



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE - 10 SEPTEMBER 2025
Subject	REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCE PROVISION
Wards affected	Bampton & Clanfield, Burford, Brize Norton and Shilton, Carterton, Charlbury & Finstock, Chipping Norton, Eynsham & Cassington, Witney & Woodstock & Bladon
Accountable member	Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment Email: lidia.arciszewska@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Claire Locke. Interim Executive Director – Corporate Services Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Claire Locke. Interim Executive Director – Corporate Services Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	The review has considered current provision of public conveniences in each location, costs, income and building condition. The aim is to provide a balance between the continued provision of good quality public toilet facilities, protect essential facilities into the future and to reduce the financial burden on the Council.
Annexes	Annex A – Table summarising costs, income, usage and condition Annex B – Summary of Condition survey indicative costs Annex C – Maps showing the location of facilities Exempt Annex D – Lease terms relevant to surrender Annex E – Equalities Impact Assessment
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: I. Agree to work with Town and Parish Councils and the Public Convenience Task and Finish Group to explore the options in regards to transferring these assets where possible, either on long leases or freehold, as detailed in the report.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Delegate authority for the terms of any disposals arising from recommendation 1 to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance. 3. Agree that, where transfer cannot be achieved, to retain facilities at Langdale Gate in Witney, Guildenford and High Street in Burford, Bampton Town Hall, New Street in Chipping Norton, Hensington Road in Woodstock and Kilkenny Country Park, and to bring forward a further report regarding the repairs and improvements required to ensure good quality facilities are provided. 4. Agree, where transfer cannot be achieved, to terminate leases at the Town Hall in Chipping Norton and Charlbury, noting the lease implications set out in Annex D to the report. 5. Agree, where transfer cannot be achieved, to close facilities at The Leys, Witney, Browns Lane, Woodstock, Back Lane, Eynsham, Black Bourton Road in Carterton which are in the Council's ownership and consider options such as conversion, lease or sale of the buildings.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	Yes
Exempt	<p>NO</p> <p>Annex D exempt – contains confidential lease information</p>
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Public Conveniences working Group</p> <p>Consultation with relevant Town and Parish Councils will follow this 'in principle' decision, to discuss what happens with individual facilities.</p>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Council provides thirteen sets of Public Conveniences district wide. Ten of these facilities are owned by the Council and three are leased. Despite a small charge at some facilities, the cleaning and maintenance costs means that the Council provides a high level of subsidy for this discretionary service.
- 1.2** Many towns now have multiple locations which offer the public free access to Public Conveniences at libraries, community centres, supermarkets and facilities provided by Town Councils.
- 1.3** In the context of Asset Management review, the Council is considering how discretionary facilities can be fit for the future. Transferring facilities to Town and Parish Councils could ensure facilities are retained at a local level.
- 1.4** Data has been used to review costs, income and usage. A 'cost per use' figure is helpful in identifying facilities that require a higher level of subsidy. This information is summarised in Annex A. Condition surveys have also been carried out to identify facilities that will require significant investment in the coming years to ensure they remain in a suitable condition. This information is referenced in Annex A but further information is contained in Annex B.
- 1.5** The review has considered options to retain, close, transfer or terminate leases for the public conveniences, whilst considering the needs of the users, and other local provision and affordability.
- 1.6** The recommendations seek to transfer all facilities but acknowledge the need to retain some high use facilities in key locations if transfer is not possible. Facilities which are retained will require some investment and a future report will consider costs as well as options for cashless payment and changes to charges. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees Public Conveniences working group will support the process of discussing options with Town and Parish Councils and considering terms for transfer or options for improvement where facilities are retained.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** West Oxfordshire District Council operates thirteen public toilets across the district, in 8 towns and villages. All sites charge 20p per use and this has not increased since charges were introduced in 2014.
- 2.2** Reactive maintenance is dealt with as and when necessary, however no refurbishments or improvements have taken place for a significant number of years. The cleaning and responsive maintenance is contracted to Danfo UK Ltd. The contract costs are the main expenditure for each site, which has increased over the last year due to wages, fuel and consumables.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1** Data on service costs, usage and income are listed by individual site in Annex A. This includes the net cost to the Council for each use of the facilities. The overall net subsidy the Council incurred in providing this service in 2024/25 was £269,747.
- 3.2** Whilst provision of the public toilets is a discretionary service, it is recognised the importance of easy access to facilities for shoppers and tourists. However, the existing level of subsidy is unsustainable for the Council and may make the service vulnerable under a new Unitary authority arrangement.

