



# News Release

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## More Time to Talk Toilets

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As South Hams District Council battles to save Public Toilets from closure – Town Councils asks for more time to find solutions other than pay on entry

South Hams District Council currently maintains 41 public toilets at a cost of just under £1 million a year. This is not funded by Council Tax as it is not a statutory service that the Council has to provide.

Until now, these public conveniences have been funded through money the council received from Central Government. However, from this financial year the Council's main grant from Central Government has been cut to zero.

As a result, last year the Council agreed to conduct a thorough review of all of the toilets it owns and maintains, how often they are used and how close they are to other conveniences.

Following these discussions, the Council identified a range of different solutions which includes installing Pay on Entry at the toilets with the highest footfall, transferring some toilets to local communities and closure of others. Some negotiations are continuing with towns and parishes.

But at a meeting of the Executive last month, some Councillors expressed their concerns that not all options had been explored and called on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss how the Council had come to their decisions.

In light of the weight of feeling at Executive, and at Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it has been agreed that that more time should be given for solutions to be considered for the public conveniences in Totnes.

To help the Council achieve this it was agreed that officers would have a discussion with the Town Council to ensure that all options are considered..

South Hams District Council was keen to stress that, where a facility has been earmarked for closure in September 2019, if a Parish or Town Council come forward with a proposal to enable it to stay open, it will be considered, up to the point of closure.

South Hams District Council brought these proposals forward because they can help the Council save approximately £226,000 a year on the cost of running and maintaining the toilets.

**Cllr Rufus Gilbert, Executive Member for Commercial Services said:** “This proposal has not been about closing toilets. It is about finding solutions to a very real problem. The question we have asked ourselves is ‘if we do not have the money, how else can we do it?’ I don’t want to close public toilets and I am pleased that we have been able to come to some agreements which mean that some of facilities with lower footfall will stay open, at a slight cost in some cases.

Where these facilities are being taken on by the local community, there are clear advantages that will benefit the people who use them. Firstly they will have prevented them being closed, secondly the people who look after them are likely to have a greater degree of civic pride. Where we have identified alternative toilets in the local area such as pubs and cafés this may have a positive impact on the local businesses with increased footfall and an increase in money spent in local area.

And for those toilets which will be devolved to Parish and Town Councils it will have a positive impact in terms of keeping those buildings in use and reducing the risks associated with crime and vandalism in disused premises.”

Through the process of working out the best outcome for all of their public conveniences South Hams District Council considered all aspects and options. This

included how often they are used by the public, the condition of the facility and if it needs extra money spending on it to bring it up to a good standard, the estimated income from pay on entry, how many other toilets are in the local area and if all of them are needed, as well as the transport, labour and running costs of keeping them open.

Each facility was looked at on its own merits and a discussion was had with the Town or Parish Council. Some of these discussions, are still ongoing and there are solutions yet to be found for some of the facilities.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editor:**

- However, to best accommodate the councils who still wanted further dialogue, this is the list of councils to be revisited.
  - Totnes
  - Kingsbridge
  - Newton & Noss
  - Staverton
  - Salcombe Estuary
  - Holbeton

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