



Seafront Toilet Charging

Introduction

Following research, comparisons and SWOT analysis, Looe Town Council agreed to introduce charges at the Millpool toilets in 2022. This site is one of five public conveniences in the town operated by the Council and all the others are currently provided for public use, free of charge.

The budgeted expenses for running public toilets for the year 2023/24 is £128.5k, which equates to 28% of the Council's precept income (equivalent to around £31 per resident per year based on an electorate of 4157 people in Looe). This is clearly a significant portion of the Council's expenditure for a facility which, arguably, benefits visitors more than residents who pay local council tax.

To facilitate charging at the Millpool toilets, the Council purchased equipment from Hi-Tec Washroom Solutions which was installed in May 2022 at a total cost of £22,020.00 + VAT. The machines installed provide entry through contactless payment by credit/debit card or via a 'residents card' which can be purchased from the Library for a small fee.

When charging for toilets was first considered, plans were discussed to introduce entry fees at other sites with the second to be the Seafront facilities. Now that we have more than a year's data from Hi-Tech, this report provides further details about the equipment, implementation, feedback, income and comparisons with other towns, to help Councillors make an informed decision.

Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps

- Install two paddle-gates (one ladies, one gents) and implement charges at Seafront toilets in time for 2024 holiday season with a contactless payment system and 20p entrance fee in line with Millpool;
- Plan signage, communication and support for users to effectively inform the public and minimise complaints after the introduction of charging;
- Ring-fence income from toilets to be used for maintenance of and improvements to these facilities
- Complete research of 'green' toilet solutions and develop a schedule for re-fitting and refurbishment of public toilet premises.



Millpool Income and Costs

Machines were installed at the Millpool toilets in May 2022 at a cost of £22,020. Servicing in the first year (two visits) totalled £1,500 making a total initial outlay of **£23,520**.

For information, there will be just one annual service at this site in 2023/24 which will cost £825.

Running costs to Looe Town Council for the system are a £30 fee per month (+ VAT) plus 8% of any sales made and these are accounted for in the income listed below. You can find monthly statements of transactions, fees and income received in Teams at the following link and this is summarised in the table:

<https://looetowncouncil.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/TownCouncillors/EvBrDjxC0iF1r9a4AAGxUuMBnV663llnUZC1O7WzQsIFig?e=crZPdk>

	Period	No. Ladies	No. Gents	No. Pre-paid	Total Paid	Total sales	Fees paid (incl. VAT)	Income
2022	12 – 31 May	2,674	2,357	0	5,031	£1,005.40	£116.43	£888.97
	1 – 30 June	4,050	3,694	0	7,744	£1,548.80	£159.90	£1,388.90
	1 – 31 July	6,098	5,378	5	11,481	£2,296.20	£219.70	£2,076.50
	1 – 31 Aug	8,200	7,335	12	15,535	£3,104.60	£284.37	£2,820.23
	1 – 30 Sept	4,926	4,705	5	9,631	£1,926.20	£190.10	£1,736.10
	1 – 31 Oct	2,870	2,544	17	5,431	£1082.80	£122.62	£960.18
	1 – 30 Nov	830	883	13	1,713	£342.60	£63.41	£279.19
	1 – 31 Dec	571	563	14	1,134	£226.80	£54.14	£172.66
2023	1 – 31 Jan	714	668	13	1,382	£276.40	£58.11	£218.29
	1 – 28 Feb	1,163	995	6	2,158	£431.60	£70.53	£361.07
	1 – 31 Mar	1,367	1,294	16	2,677	£532.20	£78.58	£453.62
	1 – 30 Apr	4,145	3,561	23	7,729	£1,541.20	£159.30	£1,381.90
	1 – 31 May	4,859	4,454	13	9,326	£1,862.60	£185.01	£1,677.59
	1 – 30 June	5,390	5,008	0	10,398	£2,079.60	£202.37	£1,877.23
	1 – 31 July	6,511	6021	8	12532	£2,506.60	£236.53	£2,270.07
	1 – 31 Aug	9,450	8347	26	17797	£3,559.40	£320.75	£3,238.65
	TOTALS	63,818	57,807	171	121,699	£24,323	£2,522	£21,801



Councillors will be aware that the actual income received falls short of that predicted prior to the charging being introduced. However, we are now at the stage when installation and first year servicing costs have almost been recouped and we can begin to plan how to use the income generated to improve our public toilet facilities.

