

Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee	
Meeting Date	12 th November 2025
Report Title	Public Conveniences Review - Consultation Outcome
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure (for service provision) Joanne Johnson, Head of Place (for property assets)
Lead Officer	Andre Bowen, Service Improvement & Project Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. To note the outcomes of the consultation exercise, as shown in Appendix I. 2. To close three public conveniences from 01 April 2026; 1. Milton Regis High Street 2. The Forum, Sittingbourne 3. The White House, Minster 3. a) To offer to transfer seven public conveniences to Town and Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations; 1. Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre 2. Central Car Park, Faversham 3. Rose Street, Sheerness 4. Beachfields, Sheerness 5. Leysdown Beach Services 6. The Spinney, Leysdown 7. Queenborough Park b) To include these toilets for a 12-month period to the contract whilst negotiations continue with the above Town/ Parish councils. Should the transfers not occur within this timeframe, options for these public conveniences will come back to this committee in order to achieve the budget requirements as detailed in 2.21 and 2.22. 4. To aim to introduce a Community Toilet Scheme in the areas impacted by closure.

	5. To authorise officers to undertake a tender process for the opening, cleansing and maintenance of the remaining facilities, considering the matters raised in 2.27 – 2.30. 6. Should the recommendations not be approved and as such the savings not achieved, committee are asked to identify where else savings could be made within the scope of this committee.
--	--

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 10th July 2025, the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee considered a report on the Business Case and Consultation Launch of the Public Conveniences Review. The purpose of the report was to consult with residents on matching the service with the budget in the medium-term financial plan.
- 1.2 A public consultation was launched on 11th July 2025 for 12 weeks. The purpose of the consultation was to get the views of Swale residents, visitors, community groups and businesses. Everyone was encouraged to share their honest opinions, particularly from representative groups such as those with a disability, older people, families with young children or those who are pregnant.
- 1.3 This report and the accompanying appendices set out the details of the consultation, the responses and the formulation of the recommendations.

2 Background

- 2.1 Swale Borough Council currently maintains 16 public conveniences for use by the general public free of charge. The majority of public conveniences are open between 07.00 and 19.00 Mon – Sun, with some facilities having seasonal changes. There is one public convenience which is currently closed due to previously identified structural issues. The full list of public conveniences is as follows:
 - The Forum, Sittingbourne
 - Library Car Park, Sittingbourne
 - Rose Street, Sheerness
 - Central Car Park, Faversham
 - Leysdown Beach Services, Leysdown
 - Minster Leas, Minster
 - Faversham Recreation Ground, Faversham
 - Milton Regis High Street, Milton Regis
 - Queenborough Park, Queenborough
 - Bartons Point, Minster
 - The White House, Minster (temporarily closed)
 - Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre, Faversham
 - The Spinney, Leysdown

- King George V Playing Field, Sittingbourne
- Milton Creek Country Park, Sittingbourne
- Beachfields, Sheerness

- 2.2 There has not been a major review of toilet provision for a long time, and this was needed to ensure the service remains fit for purpose. As such, the Council carried out a full review of public toilet provision to determine the future of each facility. This has involved looking at usage data, proximity to other facilities, condition of the facilities, interest of town and parish councils in operating the facilities and a public consultation.
- 2.3 Additionally, various options for service delivery were considered such as in-house, contracted out operating models, charging for public convenience use, transferring to Town/Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations and community toilet schemes.
- 2.4 The Council recognises the key role that public conveniences play in the community. They encourage visits to the town centre, tourism, help enhance health and wellbeing and support our vulnerable residents. Many residents consider the availability of toilets when choosing to visit areas.
- 2.5 To ensure that as many Swale residents, visitors, community groups and businesses as possible shared their views on the proposals, everyone was consulted and encouraged to share their honest opinions through both paper and online forms. We also targeted particular organisations/representatives of groups who are likely to be impacted by the proposals.
- 2.6 Over 750 individuals and several community groups responded to the public consultations, with demographic data indicating that the sample closely reflects the makeup of Swale's population. Respondents largely agreed with some proposals and disagreed with others, as shown in Appendix I.

Closing public toilets

- 2.7 Those who completed the public toilet facilities survey and answered when asked which public toilets should be closed, stated that Milton Regis High Street (30%), The Forum Sittingbourne (22%) and The White House, Minster (21%) should be closed.
- 2.8 Many of the respondents suggest not closing any public conveniences. There was a petition signed by 124 individuals asking Swale Borough Council to reconsider the proposal to close or transfer ownership of the public toilets on the Spinney. The petition stated that the toilets are a vital public service, which serves the residents and holiday makers of Leysdown alike and their closure will severely impact the local community. There was also another petition signed by 245 individuals requesting that neither the Forum nor the Library Car Park public conveniences should be closed. Written submission from Swale's Senior Forum also highlighted the importance of the Forum and Library Car Park public toilet

facilities to those who are older, families with young children and/or those who have specific health conditions. The Swale's Senior Forum also advised that toilets aid in allowing vulnerable people to shop, socialise and lead a normal life.

