

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprise Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	13 December 2022
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Comfort Scheme Pilot (Lanark)
----------	--------------------------------------

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to: -

- ◆ provide Community and Enterprise Resources Committee with an update on the comfort scheme pilot (Lanark)

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the evaluation of the comfort scheme pilot be noted;
- (2) that it be noted that, following the evaluation of the pilot, the Council would not continue the scheme; and
- (3) that it be noted that the Council would progress discussions with Lanark Business Improvement District (BID) on the potential continuation of the scheme under their management and operation.

3. Background

3.1. In 2013, the Council made the decision to close all public conveniences, as part of that year's budget process. Over the subsequent 3 years, all the Council's 21 public conveniences were closed to the public. Since then, the Council has continued to make an annual £2k contribution to the New Lanark heritage site for public use of their facilities. There are also 2 local community groups which operate and manage public convenience provision in Larkhall and Biggar.

3.2. At the time, the Council explored extending the comfort scheme arrangement at New Lanark to local businesses in areas where the public convenience was closing. The conclusion was that there were sufficient alternative locations including shops, that provided public access to toilet provision. The final determining factor was the low usage of the existing public conveniences.

3.3. In line with the Business Improvement District (BID) for Lanark, a decision was taken to pilot a comfort scheme (Community Toilet Scheme) initiative from April 2019 to April 2020. The comfort scheme enables local authorities to work in partnership with local businesses to provide access for the public to clean, safe, and accessible toilets in local business premises. Local businesses are paid a small annual fee for providing this access.

4. Comfort Scheme Pilot

- 4.1. Local businesses were written to in March 2019 to request expressions of interest to participate in the comfort scheme. From the expressions of interest received, 3 local businesses were registered for the pilot: Clydesdale Inn, Castlebank Horticultural Centre and Horse and Jockey Bar. In addition, it was agreed that Council and SLLC premises would participate i.e. South Vennel, Lanark Memorial Hall, Lanark library and Lanark Lifestyles.
- 4.2. The three local businesses were assessed in line with agreed comfort scheme assessment criteria. The annual fees range from £500 to £1,500 per annum, as determined by the standard of the facilities provided. South Lanarkshire Legal Services prepared Minutes of Agreement in relation to access and fee payments as agreed with the local businesses for the pilot period.
- 4.3. The scheme was launched in July 2019 for an initial period of 1 year. However, as a result the onset of the Covid pandemic in March 2020, the pilot has been interrupted on several occasions and the decision was taken to extend the scheme until the end of the September 2022 to allow at least one full year of operation. It should be noted that the Council facilities were also closed to the public during this time.
- 4.4. The scheme was publicised using social media and the Council website as well as publicity at the local train station. Local businesses also display the scheme logo on windows and entrances to buildings. In 2021, the publicity was extended to include lamppost advertising which displayed a QR code and this allowed the posters to be dynamic and updated via the Council website. The website provided up to date details of the premises offering the comfort scheme and a map to locate them.

5. Evaluation of Pilot

- 5.1. Prior to the evaluation commencing, the 3 business were visited to agree the final extension to September 2022 and to discuss the evaluation process. Council officers visited the three local premises on a number of different occasions to observe the activity of visitors to these premises. During these visits, footfall to all 3 premises was low ranging from 0 visitors to 4 visitors. It cannot be determined if visitors were attending the premise for the sole purpose of the comfort scheme. The visits took place in July and August 2022 at various points in the day, with a particular focus on lunchtime periods. The total cost for the pilot was £9,675 (see breakdown at 6.1).
- 5.2. The anticipated ongoing costs for the retention of the existing scheme would be around £6,800. Ongoing support would be required for the scheme to respond to business and member enquires and undertake assessments. Annual fees, advertising costs and legal costs would continue to be incurred.
- 5.3. During this time, following local member request, Discover Lanark (BID) were contacted to discuss the comfort scheme with the Discover Lanark Board keen to see the outcome of the pilot evaluation. It is clear from discussions that the Board sees a value to having toilets available to visitors to the area and is willing to discuss and work with the Council to ensure provision of a comfort scheme can continue.

- 5.4. Given the evaluation of the pilot and the overall cost to the Council to administer and run the scheme, it is proposed that the Council does not continue the scheme on a permanent basis. However, following positive initial discussions with Discover Lanark it is proposed to continue these discussions with the aim of continuing the comfort scheme under their management and operation with appropriate support from the Council.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. The Council has committed staff time and resource from Facilities Management and Legal Services in the set up and operation of the pilot scheme. Any continuation of the scheme will require further commitment in staff time.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The financial costs incurred for operating and administering the comfort scheme pilot are shown below:-

Fees for 3 current members	£5,555
Advertising	£200
Staffing costs (inc. set up, administering, and assessing)	£3,920
Total	£9,675

- 7.2. There is no identified ongoing revenue budget for the set up and operation of a comfort scheme.

8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 8.1. There are no significant implications in terms of climate change, sustainability and environmental implications associated with this report

9. Other Implications

- 9.1. There are no other significant implications as result of the contents of this report.

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements:

- 10.1. The report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required
- 10.2. There is no requirement to undertake consultation in terms of the information contained in this report.

David Booth

Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

21 November 2022

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Working with and respecting others
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like further information, please contact:

Anne Goldie, Facilities Services Manager

Mobile (07795 090278)

E-mail: anne.goldie@southlanarkshire.gov.uk