

Environment Services and Climate Change Committee	
Meeting Date	8 th July 2026
Report Title	Public Conveniences Review and Community Toilet Scheme Update
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure (for service provision)
Lead Officer	Alister Andrews, Environmental Services Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. That members discuss the next steps for those facilities not being transferred to other organisations and advise if they support further closures to create additional savings to deliver the Medium-Term Financial Plan and fund the costs of a Community Toilet Scheme. 2. To endorse the Community Toilet Scheme selection criteria (2.23 – 2.36) based on location, operating hours, facilities and longevity of interested businesses and for Members to identify how the scheme will be funded sustainably. 3. To agree the reimbursement figures for approved scheme members once sustainable funding has been identified. 4. To refer to Policy and Resources Committee should the costs of any decisions exceed the available budget.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 To update members on the award of contract for the provision of Minor Maintenance and Cleansing of Public Conveniences.
- 1.2 To update Members on the asset transfer discussions and the impact of those on the budget for the service.
- 1.3 To agree the next steps for facilities that are not being transferred.

- 1.4 Discuss and agree the Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) criteria and the extent of service provision considering the limited available budgets.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 On 12th November 2025, the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee agreed the recommendations from the Public Conveniences Review. The recommendations aimed to align the service with the allocated budget.
- 2.2 Three public conveniences were closed (White House in Minster; Milton Regis High Street; and The Forum in Sittingbourne). Seven other facilities were considered for asset transfer (Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre; Central Car Park, Faversham; Rose Street, Sheerness; Beachfields, Sheerness; Leysdown Beach Services; The Spinney, Leysdown; Queenborough Park).
- 2.3 In the Autumn of 2025 discussions were held with the relevant Parish and Town Councils in relation to the toilets listed as having potential to be transferred. The outcome of these discussions has been that only Oare Gunpowder Works is proceeding as a potential transfer to the Faversham Town Council, as part of a wider assignment of the lease on Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park. This transfer will result in a contractual servicing saving of £1.7K pa.
- 2.4 Whilst there had been early, potential interest in asset transfer and detailed information was provided, as matters stand no other Town or Parish Council has sought to progress a transfer against the other properties, indicating that if they were not at clear risk of closure they would not be considered. Minster Parish Council did suggest they may consider transfer if it included the Little Oyster car park as well as the toilet.
- 2.5 The new public convenience contract was awarded in March 2026 to open, close, maintain and clean the public toilets in Swale. The winning bid had a value of £299.3K pa. The new contract commenced on 1st May 2026.
- 2.6 The current available budget is £300K, which balances the contractual costs for 2026/27. Members previously made a decision to implement a £100K saving in public conveniences – which reduced the budget from £350K to £250K in 2026-27. However, an additional £50K contribution was added as a contingency to recognise the expected increase in contract costs arising for a new contract, meaning that current savings achieved total £50k. To date, not closing/transferring sufficient toilets has therefore not delivered the required saving.
- 2.7 In November 2025, the Environment Services and Climate Change Committee discussed a paper on the transfer or closure of some facilities which detailed

some further facilities that could be considered. More accurate financial estimates are now available for contract savings at some of these facilities.

Figure 1 to show estimated contractual savings if some previously identified facilities are closed or transferred.

Location	Estimated saving if facility is closed or transferred
Central Car Park, Faversham	£36.5K
The Spinney, Leysdown	£8.7K
Queenborough Park	£9.1K
Oare Gunpowder Works	£1.7K

