

# Communities, City Management & Air Quality Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	16 September 2023
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Public Conveniences Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Amy Jones - Director of Environment
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cllr Dimoldenberg
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Fairer Westminster
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## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Public Conveniences (PCs) service is facing a number of key challenges:

- The facilities are nearing end of life, which limits user access and their experience (and potentially gives a poor visitor impression). This also leads to high maintenance and compliance costs.
- We are generating much lower income than anticipated as a result of closures, repairs and coin-operated entry. Service costs have also increased to cover expanded temporary toilets provision, costly security/attendants provision and essential compliance works.
- Anti-Social Behaviour and rough sleepers occupying facilities. Ongoing security provision is costly and unsustainable.

1.2 In this context, the service has been reviewed, and this report presents the strategy proposals and associated changes to the modernisation programme against the backdrop of the current arrangements.

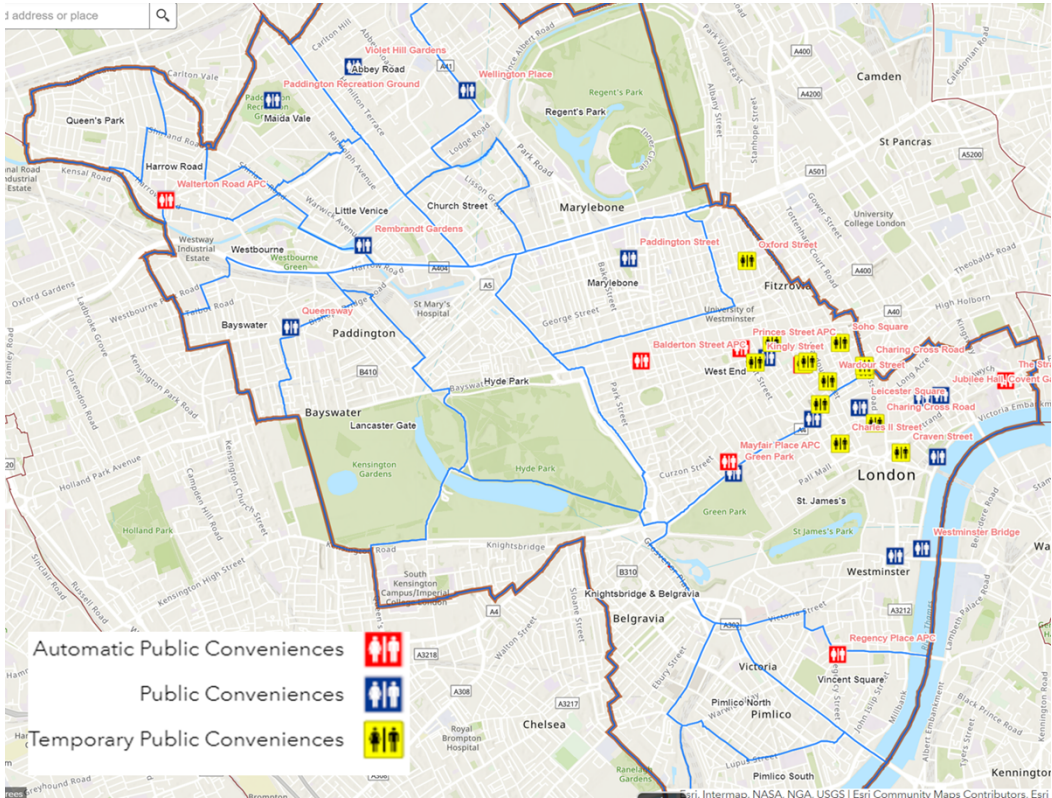
**2. Key Matters for the Committee’s Consideration**

2.1 The Committee are asked to review the elements of the Public Conveniences service, and to comment on the renewed strategy and the proposed way forward with the modernisation programme.

**3. Context**

3.1 There is no statutory duty on local authorities to provide PCs. Over the past two decades many local authorities have chosen to close public toilets and instead moved to promoting ‘community toilet’ schemes whereby cafes, bars and restaurants are incentivised to offer the use of their facilities to the general public rather than just customers.

3.2 Westminster conversely has continued to directly provide PC facilities, particularly in visitor hot spots, such as the West End, as illustrated in the map below.



The PC portfolio is currently comprised of:

- 18 PCs
- 5 single-person Auto PCs – primarily provided for disabled users.
- 3 Fixed Urinals

- 24 temporary urinals/portaloos deployed across the West End from Thursday evening to Monday morning each week and for weekday events.

3.3 The strategy for the management of PCs was last reviewed in January 2020. That approach included a capital investment programme to modernise and refurbish facilities, as well as the rationalisation of some sites. However, the Covid-19 pandemic, March 2020 onwards, led to a delay in implementing that strategy.

3.4 A refreshed strategy and update on the modernisation programme was agreed with the Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality in July 2023, with a focus on reducing the key challenges that are impacting the service.

