



Overview & Scrutiny Board

21 September 2004

Provision of Toilet Facilities for Library Users

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present the findings of the Economic Regeneration & Transport Scrutiny Panel following the review of the provision of toilet facilities for library users.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Board on the 15 June 2004 considered a request from a member of the public to scrutinise the lack of toilet facilities for library users. The Board considered that the issue was worthy of scrutiny and directed it to the Economic Regeneration & Transport Scrutiny Panel for review.

3. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION/ FINDINGS

- 3.1 The Panel formed a small working team that met with the member of the public who brought the issue to the attention of the Overview & Scrutiny Board. The salient factors to arise were that: -
- The library function is changing as homework rooms and computer facilities are being introduced which is encouraging people to use libraries for extended periods of time.
 - The lack of toilet provision is discouraging some people to walk to their local library, which in effect goes against the Council's healthy living initiatives.

3.2 The Panel considered this information alongside the response received from the Head of Libraries & Information, which is outlined below: -

- There are 13 libraries in total, and 9 have toilets available, 5 of which include toilet facilities for a person with a physical disability.
- The library service has received limited evidence that there is a demand for toilet provision, from the 79 complaints/comments received in 2003/04 only 7 related to toilet facilities. Furthermore the User Survey of 2003, only received 12 out of 2134 responses that noted that toilet facilities should be introduced.
- All libraries have staff toilets which library users can use at the staff's discretion. Requests are unlikely to be refused, however instances relating to drug/ alcohol misuse has led to some staff being reluctant. The health and safety of employees must be considered. Furthermore there is also an issue of security, as such facilities are located in staff only areas, where personal possessions are kept.
- A cost would be incurred for the cleaning and maintaining of toilets.
- There are also issues relating to space within most libraries, the most serious being in the Central Library which has the added complication of requiring listed building consent for any structural alterations.
- A comparison of the toilet provision provided elsewhere was undertaken, from which it was uncovered that Newcastle Council, Hartlepool Council and North Tyne Side Council do not provide such facilities. Redcar council has a discretion policy in operation, where by a deposit is paid for the key.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Based upon the evidence obtained, the Panel concluded that:-

- Due to budget implications and the possible risk to staff it would not be appropriate for toilet facilities to be introduced in libraries for library users. However this issue should be kept under review by the Library Service.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scrutiny Panel Report, received on the 12 August 2004 - "Scrutinising Public Toilet Facilities within Libraries".

Report of Head of Libraries & Information, Panel received on the 12 August 2004 – “Provision of Public Toilet Facilities in Libraries”.

COUNCILLOR Martin Booth

CHAIR OF Economic Regeneration & Transport Scrutiny Panel

Contact Officer:

Kelly Brooks – Assistant Scrutiny Support Officer.

Telephone: 01642 729705 (direct line)

Email: kelly_brooks@middlesbrough.gov.uk

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