

Changes to public toilet provision in Camden

Frequently asked questions – January 2016

1. What is happening and why?

We are developing a new approach to how we provide public toilets in Camden.

We need to save £260,000 a year as part of our wider savings programme. By using a combination of pay to use toilets run on behalf of the Council, alongside business and community partnerships toilet schemes we hope to provide access to toilets in our key areas.

We are moving away from 'free to use' Council-run toilets to 'pay to use' toilets where this is possible, and closure of sites where this is not possible.

We are proposing to close the public toilets at Pond Square, South End Green and West End Lane by 1 April 2016. We are proposing to charge for using the toilets at Camden Town and Lincoln's Inn Fields by autumn 2016.

To ensure that there are still toilets available to the public we are working with residents and businesses to develop a community toilet scheme.

We are open to any suggestions that achieve the reductions. We would be keen to hear from business or community groups interested in taking on the running of a site currently marked for closure.

2. Why are you closing toilets when we need more loos rather than fewer?

We recognise that access to public toilets while out and about in Camden is very important. Our proposals are therefore to continue to provide toilets for the public although they are not necessarily provided by the Council.

However, as well as needing to save £260,000 a year from running the toilets, the sites are all in need of some refurbishment work.

As well as developing the community toilet scheme we want to work with the community on any viable alternatives to closure that would still allow us to make the reductions needed.

We will also publicise other toilets which can be used by the public, such as those at our libraries.

3. What is this engagement about and what are the timescales for what's being proposed?

We are keen to hear your views, and to make sure that toilets continue to be available to the public. The process will take into consideration new ways of providing the service to users.

It is not engagement on whether to make the £260,000 reduction, as that decision was made in December 2014 as part of our strategy to make £70 million of savings.

We will engage with a wide range of residents to ask about the impact of the changes, listen to the community and to set out the Council's proposals. This engagement period takes place from 11 January until 28 February 2016.

4. Will anything be changed as a result of this engagement or have you already decided what's happening?

We have already decided that a £260,000 reduction must be made and have set out the proposals of how we would make that reduction. However, we will consider all viable alternatives.

We therefore encourage as many people as possible to give their views and suggestions by taking part in the survey by 28 February 2016.

5. Why are you closing the automated sites such as the one at Leather Lane too? Why can't these stay open?

The cost of running the six sites is higher than the money we make from people using the toilets, due to the low numbers using these automated toilets.

The Council pays around £62,000 a year for three of the APCs, and three are provided 'free of charge' by JC Decaux as part of our street advertising contract.

Our current expectation is that future on-street advertising providers will not want to continue to run the APC services, which are not covering costs, past the end of the current advertising contracts (August 2016 and April 2017).

6. How can you close toilets when you are fining people for urinating in the street? Are you opening urinals instead?

Fines have been introduced to tackle street urination, particularly in the late evening and overnight when public toilets are usually not available. Fines have been introduced to tackle anti-social behaviour, not to target or discriminate against residents who currently use the Council run public toilets.

The Council recognises the need to provide facilities for patrons of the night time economy and funds the provision of temporary urinals in key areas to help tackle this issue. We are also planning to put permanent 'pop-up' urinals in three locations across the borough.

7. Why can't you fine people more and use that money to pay for toilets?

We cannot and would not want to set targets for fining people and raising money in this way. Ideally we will not issue any fines, because people will not be urinating in public places.

Community toilets

8. How will the community toilets be run and will they be accessible? What about people who don't want to use toilets in pubs?

The proposal is to operate the community toilet scheme in three new areas (the possibility of other areas being included), with an anticipated five businesses or groups taking part in each area. Other areas will be considered.

Suitable businesses will allow the public to use their toilets for free during their opening hours. This approach will provide safer, cleaner, accessible toilets to users.

The Council will pay a contribution of up to £750 a year to local businesses that are members of this scheme. A scheme is already set up in Kentish Town.