3.5 There are ongoing commercial pressures associated with the provision of PCs that are also relevant.

3.6 Sites are categorised as *commercial* where they are located in high footfall visitor/commuter locations or *community sites* which are in residential areas with no nearby alternative PCs or locations where fouling/urination issues would increase if no facilities were available. An entrance fee (currently 50p) is charged at commercial sites whilst community sites are free entry.

#### 4. Current Arrangements

4.1 Built Public Conveniences – These are traditional facilities in mostly historical locations below ground level. The table below shows the locations of the current built conveniences.

Location	Ward	Category	Entrance Fee
1. Covent Garden	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
2. Green Park	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
3. Parliament Street	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
4. Embankment	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
5. Westminster Bridge	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
6. Leicester Sq.	St, James's	Commercial	Yes
7. Great Marlborough Street	West End	Commercial	Yes
8. Piccadilly Circus	West End	Commercial	Yes

9. Paddington St	Marylebone High Street	Community Benefit	No
10. Queensway	Bayswater	Community Benefit	No
11. Wellington Place	Regent's Park	Community Benefit	No
12. Jubilee Hall	St, James's	Community Benefit	No
13. WALTERTON ROAD	Harrow Road	Community Benefit	No

There are 5 additional toilets located in our gardens, parks, and recreation grounds including: Rembrandt, Violet Hill, and St. Anne's Gardens; Queens Park Gardens and Paddington Recreation Ground with all of these facilities being free of charge.

#### 4.2 Currently, there are a number of challenges that the service is facing:

Infrastructure - This includes the historical nature of sites and underground locations which limit accessibility. The facilities are in poor condition. Coupled with this, is inadequate wayfinding and external signage - potentially giving a poor overall visitor impression. This has led to high maintenance and compliance costs. The commercial sites still operate coin-controlled barriers which results in low usage and reduced income.

Commercial and contractual – We are generating much lower income than anticipated, primarily because the entrance barriers are still cash and in the post-Covid world, fewer people now carry cash/coins. Service costs have also increased to cover expanded temporary toilets provision in the West End, security staff to deter criminal activity/ASB, and essential compliance works.

Criminal activity and anti-social behaviour - Ongoing security provision is costly and unsustainable. Problems include occurrences of attendants being attacked, criminal activity within our facilities (including drug use and sexual attack), families exposed to witnessing sexual activity and rough sleepers occupying facilities.

Data and insights - The level of usage of our toilet facilities is not known and therefore we have little knowledge on whether they are appropriate to local needs or represent value for money. We are at present installing monitoring sensors at key locations to try to build a clearer picture. However, we need to look holistically at issues such as deterring street urination and have a clearer understanding of the role that the current PC provision is playing in managing this activity.

4.3 Automatic Public Conveniences and Urinals – These facilities are ground level modular style automatic conveniences which support accessibility requirements. The table below shows the location and type of facility. The Pimlico Station APC is a different design to the other APCs and is free entry for all users. All other APCs provide free entry for disabled users with a Radar key and an entrance fee of 50p is charged to other users.

Location & Type	Ward
Walterton Road (APC)	Harrow Road
Broadwick Street (APC)	West End
Balderton Street (APC)	West End
Regency Place (APC)	Vincent Square
Pimlico Station (APC)	Pimlico North
Soho Sq. (Urinal)	West End
Regency Place (Urinal)	Vincent Square
Adelaide St (Urinal)	St. James's

4.4 The issues with the conventional PCs set out in 4.2 above also pertain to the APC sites, specifically that they are more than 20 years old and nearing the end of their expected working life. The exception to this is Broadwick Street which has undergone a recent refurbishment - providing a modern and safe alternative to the built facility at Carnaby Street (junction with Great Marlborough Street) which is prone to ASB issues. The APC sites are also prone to rough sleepers and homelessness concerns.

4.5 Temporary Public Conveniences – These are urinals/portaloos which are easy to deploy and deal with street urination and human fouling issues in the West End. Since September 2022, the number of units deployed has more than doubled when compared with pre-Covid deployment.

4.6 Pre-Covid deployment consisted of 12 urinals from Friday to Monday. During Covid, social distancing warranted an increase in facilities, as well as a drive to provide additional units to meet gender equality requirements. Post Covid, we continue to deploy 24 urinals and portaloos from Thursday evening to Monday morning. The additional deployment days align with new working patterns, and the resulting impact on weekend hospitality demand.

4.7 The main issue with these facilities is that they are not aesthetically pleasing, and as such residents and offices object to them being sited nearby or outside of their entrances for a longer period.

4.8 The key benefit of these units, however, is they are easy to move around to tackle changing problem areas.

4.9 Education & Enforcement – The council’s City Inspectors are in regular liaison with the Police and other partners to identify problem urination/fouling locations and to deter this anti-social behaviour. The council has also started deploying ‘anti-pee’ paint across problem locations around Soho with this initiative having received very positive feedback from local residents. The paint essentially deflects the urine back onto the user’s clothing/shoes rather than absorbing into the brickwork.