Installation and maintenance

The installation of the Hi-Tec entry gates went relatively smoothly over a few days, with one outstanding job being rectified once this was reported to our Account Lead there. On the rare occasions that our team have had an issue which they are unable to resolve, Hi-Tec have always responded promptly.

We now have a maintenance agreement with Hi-Tec which provides one service visit per year with our own team carrying out monthly checks to ensure the system remains in good working order.

Please note that there may be a need for two service visits per annum at the Seafront due to the increased exposure to salt water at that site.

User feedback and experience

Whilst there were some questions and complaints when the charge of 20p per entry were introduced at the Millpool toilets (around 15 formal complaints in total), the volume was not significant in comparison to the number of users at the site and some of these may have been avoided through better communication with the public during implementation. We have subsequently improved signage and information about our charges and, of course, introduced the residents cards.

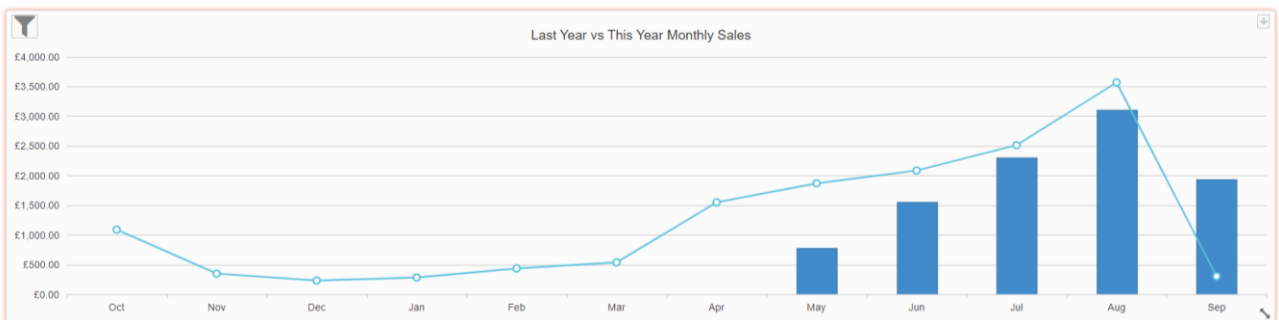
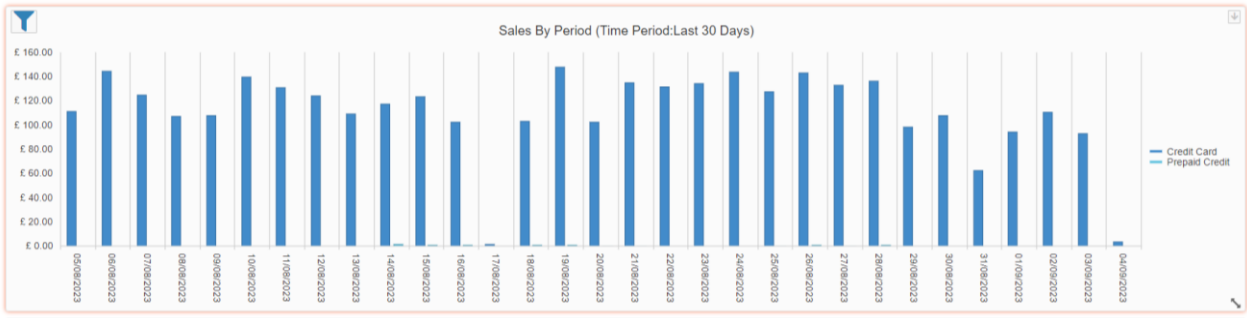
Cleaning staff continue to get verbal complaints from visitors about paying an entry fee to the toilets and there are also frequent instances of the alarms sounding when people try to force the gates; 'tailgate' another user; or wait for someone to exit so as to avoid payment. More complaints are about having to use a card instead of cash, rather than about the amount of the fee.