- 2.8 At the November 2025 Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee meeting, Members proposed and supported an amendment for the Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) to be introduced in the areas impacted by toilet closures and then expanded over time so that it is borough-wide.
- 2.9 The closure or transfer of facilities could potentially fund the Community Toilet Scheme that Members supported (see figure 1 and figure 2 for financial details). Without additional funds or savings identified then there is currently no available budget to launch a Community Toilet Scheme.
- 2.10 If Members agree to progress with a Community Toilet Scheme, then further funds will be required based upon the size of the scheme that Members would like to implement. As an example, based on an estimated six businesses joining the CTS and receiving up to £1300 per annum, there would be additional cost of £7,800 for reimbursements. The CTS was intended to be funded via savings made from the closure or asset transfer of existing public conveniences. *[For illustration purposes only, Transferring or closing Faversham Central Toilet would result in a contract saving of £36.5K pa. Replacing the service with six Community Toilets across the town would provide wider access to facilities and cost around £7.8K pa in recompense to the service providers (plus an estimated £3.8K pa officer time for inspections of the additional facilities). However, this would result in an overall saving pa of around £25K.]*
- 2.11 Councils establish Community Toilet Schemes in collaboration with businesses to ensure that clean and accessible toilet facilities are available to the public at no cost, enhancing convenience and public health. These schemes have been largely successfully across the UK, since they were first introduced nearly 20 years ago.
- 2.12 The more local businesses that take part in a Community Toilet Scheme, mean there are more public toilet options available for residents and visitors.
- 2.13 Local authorities that operate Community Toilet Schemes are able to provide fewer purpose-built public facilities in these areas. The maintenance and upkeep

costs of the CTS facilities are shared between the local business and the local authority.

- 2.14 Residents and visitors who use the Community Toilet Scheme facilities lead to increased foot traffic to well-placed participating businesses. This increase in foot traffic can lead to higher sales and economic benefits for the local economy.
- 2.15 In addition to Council Officers inspections, local businesses regularly inspect and clean their toilets. This often leads to high hygiene standards and are less likely to be vandalised compared to standalone public toilets.
- 2.16 Participating businesses can benefit from positive publicity and enhanced reputation for contributing to the community. Businesses that are a part of a Community Toilet Scheme have a sense of pride and responsibility.
- 2.17 Across Kent there are several existing Community Toilet Schemes. Some Local authorities argue that the Community Toilet Scheme provides a cost-effective, cleaner alternative to traditional public toilets and it is the main solution for some town centres.
- 2.18 Maidstone Borough Council's Community Toilet Scheme operates within the town centre and has 9 businesses that participate.
- 2.19 Ashford Borough Council's Community Toilet Scheme also operates within its town centre where there are 11 businesses that participate.
- 2.20 Gravesham Borough Council's Community Toilet Scheme has 6 businesses that participate across Gravesend.
- 2.21 Dover Town Council also reports having at least 2 businesses in their Community Toilet Scheme.
- 2.22 There are a wide range of businesses that operate within Swale. However, to ensure a fair and transparent process, without over provision and therefore higher costs, the selection of businesses to take part in Swale Borough Council's Community Toilet Scheme should follow an agreed set of criteria. Sections 2.23 - 2.36 cover the proposed criteria for our scheme.
- 2.23 **Location** - The most important factor in determining whether a business can join the Community Toilet Scheme is the location of the business. Businesses must be well placed with a priority towards locations that Swale maintained public conveniences have been closed.
- 2.24 Factors that determine the criteria are distance to nearest public convenience and the population it serves.
- 2.25 In order to benefit residents, visitors and the businesses themselves and prevent oversupply, no other public toilet (including Community Toilet Scheme toilets)

should be available within a 1 mile (1.6 km) radius. That is, businesses interested in the scheme must meet the first aspect of the location criteria where there are no other public toilets within a 1 mile (1.6 km) radius.