4.10 Other – The service will be working with the communities team in the coming months to review and build on previous work to introduce a Community Toilet Scheme. This will involve working with stakeholders across the city to find solutions that will complement the existing public network as well as those in public buildings.

#### 4.11 Finance

The total annual net cost for providing the service is £1.8m, but an overspend of £110K is forecast for the current financial year. Reasons for this forecast are summarised below:

- There are historic income shortfalls due to the condition of the sites, along with the decline in coin usage and the barriers not having a contactless option. The planned renovation programme including new contactless barriers will help to resolve this but site closures while works take place will in the short term, increase this under-recovery of fees.
- Additional security has been required at Carnaby Street due to antisocial behaviour which has also resulted in the overspend. If security is required for more than three months this will further increase pressure on the overall budget. (Daily cost of 2 staff for the duration of opening 11am to 6pm, is £250.)
- The cost of provision of temporary toilets has increased since pre-Covid from below £100k to a forecast of £345k this year. This relates to increases in both the number of units and nights they are deployed, along with introducing portaloos for equality reasons where previously only temporary urinals were provided. Thursdays have become busier for hospitality in the City due to increased working from home lowering office worker numbers on Fridays, therefore this year, the service has expanded to operate Thursday evening to Monday morning each week.

## 5. **Proposed Public Conveniences Strategy**

5.1 The strategy is to provide well designed, safe, and accessible facilities, where they are needed. To achieve this, we are reviewing and improving the existing

suite of facilities to ensure that service provision meets demand, is accessible, and is of a high quality.

- 5.2 The outcome will result in an improved user experience, a more inclusive service, a safer environment for customers and workers, and facilities which are easier to maintain and keep compliant through the:
- Use of data and intelligence to understand the public convenience requirements and establishing a suite of locations that meet service needs. This will take the form of electronic counters to better understand usage. These will be superseded with the installation of a contactless payments system which will inform usage and operating times.
  - Creation of a suite of cost effective, manageable, and accessible public conveniences that are easy to clean and maintain,
  - Reduction in the numbers of incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (including rough sleeping) and more secure facilities using architect plans and designs,
  - Increase in income generated to break even at commercially viable sites as a result of improved facilities and contactless payment systems,
  - Integration of the contracts for the built and automatic conveniences in the longer term.
- 5.3 Other aspects of the strategy will include exploring the integration of parks toilets and other toilets across the wider estate into a single service area.

## **6. Modernisation Programme**

- 6.1 To achieve the aims of the proposed strategy, 8 of the built toilet facility sites (1-8 in table in 4.1 above) have been identified for refurbishment proposals, and 'Stage 2' detailed design proposals are being drawn up to create smart, accessible, well signed, easily maintained, and easy to access facilities.
- 6.2 The remaining 4 sites (9-12 in table in 4.1 above) will be subject to a refresh and update to bring the condition and standard up to date. The last site is Walterton Road which will be subject to the outcome of the wider Maida Hill Market programme.
- 6.3 A procurement exercise has commenced for a call-off contract to upgrade the APC sites in the coming months.
- 6.4 The public conveniences modernisation programme has a total budget of £6.5m. Following approval and the implementation delays referenced in 3.3 above, the economic landscape has changed with Brexit and high annual inflation. As a result, building costs have increased significantly and the budget is insufficient to include all sites. As such, up to 5 sites (Covent Garden, Green Park, Great Marlborough Street, Embankment and Piccadilly Circus), will be

prioritised under the existing budget. It however makes sense for the service to provide a consistent look and feel across the portfolio and include all facilities under a single modernisation programme. Therefore, further capital bids will be prepared to include the remainder of the built facilities as well as the APCs and fixed permanent urinals into a phased programme of work.

6.5 Designs for the built facilities have been progressed to the next stage of development, and these will be finalised in the coming months. This work in conjunction with the procurement to upgrade the APCs will give an accurate indication of longer-term maintenance and cleaning costs and the carbon impact of the modernisation programme – reducing ongoing water and energy usage are key priorities for the project. Once these detailed design proposals are confirmed, the service will seek relevant approvals in line with the council’s Procurement Code through the Capital Review Group, Commercial Gate Review Board and Cabinet Member for City Management & Air Quality.

6.6 A high level indicative timetable for activity is presented below:

Activity	Description	Scheduled End
Refresh (4 built facilities)	Assessment of works requirement and agreement of works	End October 2023
Modernisation	Installation of cashless facility in built facilities	End November 2023
Refresh (4 built facilities)	Completion of works	End January 2024
APC Procurement	Award of call-off contract to replace/upgrade APCs	End March 2024
Modernisation (8 built facilities)	Completion and agreement of Designs	End March 2024
Modernisation (8 built facilities)	Start of works	April 2024
Modernisation (8 built facilities)	Completion of works	TBC

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Mark Banks**  
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## Background Papers & Appendices

N/A