10000 population 4 - 5 Partnerships;
- Perth City > 10 Partnerships.

If this were applied to Aberdeenshire, and related to the settlements which have already been visited, the allocation would look as follows:-

SETTLEMENT	NO. OF PARTNERSHIPS
Whitehills	1 - 2
Boddam, Cruden Bay, Kintore, New Pitsligo, Oldmeldrum, Torphins	2 - 3
Mintlaw	3 - 4
Banchory	4 – 5
Ellon, Inverurie, Peterhead, Stonehaven, Westhill	Over 5- up to 10 (as per Perth City)

In addition, the 'significant number of visitors' and 'end-point' destinations would require to be included in the calculations where settlements receive a greater footfall than their resident numbers would suggest.