In terms of the equipment, there have been some issues with payment cards being removed from terminals too quickly and signage has been posted above each terminal to help customers avoid these issues. We have had very occasional complaints about the functionality of the equipment and that people have been charged twice in which case we offer a refund of entry fees. In comparison to the volume of people using the facilities, the number of issues is negligible.

System and Data

The IT system itself (Nayax) has been very reliable with minimal down-time and we have access to the system which allows us to see up-to-date information and reports about our machines. This includes information about faults with machines; sales by period (daily/weekly/monthly); and comparisons with previous periods.

Nayax can be accessed on laptops or through a mobile app and we have not fully exploited its usage to date. This type of data will, however, be increasingly useful if more machines are added to our network. Please see screenshots overleaf showing some of the data available to us on the system:



Residents' Cards

To enable Looe Council Tax-payers to access the toilets at a reduced rate, residents' cards were made available in July which LTC purchase from Hi-Tec at £2.50 each. Cards are pre-loaded with 30 entry credits (i.e. £6 worth) at the beginning of each calendar month so provide roughly one free entry per day. Unused credits are not rolled over to avoid any abuse of this system.

Residents' cards are available for local people to purchase at a one-off cost of £5 which includes a small administrative fee to the Council as we have to check proof of residence, record card owner's details, and register the sale with Hi Tec.

To date, only a handful of cards have been sold to residents and one has been provided free of charge to Biffa so that their workers can continue to access toilet facilities near their break-out room at Millpool. It is likely that the demand for residents' cards will increase as entrance fees are introduced at other public conveniences in the town.

Charging in other Cornish Towns

A planned visit by Councillors and Officers to similar towns where toilet charging is in place was cancelled due to a lack of member availability on co-ordinated dates. However, I have contacted other Councils operating charging facilities and details about this is set out below:



Par Beach

The Council introduced charging as soon as it took over and refurbished the toilets. It is a cash-only system and it is difficult to be exact about costs of this but a Handyman empties the coin pays and delivers the money to the Clerk for banking. Handyman is paid £40 a month for cash collection. It is likely that they will look at installing card-pay in the future.

There is certainly a financial benefit in recouping some of the outlay. Additionally, the system can be set to automatically open and close the facilities which reduces the likelihood of overnight vandalism and they do not have to be opened/closed manually.

A few people complain about paying, particularly disabled people, but most people accept that it is not a problem to pay as long as the facilities are clean.

Fowey

As above, the Council introduced charging as soon as it took over and refurbished the toilets. It is a cash and card-pay system which is an advantage as there is less cash to handle. A Handyman empties the coin pays and delivers the money to the Clerk for banking and is paid £40 a month for cash collection. Fees are payable for card system but could not be provided at time of asking.

Other benefits/complaints received as above (Par and Fowey share a Town Clerk)

Mevagissey

Coin boxes were installed at West Wharf in 2019, charging 50p and card readers added this year. Coin boxes are still available. Ongoing costs are £40 onboarding fee plus 1% - 2.95% card processing fee. Biggest benefit is that income pays about 25% of the cost of providing toilets at West Wharf and Valley Road. Downside is that some visitors object to paying, abuse the attendant, wedge the doors open which can upset the card readers and incur call out fees to fix.

Newquay

Have 10 public toilets, each with a 50p charge for use. 20p fee introduced in 2016 then raised the fee to 50p this year. This increase is aimed at covering the rising energy and water bills, as well as staff costs and the necessary remedial work to address the (unfortunately) frequent vandalism. Currently, only WCs at Fore Street have contactless card payment facilities, though Facilities Manager has plans to expand this in the near future.