- 2.9 There were several alternative suggestions, including charging Swale residents and visitors for the use of public toilets. While charging per use of public conveniences, would generate an income, this was previously explored and found to be not viable. Charging at public conveniences incurs additional costs to operate for the Council. The income gained from charging for the use of public conveniences would be insufficient to cover the costs. Coupled with the expected reduction of public conveniences users, where charging is introduced and with the adverse impact on those with lower incomes, charging was not recommended.
- 2.10 Other recommendations from the public included cut spending from elsewhere. This was not part of the original brief for the review but clearly if the Committee decides not to close or transfer the facilities, then budget savings from other services will need to be found as part of the 2026-2027 budget setting process. Additionally, insourcing of public conveniences was also explored but was found to provide the least amount of savings and introduce the most risks.
- 2.11 Area Committee recommendations included not closing any public toilets prior to the local government reorganisation. However, until the reorganisation is completed, district and county councils are responsible for ensuring services are delivered in the best interest of their residents and a balanced budget is a requirement by Local Government legislation.
- 2.12 Throughout the consultation, it was also clear that members of the public want well maintained public toilets. Opportunities to improve the condition of the remaining public conveniences, while improving energy and water efficiency where applicable, can be explored following the outcomes of the review. This could be through the use of existing external grant funding like the UK Shared Prosperity Fund or the Council's reserves/capital funding.
- 2.13 It is recommended that the Milton Regis High Street, Forum and the White House public conveniences are closed based on the findings of the review and public consultation and in order to meet the required savings.
- 2.14 In particular, the poor condition of the Milton Regis High Street, Forum and the White House public conveniences has led to this recommendation. It is estimated that the planned maintenance works costs required for these facilities between 2023 and 2032 would cost the Council £350k. The Whitehouse is currently closed due to the disabled block suffering from subsidence.
- 2.15 In addition, the Milton Regis High Street and the White House public conveniences have the lowest amount of visits from Swale residents and visitors, and are the most cost ineffective to operate with neither having any baby

changing facilities. The Whitehouse toilets are in close proximity to a range of other facilities (namely Minster Leas and Barton's Point).

- 2.16 While the Forum does not have low usage, it is located within close proximity to the Library Car Park public convenience which is central to both ends of the high street and the Forum also has some of the highest reports of antisocial behaviour in Swale. As explained earlier, funds could be used to upgrade the Library car park facility to ensure it could cope with the increased usage.

Town or Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations managing the public toilets in their respective areas

- 2.17 Seven toilet facilities in parished areas were suggested for transfer. Initial discussions have been held between the Property team and the relevant Councils. Whilst there has been some initial interest, the timescales required to legally transfer property mean it is virtually impossible that any transfers will be achieved by the time we need to release the tender.

1. Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre
2. Central Car Park, Faversham
3. Rose Street, Sheerness
4. Beachfields, Sheerness
5. Leysdown Beach Services
6. The Spinney, Leysdown
7. Queenborough Park

- 2.18 Consultation respondents mostly indicated that there were no concerns with Town or Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations managing the public conveniences in their respective areas.

- 2.19 Several respondents indicated that they were unsure how the costs would be covered. Town and Parish Councils have the statutory authority to set their own annual budgets. This enables them to plan and allocate resources independently to support and enhance a wide range of local services and amenities such as parks, community centres, and public toilets.

- 2.20 At Area Committees, concerns were raised if there would be any benefit to Town or Parish Councils for taking on public conveniences. Town and Parish Councils and some other appropriate local organisations are able to effectively keep public conveniences open in their respective areas where the Borough may choose to close them and respond to local demand e.g. amended opening hours. These proposals intend to make savings that will help the Borough council reach a balanced budget position based on transferring 7 public conveniences to Town and Parish Councils. If Town and Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations do not take on management responsibilities of these 7 public conveniences, then two further considerations will need to be made by the Council a) additional proposals for closure b) further saving from other services to reach a balanced budget position.

- 2.21 Picking up on a), there are a range of considerations. The existing budget would not allow for all 7 to be placed back into the contract. The two facilities at Leysdown are very close to each other. In the discussions at Area Committee, Leysdown Parish Council acknowledged this and therefore a reduction of one site (recommended the Spinney) would help to achieve further savings.
- 2.22 At the time of publishing, we are recently aware of a potential interest in a local organisation taking on Milton Regis toilets. We have not pursued this fully and need to investigate the terms of our Deed and whether a transfer of this facility is feasible. This does not change the fact that the facility is one of the lowest used, and in poor condition, so the recommendation is still for closure.