If a business is interested in being part of the scheme the premises will be assessed to check that they meet the requirements for the scheme, and provide safe, clean and accessible facilities,

9. How will I know how and where to find a community toilet?

We will promote the community toilets through online and printed publicity. Publicity will include stickers for the venue windows, posters in the area, and online information about where to find public toilets in Camden.

Community toilet venues and other local provision will be promoted through internet apps (such as 'Toiletfinder' and the 'Great British Public Toilet Map') to help people find the closest public toilet.

greatbritishpublictoiletmap.rca.ac.uk

www.toiletfinder.org

10. Where will people go when shops are closed or if there's isn't a community toilet set up by 1 April 2016?

Unfortunately, as with current provision, for financial reasons we can only provide toilets at the busiest times of the day. The Council-run public toilets are currently open from 9am to 6pm in the winter and until 8pm in the summer.

As part of the publicity for the community toilet scheme we will also be publicising other public conveniences.

11. How successful have community toilet schemes been in other places?

This approach is a proven method and is used successfully by many local authorities across the country.

The number of London local authorities operating similar schemes includes Bromley, City of London, Enfield, Richmond, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond, Sutton and

Waltham Forest.

12. What will happen if you don't get businesses to sign up to a Community Toilet Scheme in each of the three areas you are closing down toilets?

We are speaking with businesses and community groups in the affected areas to explain what is happening and encourage involvement in the changes.

Council-run toilets in these areas will have to end on 1 April 2016 in order to make the necessarily reductions. But, if needed, we would continue to work with businesses and the community after this date in order to set up alternative provision.

Public toilets (not all Council-run)

13. Will your libraries and sports centres be making their toilets available to everyone to make use of?

Yes, toilets at Council-run buildings can be used by the public, and we will be publicising where these toilets can be found.

14. Doesn't a pub have to allow the public access to its toilets?

The Government sets the mandatory conditions and this condition isn't included.

If a licence application is not opposed, the Council must grant the licence and can only attach mandatory conditions and further conditions that are consistent with the operating schedule as set out in the application. If this condition is not requested, it cannot be imposed.

If a licence application is opposed, the Council can grant the licence and impose conditions which are appropriate to promote the licensing objectives. There are a number of further caveats around imposing conditions and it is unlikely that allowing the general public in to use the pub toilet would ever be an appropriate licence condition.

Pubs are private property and access is granted at the discretion of the landlord. It would not be appropriate to remove that right by imposing a condition on the licence.

15. Will the Council be asking developers to include publicly accessible toilets in future buildings or squares?

Revisions to our Local Plan will include an expectation that major developments which will have large number of visitors will provide public toilets.

This will help us to improve the range of public toilet provision in the future.

Pond Square, South End Green and West End Lane

16. Why are you closing public toilets? Why can't they be charged for instead? Isn't what you are doing illegal?

Our review of existing services has looked at how many people are currently using the free to use Council-run toilets and the potential for an external supplier to run a 'pay to use' service. A pay to use service would mean that certain toilets remain open at no cost to the Council.

Discussions with suppliers have shown us that three toilets are unlikely to be financially viable to remain open within this 'nil cost' approach. These three locations are West End Lane, South End Green and Pond Square. It is therefore proposed to close these facilities and develop a community toilet scheme in these areas.

The other three locations (Lincoln's Inn Fields, Camden Town - men's and women's) are proposed to be part of a 'pay to use' contract procurement exercise.

Providing public toilets is not a statutory function of local authorities. We know that being able to access public toilet facilities is important, but with less money, the Council is planning to make changes to the way they are provided.

17. Why can't the Council continue to run all six toilets, with the locations which are making a profit subsidising the other sites?

We do not believe that this would be a sustainable option, and the external contractors are not interested in running the toilets in this way.