- 2.26 The population served by a business wishing to take part in the Community Toilet Scheme must be substantial. Priority is given to locations in town centres, beachfronts or those that serve people who are particularly vulnerable. Businesses taking part in the Community Toilet Scheme cannot be in remote locations that will not make a significant impact. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.27 **Operating Hours** - Local businesses may operate on the days and hours that best suits their needs and still be a part of the Community Toilet Scheme.
- 2.28 Nonetheless, to ensure that residents and visitors can best benefit from public toilets there are requirements on how often business will offer their facilities. Specifically, the number of days the Community Toilet Scheme business operate and the amounts of hours they are open for in a given week.
- 2.29 To meet the operating hours criteria, businesses are expected to operate a minimum of 6 days each week.
- 2.30 Businesses must also be open to members of the public at least 42 hours each week.
- 2.31 **Facilities** - Inclusive public toilets are designed to serve the widest range of users, providing features such as wheelchair access and baby-changing facilities. Despite this, many businesses may not always have these facilities available.
- 2.32 All businesses are required to have wheelchair access to members of the public who want to use toilets free of charge.
- 2.33 Baby changing facilities are not a requirement of the facility's criteria. Though, businesses with baby changing facilities are prioritised.
- 2.34 **Longevity** - It is important that businesses that take part in the Community Toilet Scheme remain a part of the scheme as long as possible. Businesses that withdraw from the scheme causes reputational damage as well as administrative burdens.
- 2.35 To mitigate high turnover rates within the Community Toilet Scheme, only businesses that have a proven track record of stability can take part in the scheme. Many sources indicate that 50% or more of small businesses fail within five years. As such, the Community Toilet Scheme only accepts applicants that have been trading for 5 years or more. This does not apply to franchises who already have a track record of trading successfully.

- 2.36 **Reimbursements** - Every business that takes part in the Community Toilet Scheme is eligible for contributions towards upkeep. The amount awarded is dependent on the opening hours and facilities available. The business will be responsible for procuring all consumables, cleansing and maintenance.

2.36

Opening Hours of Facilities	Wheelchair access	Baby Change Facility	Award (annually)
42	Yes	No	£700
42	Yes	Yes	£800
43 – 50	Yes	No	£800
43 – 50	Yes	Yes	£900
51 - 58	Yes	No	£900
51 - 58	Yes	Yes	£1,000
59 - 66	Yes	No	£1,000
59 - 66	Yes	Yes	£1,100
67 - 74	Yes	No	£1,100
67 - 74	Yes	Yes	£1,200
74+	Yes	No	£1,200
74+	Yes	Yes	£1,300

Figure 2 to show financial reimbursements for schemes accepted onto the community toilet scheme.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That members discuss the next steps for those facilities not being transferred to other organisations and advise if they support further closures to create additional savings to deliver the Medium-Term Financial Plan and fund the costs of a Community Toilet Scheme.
- 3.2 To endorse the Community Toilet Scheme selection criteria based on location, operating hours, facilities and longevity of interested businesses and for Members to identify how the scheme will be funded sustainably
- 3.3 To agree the reimbursement figures for approved scheme members once sustainable funding has been identified.
- 3.4 To refer to Policy and Resources Committee should the costs of any decisions exceed the available budget.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 **Option 1** - The 'do nothing' option would be to not implement the Community Toilet Scheme. This option was rejected as the CTS scheme would offer a 'value for money' option to provide additional clean and accessible toilet facilities at convenient locations. Businesses, residents, visitors and Members have indicated support for the Community Toilet Scheme. However, the option to not

introduce the CTS may be a valid option if there are no funds identified for the CTS scheme.

- 4.2 **Option 2** - Offer businesses no reimbursement for allowing residents and visitors to use their facilities. Although this would be the most financially beneficial option for the Council, this would not encourage collaboration with businesses and is unlikely to attract any scheme participants.
- 4.3 **Option 3** - To offer businesses more financial incentives would potentially attract more scheme participants. However, this option would negatively affect the Council's financial position more than the current proposals.
- 4.4 **Option 4** - To encourage a more extensive uptake of Community toilets, including in areas where the council currently has public facilities (paragraph 2.25 suggests proposes not to open a community toilet within 1 mile of a public toilet). With a successful network of community toilets in place then the council facilities could be closed to fund the costs of the CTS and make necessary savings. 'Invest to Save' funding streams may need to be identified in the short term for this option. The new contract was set up to allow the removal of some facilities in some areas at no additional charge i.e if an asset was to be transferred or closed.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Businesses that initially expressed an interest in the Community Toilet Scheme were asked how much it currently cost to maintain their toilets. They were also asked what percentage of contributions they think would be suitable from the Council towards the upkeep of facilities. This helped formulate figures in Figure 2.
- 5.2 Fifty-three businesses across the borough were engaged with. Six advised that they would be interested in joining the Community Toilet Scheme and three said that they would not. The remainder did not respond.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Community Toilet Scheme supports several Corporate Plan objectives. These include 'Running the Council' by working within our resources and delivering in a transparent and efficient way. The 'Economy' objective is supported through working with businesses to increase customer footfall and free facilities for local people.
Financial, Resource and Property	The Environment Services and Climate Change Committee delegated authority to the Section 151 Officer and Head of Legal to award a Provision of Minor Maintenance and Cleansing of Public Conveniences Contract to the winning bid.