Businesses allowing the public to use their facilities free of charge during their operating hours

- 2.23 Most Swale residents and visitors responded that they would be in favour of a community toilet scheme.
- 2.24 However, several potential disadvantages have been suggested, such as insufficient suitable premises, businesses turning away people, the public being deterred from some places such as public houses, the costs and opening hours. These concerns could be addressed by regularly monitoring participating businesses and advertising, with only suitable, inclusive well-placed businesses with convenient operating hours eligible to take part in the scheme.
- 2.25 At Area Committees, it was also highlighted that all participating businesses in the community toilet scheme must be accessible and long-standing. This would be included in the selection criterion.
- 2.26 In the decision-making process, due regard has been given to the public sector equality duty and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has also been completed to test this, as seen in Appendix II. Closures of public conveniences may have a negative impact on service users, with some groups—such as older people and disabled individuals—potentially being disproportionately affected. Although there are recommended closures of public conveniences in some areas, this is to ensure the service can operate within budget and not impact on other council services. Public conveniences are a non-statutory service and statutory services have to be prioritised with the limited council budget available. Furthermore, most of the closures are recommended in areas where another suitable facility is in close proximity. These recommendations align with the ‘Running the Council’, Environment’ and ‘Economy’ Corporate Plan objectives. The public conveniences review aims to provide public conveniences on a sustainable basis by working with local businesses and Town and Parish Councils. This is to increase the number and improve the standard of toilets that are available for public use within Swale and mitigate the negative effects of closures of less used public toilets that are in poor condition.

Decisions needed for the continuation of the service from April 2026

- 2.27 The existing public toilet cleansing and maintenance contract is due to expire on 31st March 2026. There is no further provision to extend and subject to approval from this committee, the intention is to go straight to tender in November. The committee debated the business cases for insourcing and outsourcing in July 2025.
- 2.28 It is expected that the unit rate per facility will go up since the last time we tendered the service. Therefore, if Members decided to keep the service the same, then not only would it not generate the intended savings, but it would add further budget growth/pressure.
- 2.29 Officers have approached the market to consider whether reductions in Attendants (cleaners based at the facilities during the day) or times of opening would reduce the budget. It is proposed that the tender will therefore include variant bids to allow Members to make final decisions when the Contract award report comes to committee.
- 2.30 Due to the fact that any asset transfers are unlikely to be confirmed at the time of tender submission, it is proposed to undertake two lots. Lot 1 would be for the six facilities proposed to remain in the Council's service. Lot 2 would include those proposed for transfer with a separate pricing mechanism based on 6-month periods of operation. This would allow continued service during the transfer process but a clear indication that they would be removable when the transfer was completed.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To note the outcomes of the consultation exercise, as shown in Appendix I
- 3.2 To close three public conveniences from 01 April 2026;
 - 1. Milton Regis High Street
 - 2. The Forum
 - 3. The White House
- 3.3
 - a) To offer to transfer seven public conveniences to Town and Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations;
 - 1. Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre
 - 2. Central Car Park, Faversham
 - 3. Rose Street, Sheerness
 - 4. Beachfields, Sheerness
 - 5. Leysdown Beach Services
 - 6. The Spinney, Leysdown
 - 7. Queenborough Park
 - b) To include these toilets for a 12-month period to the contract whilst negotiations continue with the above Town/ Parish councils. Should the transfers

not occur within this timeframe, options for these public conveniences will come back to this committee in order to achieve the budget requirements as detailed in 2.21 and 2.22.

- 3.4 To aim to introduce a Community Toilet Scheme in the areas impacted by closure
- 3.5 To authorise officers to undertake a tender process for the opening, cleansing and maintenance of the remaining facilities, considering the matters raised in 2.27 – 2.30.
- 3.6 Should the recommendations not be approved and as such the savings not achieved, committee are asked to identify where else savings could be made within the scope of this committee