18. Have you asked local residents what they think or whether they could help?

We are speaking with businesses and community groups in the affected areas to explain what is happening and encourage involvement in the changes. We have set up three meetings in these areas as follows:

- 6 to 8pm on Wednesday 27 January 2016 at West Hampstead Library, Dennington Park Road, NW6 1AU about the West End Lane toilets
- 6 to 8pm on Tuesday 9 February 2016 at the Roy Shaw Centre, Cressy Road, NW3 2ND about the South End Green toilets
- 6 to 8pm on Thursday 11 February 2016 at the Highgate Society, 10A South Grove, N6 6BS about the Pond Square toilets

19. My group is interested in running a toilet or has an alternative suggestion. How can I find out more and how much is it likely to cost our group? Could we use CIL money?

Please contact us by email to publictoilets@camden.gov.uk or call 020 7974 4444 to discuss this further. Further information is available at camden.gov.uk/publictoilets

20. Has the Council approached other agencies, including London Taxi Drivers Association and Transport for London about financially contributing to public toilets in Camden – and if so what was the response?

As part of the engagement exercise we are meeting with both the London Taxi Drivers Association and Transport for London to discuss future opportunities at these sites.

21. What will happen to the buildings if the toilets close? Will the buildings become derelict or sold? Aren't they listed buildings?

The Council would market the sites to find an alternative business use for the property, subject to planning, and internal agreements. It is not intended to sell the freehold, but rather to grant short leases at market rents. Two of the toilets are Grade II listed, at South End Green and West End Lane.

22. What will happen to the rental income? Could it be used to keep at least one of the toilets open?

The rental income from the properties would be used to finance provision of council services. This could be repairs and security for these properties and a contribution to the community toilet scheme. The rental income achievable is not likely to be sufficient to fund the running costs of providing a public toilet.

23. What will happen if residents want to reopen toilets after they have closed?

The toilets would have to close on 1 April 2016 in order to make the necessary reductions but if needed we would continue to work with businesses and the community after this date to set up alternatives.

Paid for toilets – Camden Town and Lincoln's Inn Fields

24. Why have you decided to use an external company and charge people to use the toilets in Camden Town and Lincoln's Inn Fields? What if my community group wants to get involved?

Using an external supplier to provide a 'pay to use' service means that the toilets can remain open at no cost to the Council. This reduction is not part of the engagement phase as the decision to make reductions in this way has already been made.

The procurement of a supplier to run the three pay to use sites is proposed to begin in spring 2016.

Please contact us if your group would like to discuss this.

25. What will the charge be? Who decides the charge, and how often could the charge be increased?

The Council will not be setting the fee to use the toilets it will set by the contractor at a level to balance cost of running the service with cost to the public. However, the charge will be in line with other local chargeable public conveniences. Charges will be reviewed once a year, and be subject to a transparent process with the Council.

26. Will the new provider keep the toilets open longer than they are currently, during summer and winter?

The opening hours will be decided by the contractor, and therefore if demand exists and it becomes viable to have longer opening hours they will extend the hours. The Council does not propose to restrict the opening hours to the current hours.

27. What happens if the company running the toilets doesn't want to run them anymore? How long will the agreement be for?

The agreement duration is to be confirmed, once the contracting strategy has been agreed but will be of sufficient duration to allow the company to recover their initial investment costs. The Council will implement a business continuity plan, in conjunction with the successful provider, to ensure that if the provider decided to no longer run the facilities the Council is able to put new arrangements in place.

28. How long will refurbishment take place? Where will I go when these toilets are closed?

A funded refurbishment programme for the three proposed remaining public toilets will take place. The refurbishment of the three toilets is estimated to take 10-12 weeks at each location once a contractor has been appointed through a tender process. To minimise user disruption toilets will be refurbished one at a time, Camden will advertise alternative locations to use via the website and on posters outside toilets.

29. Who would I contact if I have any questions now or want to give feedback about a community toilet once it is set up?

Please send your questions by email to publictoilets@camden.gov.uk or call 020 7974 4444. Further information is available at camden.gov.uk/publictoilets