	Following a full procurement exercise, the Provision of Minor Maintenance and Cleansing of Public Conveniences Contract cost increased from the previous tender several years earlier. This is primarily due to inflation and the uncertainty risks associated with several facilities that were anticipated to be closed or transferred to Town and Parish Councils pending negotiations. The new contract cost from 2026/27 is £299.3K. Members previously made a decision to implement a £100K saving in public conveniences – which reduced the budget from £350K to £250K in 2026-27. However, an additional £50K contribution was added as a contingency during budget setting to recognise the expected increase in contract costs. Work to date alongside facility closures have resulted in an overall £50K saving towards the £100K target set by Members. There is currently no budget to fund a Community Toilet Scheme without a new funding stream or savings such as transfers or closures being identified. Based on an estimated six businesses joining the CTS and receiving up to £1300 per annum, there would be additional cost of £7,800 for reimbursements. Swale Council Officers will be required to undertake regular compliance inspections at any Community Toilet Schemes. Inspections currently take place at public conveniences so resources will depend upon how many current facilities close and how many new Community Toilets activate. Based upon an estimate of 3 hours per month to encompass all related activities (travel, inspection, report, feedback, resolutions etc), the workload equates to 0.02FTE pa per facility. This is the cost equivalent of £773 pa per facility. This report invites discussion on the next steps for those facilities not being transferred to other organisations. Further closures would produce additional savings to support the Medium-Term Financial Plan.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide public conveniences. Legal officers have viewed the proposed selection criteria and created an associated agreement document for representatives of

	participating businesses to sign once accepted onto the Community Toilet Scheme.
Crime and Disorder	Public conveniences can be subjected to vandalism. Private facilities which are part of a business are less likely to get vandalised.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None
Health and Wellbeing	The provision of public conveniences can bring health and wellbeing benefits to members of the public. Residents with health issues may rely on public toilets when making decisions to visit local areas. A Community Toilet Scheme may result in more toilets being available making them more accessible to residents.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	Toilet provision is important to some vulnerable residents. Public conveniences may be particularly beneficial for older people, those with disabilities, pregnant women and children.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	There is risk of reputational damage if the 'community toilet' scheme fails to meet commitments. Through regular inspections, legal agreements and intensive promotion, these risks are minimised. There is a risk that decisions to close SBC toilets are based on information that cannot be sustained e.g. community toilet operators may close the overall business or decide not continue with the scheme in the long term.
Equality and Diversity	The introduction of Community Toilet Scheme facilities positively impacts particular groups, including older people, families with small children, disabled people and pregnant women. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the Public Conveniences Review in 2025. Closures clearly can impact some protected characteristics which is why clear evidence based decision is required.
Privacy and Data Protection	None.
Local Government Reorganisation	Many other Local Authorities already operate a community toilet scheme.

7 Appendices

Appendix I: Equality Impact Assessment for Community Toilet Scheme.

8 Background Papers

12 November 2025, Environmental Services and Climate Change - Public Conveniences Review - Consultation Outcome

<https://democracy.swale.gov.uk/documents/s32014/Environmental%20Services%20and%20Climate%20Change%20-%20Public%20Conveniences%20Review%20Consultation%20Outcome.pdf>

Equality Impact Assessment for the initial public conveniences review

<https://democracy.swale.gov.uk/documents/s32016/Appendix%20II%20-%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf>