



RYDE

TOWN COUNCIL

Paper To: General Purpose Working Party – 28 August 2019

Paper From: Darren Carter Smith, Facilities Officer

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) IN THE WESTERN ESPLANADE PUBLIC TOILETS

1. Purpose

To provide a report on a recent incident at the Western Gardens public conveniences and to consider how the Town Council can try to mitigate ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) at this location.

2. Background

2.1 The Western Gardens public conveniences are situated on the Western Esplanade to the west of the pier and nearby travel terminals (train, bus, ferry and hovercraft). As such they serve the Western Esplanade beach as well as the surrounding areas including commuters/bus drivers from the nearby travel terminals and the town area. The external floor area of the building is calculated at 70m². This building is shared with an adjoining café.

Recently the Town Council has experienced a significant increase in the amount of reported ASB, particularly those that are drug related incidents occurring within these public conveniences. These incidents include the unsafe disposal of syringes and other drug related paraphernalia within its toilet blocks.

In June of this year, this issue was escalated further when emergency services attended the gentleman's toilets in response to a reported incident of drug misuse. Following this incident a meeting was held at the Town Council with Ryde Police Sergeant. The purpose of this meeting was to seek police guidance on how the Town Council could help further in mitigating drug related ASB within the Western Esplanade public conveniences.

3. Established Procedures and Practices

3.1 Set out below are the current Procedures and Practices that are in place by the Town Council, in addressing drug related ASB incidents within the public conveniences as managed:

- As part of the daily Health and Safety checks, all areas of the public conveniences are checked for drug paraphernalia by the cleaning operatives.
- Combined weekly Audit Inspections of the public conveniences are carried out by the Facilities Officer and a manager of the Cleaning Contractors. In addition to this a separate weekly inspection is also undertaken within these facilities by the Environment Officers. In those occurrences where drug paraphernalia is found, the area is secured and arrangements made for a cleaning operative to attend and safely remove/dispose of the items ASAP.
- Signage is installed within all of the Town Councils public conveniences (ladies, gents and Easy Access facilities) informing service users of the process of reporting ASB activities.
- All notifications from callers are received via the MYPA system who then inform the Town Council and the cleaning contractors. These reports are then investigated, and the necessary action taken.
- A reporting structure is firmly in place in regard to acts of ASB, with the Town Council receiving notification from the contract cleaners, Environment officers (during the course of their weekly inspections) as well as being notified by members of the public via the MYPA system.
- A Reactive Cleaning Service can be called upon to respond to any reports of drug paraphernalia within the public conveniences, which occur outside of the daily scheduled cleans. All public accessible areas of the public convenience are checked/cleaned by the cleaning operatives in attendance and any items discovered are safely removed and disposed of. Their findings are then reported to their offices as well as to the Town Council.
- All reports as received by the Town Council are logged with the police (via 101) and an ASB incident form completed. All records of ASB incidents are maintained and updated by the Town Councils Facilities Officer and subsequently collated by them into a spreadsheet.
- All contractors and staff undertaking works/inspections within the public conveniences are advised to be extra vigilant whilst in attendance during periods of increased Anti Sociable Behaviour (specifically drug related).
- If an area, fixture or fitting within the public conveniences has been identified as being used as a holding/depositing area for sharps or other drug related paraphernalia then the Town Council will instruct (when ever practice to do so) remedial works to be undertaken.

4. Suggested activities to address ASB

4.1 Following consultation with the Ryde Police Sergeant in June 2019, a meeting in which the mayor also attended, the following has been undertaken:

- **ASB drug related statistics** – All reported ASB (drug related) incidents pertaining to the public conveniences and as recorded by the Town Council since 2017 until present, have been sent over to a local PS Officer (Neighbourhood and Prevention team) for their teams and also the IWC Inclusion teams reference. Any future reported incidents of this nature will also be passed onto them, as well as updates on any preventive measures being considered or introduced within the public conveniences.
- **Boxing off the high level window ledges** – As documented in the Town Council ASB records, the high level window ledges within the Western Esplanade public conveniences have been used on several occasions in the past as a disposal/holding area for sharps and other drug paraphernalia. This has been especially prevalent in the far end cubicle of the gents toilets, which is the furthest cubicle from the main entranceway door in this toilet block and intern the most secluded area within these facilities.

In addressing this, all high level window ledges within the gents and ladies have been boxed off using a polycarbonate sheeting with rounded corners. This prevents access to these ledges whilst at the same time still allowing nature light to come through these windows.

Polycarbonate sheeting is not only a robust material but it also achieves a Class 1 fire rating which means it is self-extinguishing and is highly recommended for such environments as schools and hospitals.

Consultation was had with a Fire Risk Assessor in order to get guidance from a fire prevention perspective as to the suitability of this material within its intended environment. Whilst the Assessor had little experience of fire safety within the public toilets, they advised that a class 0 or Class 1 fire rated material would be best suited to help limit fire spread if there may be a risk of arson.

Due to the public conveniences being public accessible buildings with only one entranceway in/out of each toilet block and the potential for other types of ASB (including vandalism and arson) to be perpetrated within them, it is extremely important to apply caution to any new type of material introduced into the fabric of the buildings.

- **Opening hours** - During the meeting held at the Town Council in June with the Ryde Police Sergeant, one of the recommendations made to further help mitigate drug use within the Western Esplanade public conveniences was for these facilities to be locked overnight.

Currently these public conveniences are open 24 hours daily, seven days a week. If approval is given for an overnight closure to be applied then these facilities they would inturn be locked in-line with the other Town Council public

conveniences, that being locked at dusk and opened between 6am and 8am daily.

Please note that if the Western Esplanade public conveniences are closed in the evenings then it will need to be added to the locking and unlocking service. A variation instruction will then need to be issued to our cleaning contractors.

The cost will be at the same rate as for the other three public conveniences that are currently on this service, and be in accordance with Bill Number 6 of the contract document (£3.54 per day / £1,288.56 per annum). The cleaning regime will remain the same.

Due to commuters/bus drivers being the main service users of these facilities during the evenings, consideration was needed as to the impact an overnight closure of the Western Esplanade public conveniences would have on the nearby bus and rail services.

Engagement was in intern made with the Operations Manager for Southern Vectis in order to establish what the implications would be on the bus services.

The Town Council acknowledges that the bus drivers in particular would be affected by such a change, with our understanding being that the Western Esplanade public conveniences are often used by their drivers upon arrival at the Ryde bus terminal. The Operation Manager confirmed that there are currently no toilet facilities available for staff/customers within the bus station and that there buses run the majority of the day in and out of Ryde.

Whist it is the responsibility of both Southern Vectis and Islandline to make provision for toilet and washing facilities for use by staff, a compromise to this issue would be for both companies to purchase their own Radar keys so as their drivers can still access the Easy Access toilets when the Western Esplanade public conveniences are locked overnight.

A condition being that all drivers would need to ensure that the entranceway door is securely closed behind them after use.

In addition the rail timetable for arrivals and departures from the Esplanade train station was also investigated, in order to establish the timings of an overnight closure of the Western Esplanade public conveniences.

This information is outlined below:

Arrival times from the Eastern Esplanade train station:

| Week day: | Arrival time of first train: | Arrival time of last train: |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mondays – Saturdays: | 6:39am | 22:57pm |
| Sundays: | 7:39am | 22:57pm |

Departure times from the Eastern Esplanade train station:

| Week day: | Departure time of first train: | Departure time of last train: |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mondays – Saturdays: | 5:51am | 21:51pm |
| Sundays: | 6:52am | 21:51 pm |

- **Sharp Boxes**

The Ryde Police Sergeant also recommended that the Town Council consider installing sharp boxes. More information about this is referred to in sections 5 and 7.

5. Neighbouring Local Authorities and ASB in Public Conveniences

Information has been sought from both Portsmouth Council and Gosport Borough Council, regarding which measures are in place (or have been) within their public conveniences in addressing drug related ASB and how effective these measures have been.

Portsmouth Council have confirmed that whilst one of their public conveniences has a sharp disposal facility within it, they find that it is often not used. This said they believe this is something that maybe useful if managed properly and publicised.

They work in partnership with Outreach Support Workers, providing small sharp boxes and encouraging safe disposal etc for persons who have been identified as being responsible for unsafe disposal of drug paraphernalia in outside areas and housing blocks.

Those that do not engage and whom they have evidence that they are responsible for ASB such as leaving drug paraphernalia in public toilets and/or in other areas are given warnings that enforcement action will be taken if the behaviour does not change. Their approach is often informal and supportive but some most persistent individuals have escalated to the community protection notice level.

The manager for public conveniences reviews these facilities use and on occasions they may be closed for a period of time. Opening hours are changed or additional cleans and checks are carried out. Whilst they have not ruled out blue lighting as an potential option they are not sure of the evidence.

An Officer from Streetscene (Gosport Borough Council) have confirmed that sharps boxes are provided within their problematic public conveniences due to sharps and drug incidents being a problem within these facilities.

On occasion there Council receives complaints that they are condoning drug mis-use by the provision of sharp bins. Whilst these bins are well used, sharps are sometimes found within hand washers, on shelves and also on window sills.

Blue lighting has been trailed within their public conveniences but to no avail. In addition to the public conveniences being deemed as being too dark, information was also received that the drug users got around the blue lighting, by marking veins with ultra – violet pens which were highlighted when in the toilets.

In addition to this a local group in Gosport also places stickers on the cubicle doors offering help/assistance to drug users.

There cleaning operatives report every incident (drug paraphernalia and alcohol mis-use) they come across when carrying out their duties and the partnership group are given this information on a regular basis.

6. Best practice/guidance literature in addressing ASB.

Investigation has been undertaken by the Town Council for the purpose of obtaining literature in regards to best practice/guidance in addressing ASB (specifically drug paraphernalia) within the environment of public conveniences.

Whilst some articles have been found online, this majority of literature found is ever quite old (spanning back 5 years or more) or specifically in relation to overseas procedures and practices.

Further assistance has been sought from both the Portsmouth City Council and also Gosport Council.

Portsmouth City Council found the “Publicly Available Toilets Problem Reduction Guide” to be of use which offers guidance from the Police, Architects and Local Authorities.

This literature can be found online via the following link:

<http://www.btalooos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/PubliclyAvailableToiletsProblemReductionGuide.pdf>

The Officer from Streetscene (Gosport Borough Council) were unable to find any literature of any use when looking for information on the subject. All guidance gained was instead gained by them through word of mouth at district meetings and from contractors.

In addition the Regulatory and Community Safety Services at IWC kindly contacted several local councils on our behalf (including Havant Borough Council, Fareham Borough, Winchester City Council and Eastleigh Borough Council) to see if they had any literature or guidance notes on this subject of which they could share. Unfortunately all that was obtained was a safe system at work procedure for the removal and disposal of drug paraphernalia.

7. Sharps Boxes

An initial investigation has been carried out in regards to the different sharps boxes available for the safe disposal of syringes and sharp objects in a public space.

Sharps boxes within public areas (including public conveniences) can be both a public and politically sensitive area.

There are two main different types of boxes for consideration. The first being a wall mounted stainless steel sharps box and the other being sharps boxes recessed into walls.

The wall mounted sharps boxes have a lockable hinged door with lock for safety and a hole and chute in the top of the sharps box to safely dispose of the syringes and sharp objects. A plastic internal sharps bin included.

Sharps boxes which are recessed into walls, have a syringe disposal chute which is accessed from a small steel plate, containing a opening to a stainless steel disposal pipe that can accommodate syringes. The pipe extends through the wall at an angle sufficient to overcome friction and maintain the momentum of a syringe, and discharges into a wall mounted sharps container in the adjacent service area.

One of the articles read, states that sharps disposal bins provided in public toilets by local councils are typically wall mounted and that these types of bins are often subjected to vandalism, including being torn from the walls.

Furthermore this is a common reason given by some Council Facilities Managers for not providing these units, even when there is evidence that injecting is consistently taking place in, or around the areas of the public conveniences.

Sharps boxes recessed into the walls, discourages vandalism of community sharps disposal facilities in public toilets as well as also minimises the risk of injury to maintenance workers and members of the public.

The disposal chute in the sharps boxes integrated into walls are considered unobtrusive and does not tend to draw attention to the presence of sharps (and invite vandalism) in the same way that a wall -mounted sharps bin does.

Due to sharp container being located in the adjacent service area which is not accessible to the public this allows for the containers and contents to be easily and safely checked by contractors without the need to open wall mounted containers in a public space.

Whilst this latter option would be best suited, this system is considered not to be as suited to many older council toilet blocks, due to the fabric of the buildings as well as the available wall space into the service room area. This said this option should be considered when designing new facilities or upgrading existing public conveniences.

Having reviewed the internal layout within the Western Esplanade public conveniences, I am not convinced that there will be enough unrestricted and free wall space into the rear service area from either the ladies or the gents. This is due

to the existing placement of the Wallgate units as well as the configurations of the toilet cubicles in each of the toilet blocks.

In addition to the above, consultation was had with our Procurement Officer in respect of the emptying of sharps boxes and the subsequent disposal of the contents.

The emptying of the sharps bins would need to be undertaken by a competent contractor who holds the necessary waste management licence (covering the handling and disposal of clinical waste).

To their knowledge there is only one island based company that would be able to provide this service. If the installation of sharps bins was sanctioned it was recommended that this contractor is contacted not only to provide a quote but also to seek guidance as to the best method of provision.

8. Items for consideration

- An overnight closure of the Western Esplanade public conveniences, in line with the rest of the town's toilets
- Provision of sharps bins within these facilities.
- Installation of information signage to advise service users as to where the registered pharmacies are located in Ryde for the purpose of safely disposal of sharps.
- Installation of blue lighting within the Western Esplanade public conveniences.

Darren Carter Smith, Facilities Officer.