4. District wide provision of public conveniences.

- 4.1** There are 13 sets of facilities across 9 towns and villages. Witney, Burford, Woodstock, Chipping Norton all have 2 sites operated by the Council. Bampton, Charlbury, Carterton, Brize Norton & Shilton and Eynsham all have 1 site operated by the Council.
- 4.2** Where there are multiple facilities provided, they are located relatively close together. It should also be considered that many towns and villages have multiple cafes, restaurants, public houses and tourist attractions which have toilet available for customers. Annex C provides maps showing the location of WODC run public conveniences and other publicly accessible facilities in each town.
- 4.3** Whilst there is considered to be a need for continued service provision, there could be a reduction in the number of facilities provided which would reduce costs.

5. Transferring responsibility for public conveniences.

- 5.1** The Council could transfer facilities to Town and Parish councils. Where facilities are located in Council owned car parks it will be appropriate for the District Council to retain the freehold and transfer the public conveniences on a long lease. This avoids complications should the wider site ever be considered for sale or redevelopment. Where facilities sit separate to or on the edge of other council owned land freehold transfer may be appropriate with suitable covenants requiring the continued provision of toilet facilities and enabling the district council to receive a capital receipt should the facilities close and be sold or repurposed in the future. There may be exceptions to this if continued provision is not needed, for example, at The Leys, Witney, the Town Council have recently built new facilities. Each site will therefore be considered based on individual circumstances.
- 5.2** Not all Town or Parish Councils will wish to take on the facilities and the Council therefore needs to consider what action will be taken if transfer is not agreed. Where alternative facilities are available it is recommended leases are surrendered or facilities are closed.
- 5.3** In addition to the costs of running the facilities, the Council needs to consider the costs to keep these facilities in good order. Annex B provides indicative costs for repairs and replacement each year for the next ten years. This has been summarised in the annex as Year 1 costs, costs from 2025 – 1st April 2028 (Unitary authorities established) and total cost over the next ten years. It is important to stress these costs are indicative. They may

not all need to be incurred, they may not all need to be incurred in the periods stated and they have not been tendered. However, they provide a valuable insight for decision making and budget setting, into the level of investment that may be needed.

Surrender of leases

- 5.4 At Charlbury the community centre is located close to the council owned public conveniences and has similar opening times. Usage is relatively low at this site. At Chipping Norton the Council provides alternative facilities at New Street car park and there are also other facilities provided locally (Annex A).
- 5.5 It is recommended that the Council seek to surrender these leases. Please refer to Annex D which contains confidential information relating to these leases and sets out the potential implications of surrender. Surrendering these leases and closing the public conveniences would reduce costs by approximately £44,000 annually.
- 5.6 Whilst condition survey information indicates repair and replacement costs, some of these costs would be borne by the building owners, not WODC as lessee. However, the Council will need to carry out certain works to reinstate the building to a required condition in line with the lease terms before it is handed back. These costs will be negotiated with the building owners once the process of lease surrender commences.