All other facilities are currently coin-operated and steps taken to manage cash are:

- Facilities team when cleaning the toilets will collect the cash at each toilet and bring the cash bags into the office.
- Office team then count the cash (for our reference) and bag the cash in bags provided by G4S.
- G4S collect bagged cash
- Monthly invoice from G4S charges for the collections and a processing fee

The main cost incurred is staff to physically collecting the cash from each toilet and then count the money. The fee for the G4S is around £25 a collection and then a processing fee of around £25 a



month but this can vary depending on the amounts involved. For the contactless system they pay a monthly fee of around £35 a month.

The most common complaints received are about the fact that they charge for the use of toilets and that they're not part of the RADAR toilet scheme. Charging for public toilet use is essential for Newquay as it ensures cleanliness, full staffing, and helps to reduce anti-social behaviour. The town has opted out of the RADAR scheme due to the ready availability of keys online for non-members. Accessible toilets using the RADAR key were associated with a significantly higher level of graffiti and vandalism, prompting their decision to discontinue participation in the scheme.

In summary, the experience of other Councils is not dis-similar to our own at the Millpool toilets:

- Income received is a valuable contribution towards the significant cost of providing toilet facilities;
- Cash payment systems are more burdensome than cards;
- A small percentage of users are unhappy at having to pay for toilets.

Feedback from Newquay also supports the theory that vandalism and anti-social behaviour is less prevalent at paid-for facilities.

Implementation at Seafront Toilets

Previous discussions about implementing charges resulted in the suggestion that entry fees would be introduced at the Seafront toilets as a next step. This would still be our preferred option as, together with Millpool, these sites are the busiest in summer months and are the toilets most used by visitors as opposed to residents.

Assuming a similar level of use at Seafront toilets to that at the Millpool, implementing entry fees here, after costs have been recouped, would increase our income from public toilets to cover around 23% of our costs of servicing and maintaining all the public toilets in Looe. The cost to install paddle-gates remains similar to when this was done at the Millpool, ie. £9,100 per gate plus installation costs of £3,000, making a total cost of £21,200. We will need to budget for two services of the equipment each year at the seafront site given the environment but, nonetheless, should recoup costs within 18 months of installation as we have at the Millpool.

Due to the occasions when the sensors at Millpool paddle-gates have been damaged or kicked, I have discussed with Hi-Tech an alternative option of installing turnstiles. Whilst these would be a cheaper and more established solution, they do not allow access for those with pushchairs or buggies and we could not provide a second entrance or alternative access to baby-changing facilities at any of our existing premises. Other advantages to paddle-gates are that they provide a visual barrier; they open instantly once payment is made; and they allow faster throughput than turnstile alternatives.

In light of the above, my recommendation would be that we implement a paddle-gate system at the seafront toilets with a contactless payment system in line with that at the Millpool site.



I have discussed the option of a cash/card system with Hi-Tec Washrooms who inform me that they are, generally, moving away from cash operated machines due to the issues of security, theft, and collection costs which were considered by Council when our initial site was fitted with entry gates. Please refer also to the earlier section of this report about other Council's experiences in this respect, their costs of cash collection and planned moves to introduce more card payments in other towns.

I also recommend, however, that Council consider what actions we can take to mitigate problems for people who may need to use the toilets at seafront which are, arguably, in an area where people may not be carrying a card at all times, e.g. coming from the beach. Steps to help with this could include (but are not limited to):

- Open publicity and marketing to ensure visitors are aware of fee and payment system;
- Clear signage at the sites about fees, how to pay, contact number to report problems;
- Staff member on site during busiest periods/'beach weather' to help with any problems with entry equipment;
- Re-promotion of Resident's cards for locals.

Other Considerations

As we are now at the stage where we begin to generate income from the Millpool toilet site, Councillors should consider how this can best be used to improve our public toilet facilities. If possible, this income should be 'ring-fenced' for refurbishment of our toilets and, with this in mind, we will develop a costed plan for re-fitting public toilets which we hope can then form part of our ongoing Asset Maintenance Plan.

I would like to recommend that major repairs begin with the facilities where charging is in place and that we seek to implement GREENER & CLEANER alternatives where possible to reduce use of water and electricity in our toilet buildings, and to make the sites easier for our team to maintain on a daily basis.



Report by Karen Vaughan, Deputy Clerk

4 October 2023