

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

21 April 2026

Review of the Public Convenience Service

Report of the Corporate Director Environment

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 A Task and Finish Group of the Transport, Economy, Environment & Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met throughout Autumn, to review the challenges facing the public convenience service.
- 1.2 Following its deliberations, the group has developed a set of guiding principles and associated 'findings' for future service delivery. This report presents these proposals for consideration by the Executive.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Over five meetings the Task and Finish Group explored the service pressures and potential solutions for the NYC public convenience network, the largest of its kind in the UK. The group focused on four key areas:
- Service budget and expenditure since Local Government Reorganisation [LGR]
 - Income opportunities, including direct revenue and alternative funding streams
 - Condition of facilities, estimated footfall, and proximity of sites to one another
 - Accessibility across the network

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The provision of public toilets is a non-statutory function, yet it represents an important social amenity. Public conveniences contribute significantly to the quality of public spaces, and their absence can create barriers for residents and visitors - particularly for those with greater needs.
- 3.2 Since LGR, the service has faced a substantial and ongoing overspend. While efforts to reduce this have achieved some success, it is clear that a new strategic approach is required to ensure the service operates within the available budget.
- 3.3 TEEEOOSC considered a report in September 2025 which summarised the public convenience service and the committee agreed to form a small task and finish group to consider the issues with a view to identifying potential solutions.
- 3.4 This work has now concluded and the findings they have devised are presented for consideration.

4.0 FINDINGS OF THE GROUP

- 4.1 The group's report is attached as Appendix A, it identifies five principles designed to guide service delivery over the coming years. The principles have been designed to balance service quality with operational efficiency, ensuring that facilities meet the needs of all users while remaining financially viable. By establishing strategic principles, the aim is to create a robust framework that will guide the Service's operations, effectively for years to come.

Principle 1 - Support for Alternative Delivery Models

The Service is committed to enabling alternative models for the management of public conveniences. To assist organisations interested in operating these facilities to make informed decisions, we will provide a comprehensive information pack, this will include:

- Utility and maintenance considerations
- Cleaning and consumable costs
- Income generation opportunities
- Any available grants and funding options
- Examples of good practice
- Cost-reduction strategies
- A clear and consistent financial framework for one-off support

Principle 2 - Consistent Entry Fee Policy

- i) To ensure the network operates on a sound and sustainable financial basis, a standard entry fee will be introduced at all sites, where it is practical and effective.
- ii) Where such infrastructure cannot be implemented, alternative solutions such as physical or digital 'honesty boxes' will be considered.

Principle 3 - Rationalisation of Underperforming Sites

- i) Where facilities are in poor condition, have low usage, or are located near alternative conveniences, rationalisation will be considered.
- ii) This process will involve:
 - Consultation with Town/Parish/City Councils, Area Committees, Division Members, and the Executive
 - Quantifying usage and condition
 - Offering Parish/Town Councils the opportunity to operate the site under an enhanced support package. If all alternative options are exhausted, the site will be closed and disposed of.
 - Any capital receipts will be ring-fenced and reinvested into improving the remaining network.

Principle 4 - Integration with Car Park Operations

Public conveniences are an essential part of North Yorkshire's visitor experience, with many located within or close to chargeable car parks. High-quality toilet facilities are an essential component of the service provided to car park users. Consequently, the associated cleaning and consumable costs should be fully accounted for as part of the overall car park operating cost. As part of the next tariff review, all revenue costs for these facilities - along with a contribution towards a capital modernisation programme - should be funded through the overall car park tariff income, supplemented by any pay-on-entry revenue where applicable.

Principle 5 - Capital Improvement Programme

All sites across the network will go through a clear and consistent condition assessment, to identify areas for improvement and compliance with best practice. The Service will then work collaboratively to seek to deliver a capital improvement programme aimed at ensuring all sites achieve a 'good' or 'excellent' condition rating by 2030.

Enhancements will aim to include:

- Water bottle refill stations
- Baby changing facilities and Sanitary waste disposal options in both male and female spaces
- Improve signage within and externally to promote network visibility, responsible use of the space and relevant contact details.
- Environmental initiatives such as greywater recycling, renewable energy generation, and efficient energy use that support the council's ambition to achieve net-zero carbon neutrality by 2030.

Therefore, to summarise The TEEE O&S committee set the following 10 findings for Executive to consider.