Transfer or closure

- 5.7 It is proposed that facilities at The Leys, Witney, Back Lane, Eynsham, Browns Lane, Woodstock and Black Bourton Road, Carterton are transferred to the relevant Town Councils or closed. In all cases there are alternative facilities provided close by (Annex A). Closing these facilities will reduce costs by approximately £70,000 annually. It may result in a slight increase in consumables at the other council owned facilities as usage is consolidated into one site. This cost is hard to quantify.
- 5.8 If the facilities listed in 5.7 were retained the Council would need to invest approximately £87,700 between now and 2028.
- 5.9 Freehold facilities could be sold providing a capital receipt to the Council or they could be stripped out and converted for a new commercial use. This can be fully explored if transfer is not possible and the council could decide whether it pursues disposal or investment to retain as a commercial asset. If transfer is not viable, an options appraisal will be prepared for each relevant facility, and a further report will be brought back to the Council for decision.

Transfer or retention

- 5.10 The remaining facilities would ideally be transferred but if transfer is not viable the Council may wish to consider retention of these facilities as they are either high demand facilities in key tourism locations (Guilford and High Street in Burford, New street in Chipping Norton), near large car parks that serve shoppers (Langdale Gate, Witney) or located in areas where there are little or no other alternative facilities (Bampton Town Hall and Kilkenny Country Park). Hensington Road, Woodstock will be looked at separately and in conjunction with Oxfordshire County Council seeking to make changes to the to the Old Library site in Hensington Road.

- 5.1.1 If facilities are retained, the Council will need to allocate funding for essential repairs and maintenance which are estimated to be in the region of £56,000 between now and 2028. However, the Council may also wish to consider investment to upgrade older facilities. Consideration could also be given to introducing cashless payment as all facilities are 'cash only' currently. Cashless payment can be more user friendly as people do not need to find the right change. However, there is a significant capital cost of around £1350 per unit to install card readers. Consideration could also be given to the appropriate level of fee, with scope to increase charges and reduce the level of subsidy, particularly if facilities are improved and customers are offered a better standard of facility. These options can be considered as part of a future report on investment into retained facilities.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 The Council could retain all facilities, but this would not address the level of subsidy currently incurred and may make the service vulnerable when Unitary authorities are created.
- 6.2 The Council could seek to close more facilities, if transfer to Town and Parish Councils does not occur however this may impact on users, where alternative facilities are not available, which could in turn affect the local economy.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The recommendations seek agreement in principle to transferring public conveniences to Town and Parish Councils. However there has not yet been consultation with these Councils, so the proposals in this report may be subject to change. Delegations are sought to enable matters to progress but where proposals change it may be necessary to bring a further report to Executive.
- 7.2 The aim is to achieve the right balance between essential local provision and cost and to protect these facilities at a local level into the future.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The provision of public convenience currently has an annual revenue cost to the Council of £269,747.
- 8.2 The recommendations in this report seek to reduce this net subsidy, however the level of reduction will depend on the number of facilities that are transferred and associated costs.
- 8.3 The budget requirements for essential repairs and maintenance are set out in Annex C. Any funding requirements for 2025/26 will be met from revenue funding. Funding for future years will be built into the budget setting process.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Public conveniences are a discretionary service and therefore the Council could cease to provide the service.

- 9.2** The Council is the freeholder of all but 3 of the public conveniences (see annex A). The Council can therefore choose to sell or repurpose the buildings that it owns subject to the relevant permissions.

10. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1** The Council may suffer reputational damage from any closure of facilities and increasing charges. However, offering the facilities to the Town or Parish Councils in the first instance and providing effective communication to explain may help mitigate this risk.

11. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 11.1** Closure of public conveniences may impact some groups more than others. An EIA is provided at Annex E.

12. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** There may be a reduction in fuel usage from servicing, maintaining and cash collection all existing facilities. However, as the proposals include where retention of at least one set of facilities in each Town or Village, there will be limited reduction in travel for the contractor.
- 12.2** There will be a small reduction in utilities used if any of the toilets are closed but demand may transfer the facilities remaining open. It is likely the consumables usage may also transfer.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1** None.

(END)