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 In the July 2025 Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee decision, a range of options were rejected. These were do nothing and continue with the current contract, insourcing the service or charging for the use of public conveniences.
- 4.2 To close more or fewer public conveniences facilities. These options all have potential negative consequences and such have been rejected for the reasons below;
 - a) Closing fewer public conveniences: While some members of the public do not want any public conveniences closed, the required budget savings cannot be achieved otherwise.
 - b) Closing more public conveniences: Although further savings could be achieved from closing more public conveniences, members of the public have highlighted a need for public conveniences where they are well used and maintained, and the financial savings can be achieved by the current recommendations.
- 4.3 To transfer more or fewer public conveniences facilities. These options also have potential negative consequences and such have been rejected for the reasons below;
 - a) Transferring fewer public conveniences: If fewer public conveniences are transferred to Town or Parish Councils, then the required budget savings cannot be achieved.
 - b) Transferring more public conveniences: Not all public conveniences are within Town or Parish Council footprints, but those that are within a Town or Parish Council that are not being transferred, it is not possible to do so. That is, there are several public convenience that are a part of a larger building not specifically related to public conveniences.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Officers from across the Council which includes representatives from the Property Team, Contract Management and Legal have reviewed the public convenience provision provided by the Council and proposed the recommendations which formed the basis of the consultation.
- 5.2 A public consultation was carried out based the recommendations in the July Committee report. The public consultation lasted 12 weeks was opened to Swale residents, visitors, community groups and businesses to ensure as many people could take part. There were also posters in all the public toilet facilities, posters in all Council offices along with paper forms, advertised on the Swale website and social media, shared with the local press, Area Committee presentations and directly contacting representative organisations (such as, Swale CVS, Age UK, Swale Seniors Forum, Freedom Centre and others). The summary of the over 750 responses received can be seen in Appendix I. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed to show how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in decision-making, as seen in Appendix II.
- 5.3 Parish and Town Councils were contacted about the review of public conveniences and asked to share their views including whether they would be interested in taking over responsibility. Collectively, there are 7 public conveniences that Parish and Town Councils that have set out an initial interest in taking on management responsibilities.
- 5.4 Where there were possible closures of public conveniences, local businesses were asked if they would consider opening their facilities to the public. A total of 6 businesses expressed an interest.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposed way forward will support several Corporate Plan objectives. These include 'Running the Council' by working within our resources, and delivering in a transparent and efficient way. The 'Environment' objective is supported by reducing the environmental impact on the air and treated water wastage. While the 'Economy' objective is supported through working with businesses to increase customer footfall and free facilities for local people.
Financial, Resource and Property	The financial impacts of each option will vary. The 'do nothing' option would create no savings and the costs would increase each year with inflation.

	For 25/26, officers commissioned the +1 option available within the tender. The costs were in excess of budget c.£196k, due to both contract inflation and to the application of a £100k budget reduction in 2023. The recommended mitigation for this is to close some facilities on a permanent basis (including the removal/transfer of those closed at Eastchurch and Rushenden), which would deliver the savings proposed in the medium-term financial plan. If all of the proposals were accepted then it is estimated that an annual saving of circa £250,000 could be made, although this would be phased depending upon the time taken for asset transfers and any investment in remaining facilities. Transferring the assets to Town or Parish Councils may likely require a public convenience time-limited dowry payment to take on the assets, to cover maintenance liabilities / consumables / legal fees. If the proposed closures are not agreed, the Council will be unable to realise the planned savings, and the revenue budget will face additional growth pressures. Research from other Councils, shows that Community toilet scheme partners would require a small fee to retain interest and protect provision for residents. A ring-fenced allocation for toilet improvements has been made in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant for 25/26 totalling £40,000. Closed public toilets will be secured / declared as surplus / disposed of appropriately in line with the agreed Disposals Policy. The anticipated savings cannot be realised until the asset transfers are fully completed.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide public conveniences. Transferring the assets to Town or Parish Councils and 'Community toilet' agreements would require Legal input. A timescale for completing the asset transfers ahead of 31st March 2026 is unviable. As such, the Council will need to make temporary arrangements until the asset transfers are completed.
Crime and Disorder	Public conveniences are partly attended where there is a higher risk of crime / vandalism if unattended. Future investment needs to 'design out' problems. Evidence of this can be seen in recent new build toilet provision.

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The closure of several public conveniences reduces the impact of water wastage and emissions from Council and Contractor operations. Any investment plan should look at reducing emissions from carbon reduction mechanisms such as LED lighting, timed lighting, reduced water usage etc.
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.
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 are financial and legal risks associated with asset transfers and the community toilet scheme. However, advice has been sought from the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal to address these concerns. There is a risk of reputational damage through closure of facilities. Residents have been consulted on the proposed changes, efforts will be made to explain the decision clearly and in future signage/website information to help direct residents and visitors to Swale Borough Council facilities. 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 are risks of vandalism from a reduced service or removed service.
Equality and Diversity	Closure or reduced provision may impact particular groups more than others as identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment, as seen in Appendix II. However, this approach represents a proportionate means for the Council to deliver a balanced budget, considering that public conveniences are not a statutory requirement for the Council and there are mitigations in place to reduce the impact on those with protected characteristics that are likely to be impacted.
Privacy and Data Protection	None.

7 Appendices

Appendix I: Public consultation summary
Appendix II: Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix III: Business Case

8 Background Papers

[10 July 2025, Environmental Services and Climate Change - Public Conveniences Review - Business Case and Consultation Launch](#)