- 1) As a priority collaborate with others, including the Combined Authority, to identify opportunities for financial support in operating tourist infrastructure and to actively pursue external funding to enhance and sustain the service.
- 2) To set a consistent entry fee, the Group recommends the entry fee for 2026-27 to be set at either 40p or 50p per user, with the final value decided by Executive.
- 3) To endorse a capital allocation to expand the locations where a charge is levied.
- 4) To endorse a capital allocation to enable officers to explore alternative funding streams, including honesty boxes, app-based donations, advertising, sponsorship, and community partnerships.
- 5) To continue to offer free access for disabled users, through the National RADAR key scheme.
- 6) To maintain and seek to expand Changing Places provision to meet the needs of people with profound disabilities, supported by external funding.
- 7) To implement as part of the next car park tariff review, an increase to the per ticket price across all off-street parking to fund all revenue costs for toilets within the immediate vicinity of any NYC car park. In addition to the revenue costs, the uplift in the tariff should include a contribution towards a capital modernisation programme - should be funded through the overall car park tariff income.
If this is approved, the group would like consideration to be given to how this could also support ongoing revenue contributions to Parish and Town councils interested in devolution of any public conveniences.
- 8) Consider closure of sites which are in a poor condition, have low footfall and/or are in close proximity to other sites, subject to consultation with Parish/Town Councils, Division Members, Area Committee, Executive and with the final decision to be taken by the Executive Member for Managing Our Environment.
- 9) To ring-fence proceeds from the disposal of any public conveniences for reinvestment into the wider toilet network.
- 10) To commit to a capital improvement programme to ensure that by 2030 all sites are in a good or excellent condition. Enhancements will aim to include:
 - Water bottle refill stations
 - Baby changing facilities and Sanitary waste disposal options in both male and female spaces
 - Improve signage within and externally to promote network visibility, responsible use of the space and relevant contact details.
 - Environmental initiatives such as greywater recycling, renewable energy generation, and efficient energy use that support the council's ambition to achieve net-zero carbon neutrality by 2030.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

5.1 The public convenience service supports a number of the Council themes.

- Support thriving places and empowered communities that live, work, visit and do business in North Yorkshire
- Ensure the people of North Yorkshire are safe, healthy and living well

5.2 The work to align and harmonise the Service also supports the ambition: One Council with strong, local and customer-led services alongside supporting and enhancing the four pillars of locality working; local services and access, local accountability, local action and local empowerment.

6.0 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Adopting Principle 1 will require financial support to encourage alternative delivery models that provide long-term savings. By working closely with others where there is interest to operate/manage parts of the network, long-term savings can be achieved whilst maintaining network availability. Work is continuing to improve the data held across different legacy systems to provide an accurate set of cost information for the full estate.
- 6.2 Principle 2 seeks to reduce income-related pressures. Currently, the service's income target rises annually in line with inflation. Without securing capital to introduce new chargeable sites or revising entry fees, additional financial strain will occur from April 2026. Nearly 90% of income is generated from sites where fees have remained unchanged for 17 years. While adjusting entry fees may influence public behaviour - an outcome that is difficult to predict - this risk can be mitigated by setting charges within the recommended range. To explore potential to generate income from sites where traditional pay-on-entry technology would be cost prohibitive, it is proposed to trial alternative mechanisms such as digital or physical honesty boxes, at a cost of £2,000 at a small number of sites initially.
- 6.3 Any network rationalisation under Principle 3 is likely to generate significant local concern. However, the proposed approach - identifying sites through a transparent, consistent process supported by robust evidence, extensive stakeholder engagement, and assistance for alternative operators - should help to mitigate, though not entirely eliminate, these concerns.
- 6.4 One of the opportunities afforded to NYC following LGR was to deliver a programme of estate rationalisation, which includes the disposal of certain assets. This approach is intended to reduce ongoing maintenance liabilities and generate capital receipts to support the Council's financial sustainability and strategic priorities. Asset disposal is ordinarily a key source of income for the Council's capital account. However, Principle 3 prevents any benefit from rationalisation of the toilet estate contributing to the fund, which is a variation of normal process. Ringfencing limits NYC's ability to allocate resources where they are most needed, a corporate approach ensures that capital receipts can be directed to projects that deliver the greatest strategic benefit, rather than being restricted to a single service area. A corporate allocation model ensures fairness by distributing resources based on need and strategic impact, establishing ringfencing as a precedent could constrain future decision-making and reduce flexibility in managing the Council's estate and finances
- 6.5 It is not feasible to meet all ongoing capital requirements for the service solely through capital receipts from asset disposals. If Principle 4 is adopted, a revenue contribution for capital works would be drawn from car park tariff income; however, this would only apply to sites directly associated with car parks. Achieving the desired improvement in standards across the entire network will therefore require additional support from the corporate capital fund.
- 6.6 The new alternative funding model set out in Principle 4 whereby the cost of operating toilets near car parks, is funded through the County-wide car park estate tariff setting process, is not consistent with the current operating model for the car parking service. If agreed, time will be needed to adequately cost up in detail a capital improvement programme to form part of the tariff uplift, alongside the most up to date revenue costs for these sites. There is an associated risk that the principle will be deemed unfair by users of car park who do not make use of the public toilet, in effect paying for a service they are not using.

- 6.7 Principle 4 is lawful under section 32 (3), section 33 and section 35 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA), which empower authorities to provide public conveniences as part of parking facilities and to regulate charges accordingly. If this principle is implemented, the Council must evidence that integrating the cost of toilet provision into car park tariffs is consistent with its general duty to balance traffic movement, access, amenity, and environmental considerations. This will not reduce existing obligations set out in the Act, such as separate account for income and expenditure, with conditions set out for the expenditure of any surplus.
- 6.8 The capital investment required to bring the entire network, as it is today, up to a 'Good' or 'Excellent' standard is estimated to exceed £3 million and will continue to grow as other sites deteriorate and detailed condition surveys are completed. Work will continue to identify and secure any external funding, however there is likely still to be a significant ask on the NYC capital programme. If agreed the Service will work with colleagues in the Property Service to draw together a capital improvement programme to be considered for approval, through the normal governance process. Any request for support from the corporate capital fund to deliver this aim, will be assessed in the context of the Council's prevailing financial position and considered alongside competing priorities across both discretionary and statutory services.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The service is currently facing a recurring budget shortfall, which will persist without a change in strategic direction and a capital investment. If all principles are implemented in full, the current overspend is expected to be resolved. However, if the Executive does not wish to take forward all principles, the service may continue to overspend, or the ask on individual principles will need to increase.
- 7.2 The 2025-26 budget for the network within the Environment Directorate is £1.144m with an income target of £220k, the service is forecasting an overspend of circa £260k. The table below summarises the estimated financial impacts of the different proposed principles.

Principle	Element	£ Change est. per yr.	Cost to implement
1	Support for alternative delivery models	This will be site specific and done on a case by case basis	
2	All sites that currently have an entry fee, align on 40p [A]	£25,000 benefit	£0
	All sites that currently have an entry fee, align on 50p [B]	£85,000 benefit	£0
	Expand sites that charge, to those with a <5year payback. Also includes 40p entry fee [A]	£102,000 benefit	£175,000
	Expand sites that charge, to those with a <5year payback. Also includes 50p entry fee [B]	£181,000 benefit	£175,000
3	Rationalise of underperforming sites	This will be site specific and done on a case by case basis, on average each block costs £9,000 per year for cleaning/consumables, in addition to utilities/maintenance.	
4	Implement Alternative funding Model - car park tariff	The earliest this principle could be implemented is April 2027. Prior to this, further work is required to estimate the capital improvement costs and to fully assess the wider implications and benefits.	
5	Ensure all sites are Good/Excellent and become chargeable	£150,000+ benefit	£3m+

- 7.3 The figures in the table do not include any adjustments for sites that sit on Harbour land. As part of the court judgment, all income and expenditure associated with sites on Harbour land are to be ringfenced in a separate account, which includes some public conveniences.
- 7.4 'Finding 9' of the report is "To ring-fence proceeds from the disposal of any public conveniences for reinvestment into the wider toilet network". It is important to set out the financial governance implications of this. The Council has adopted a set of Financial Procedure Rules to provide the framework for the Council's financial management and administration. One of the objectives of the Financial Procedure Rules is to ensure the proper financial management and control of all the Council's activities and the efficient, effective and economic use of its resources.
- 7.5 The Financial Procedure Rules set out that the Chief Finance Officer will determine whether the Council's funds are held as general reserves or in an earmarked or restricted reserve. Earmarked reserves are created for a specific purpose and should only be used for that purpose. Restricted reserves are used for ringfenced funds required for statutory purposes or other specified reasons, for example capital receipts, developer contributions or to support the Housing Revenue Account.
- 7.6 On this basis, if the proceeds from any disposal of public conveniences are held in a ringfenced account, the funds would become a restricted reserve and therefore investment would be restricted to the balance of these funds and any flexibility for investment would be lost. This recommendation is against usual financial practice which would be to retain flexibility of funds as far as possible so appropriate investment can be considered from the wider council funds. In addition, any ringfencing infers that investment would be capped at available receipts in the first place.
- 7.7 For the above reasons it is not recommended that the capital receipt is ringfenced.
- 7.8 £177k of investment will be required to expand the range of sites that levy a charge, and to trail donation points, as set out under principle 2 in the table above. This will be funded from the Council's Strategic Capacity Reserve. As set out in paragraph 6.8, a capital improvement programme will be drawn together to support principle 5 and will be considered for funding in due course in line with the Council's normal governance processes.

8.0 EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Equalities – An equality impact assessment has been undertaken (Appendix A). A more detailed EIA will be drafted as part of any future rationalisation proposal.

9.0 CLIMATE IMPACT

- 9.1 Environmental – A Climate Change Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of the proposals (Appendix A).

10.0 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The TEEE O&S committee set the following findings for Executive to consider.
- 1) As a priority collaborate with others, including the Combined Authority, to identify opportunities for financial support in operating tourist infrastructure and to actively pursue external funding to enhance and sustain the service.
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11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That Executive note each of the 'findings' put forward by TEEE O&S committee.
- 11.2 For each finding, and paying particular regard to the Risk & Implications (section 6) and Financial Implications (section 7) sections of this report, Executive is asked to:
 - Agree the finding as written.
 - Agree the finding with amendments as requested by Executive; or
 - Reject the finding.
- 11.3 A capital allocation of £177,000 is set aside, funded from the Strategic Capacity Reserve, to deliver the findings should they be approved.

APPENDICES: Appendix A – TEEEOOSC Working Group Finding Report

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

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10 April 2026

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.