PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

1. Reason for Report
To seek the Area Committee’s agreement to measures designed to reduce expenditure on public conveniences within the area, in line with a 25% reduction in the overall budget, and reallocation of expenditure based on population numbers.

2. Report Summary
2.1 The report outlines the background to the reallocated and top-sliced budget.
2.2 The report proposes a number of measures which can reduce expenditure, and the results of consultation with Community Councils.

3. Glossary of Terms
Financial Efficiency Strategy – FES
Public Convenience - PC

4. Recommendations
Members are asked to:

4.1 approve the restricted opening of facilities at Brighouse Bay, The Dhoon and Sandyhills to seasonal only (Easter – October holidays);
4.2 approve the closure of the toilets at Carlingwark Street, Castle Douglas and Achie Bridge, New Galloway; and
4.3 agree to purchase of additional cleaning input hours at the facilities at Market Hill, Castle Douglas and Harbour Square, Kirkcudbright from the £4,789 savings achieved in excess of target if recommendations 4.1 and 4.2 are agreed; and
4.4 remit to Corporate director of Combined Services to progress discussions with owners of adjacent or shared facilities on the potential for sharing provision and costs; and
4.5 await the outcome of the pilot “Comfort Partnership” in the Wigtown area.

5. Corporate Plan Links and Contribution
The key link is to Financial Management which states: "We will continue to make strong financial management a top priority by closely monitoring spending and taking action to reduce Council Tax increases and achieve value for money".

6. Resources/Value for Money Assessment
6.1 A report to the Combined Services Committee in December 2006 pointed out the inequitable distribution of budget for public conveniences, based on historical spending patterns rather than any objective measure related to population or demand, and suggested reallocation of budgets in the first instance on population.
6.2 Within a cash-limited budget, resources must be focused on facilities which are most used, and where there is no alternative provision. The proposed savings measures do in fact produce excess savings, which it is recommended are used to procure additional cleaning input hours for those facilities with heaviest demand.

6.3 The proposed savings measures will require steps to be taken to minimise impacts on a number of staff, as there will be either a reduction in annual contract hours, or full closure of facilities. A first resort would be to seek redeployment of affected staff, but there is potential for redundancy or - in respect of toilets which are proposed for reduction to seasonal opening - technical redundancy.

7. Risk Assessment
Closure of facilities has the potential to impact on tourist numbers; however, Dumfries & Galloway is currently well served in comparison to other authorities, with one Public Convenience for every 1,826 member of population. This compares to 1:7,640 in Perth & Kinross, 1:5,890 in Cumbria, and 1:2,541 in Scottish Borders. Only Highland Council in Scotland has greater numbers, at 1:1,565.

8. Authorities and Legal Implications
8.1 Provision of PCs is a discretionary service, although clearly their provision improves the amenity of the areas in which they are sited. Where PCs are provided, the Council has statutory obligations to ensure the safety of the buildings and the facilities contained within them.

8.2 Resources Committee remitted to Stewartry and Wigtown Area Committees consideration of further savings measures to achieve the required reductions in expenditure. This Area Committee therefore has delegated authority to agree actions in respect of the Public Convenience service in the Stewartry.

9. Consultations
9.1 The Area Manager (Stewartry) and the Group Manager Human Resources have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are in agreement.

9.2 The Trade Unions have been consulted on the report.

9.3 The results of Community Council consultations are detailed at paragraph 11.4.

9.4 It is understood that a petition opposing the proposed closure of the Carlingwark Street facility is being organised, and may be presented to the Council prior to the Area Committee meeting.

10. Background
10.1 The Public Convenience budget was reduced by 25%, as part of the Council's Financial Efficiency Strategy for 2007/08, at a meeting of the Combined Services Committee in December 2006.

10.2 A report submitted to Combined Services Committee in April 2007 proposed opening seasonal facilities only during holiday periods, and remitting consideration of measures to reduce expenditure to Area Committees. The Committee, however, amongst other things "agreed appreciating the advice of the Corporate Director of Combined Services to remit to the Corporate Director to undertake an urgent options review of the staffed toilet provision recognising their higher unit costs and the
potential to release revenue savings from their rationalisation and substitution as appropriate by modern automatic / unmanned facilities and to report in June 2007”.

10.3 A report came before the Resources Committee on 21 August 2007, which duly examined the usage and cost of staffed facilities, and Members at that point agreed a new “Strategic Vision” for Dumfries & Galloway’s Public Convenience service, viz:

To provide good quality public conveniences in key areas which supplement alternative provision and enhance visitors’ perception of Dumfries & Galloway.

Members thereby agreed to focus expenditure on facilities which are most frequently used, and which are in critical locations in respect of tourism, etc.

10.4 In summary, the actions agreed by Resources Committee (subject to consultation with staff groups) were:

- Reallocation of budgets between areas to reflect local population;
- Increase in charges for attended and automated conveniences to 30p;
- Removal of attendants from less frequently used attended conveniences (Annan, Lockerbie, Dock Park Dumfries, Whithorn);
- Reduction of attended facility at Portpatrick to Easter-October only.

10.5 Following implementation of these recommendations, however, and despite unused budgets in Nithsdale and Annandale & Eskdale being reallocated to Wigtown and Stewartry to minimise the impact on the historic level of service, savings of £36,081 and £3,631 respectively require to be found in these areas.

10.6 Resources Committee therefore agreed to remit consideration of further actions to Area Committees, and to advise them in particular to consider:

- The removal of secondary facilities in those communities where two currently exist;
- The consistent reduction to seasonal opening only of facilities located within lower population areas or at bathing beaches;
- The transfer of responsibility for existing toilet provision to lead tenants within Council buildings, or to external parties which currently share locations;
- The closure of low-use facilities which fall below an acceptable standard.

11. Key Issues

11.1 The table below outlines the current costs of conveniences in the Stewartry area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalbeattie Toilets</td>
<td>£ 7,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Toilets</td>
<td>£ 1,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Hill Toilets C/D</td>
<td>£ 12,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhoon Toilets</td>
<td>£ 4,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkcudbright Toilets</td>
<td>£ 13,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighouse Public Toilets</td>
<td>£ 2,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlingwark Toilets C/D</td>
<td>£ 4,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auchencairn Toilets</td>
<td>£ 1,285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Gatehouse Toilets

New Galloway High Street

New Galloway Achie Bridge

Carsphairn Toilets

Sandyhills Toilets

Rockliffe Toilets

Kippford Toilets

£ 4,984
£ 965
£ 457
£ 808
£ 3,118
£ 2,262
£ 2,001

11.2.1 Closure of facilities at Carlingwark Street, Castle Douglas, and Achie Bridge, New Galloway

Two facilities are currently provided in New Galloway and Castle Douglas. In recent years, secondary facilities have been closed in Kirkcudbright and Dalbeattie. It is suggested that the smaller of the facilities in both these communities should be closed (Achie Bridge, NG, and Carlingwark Street, Castle Douglas). The facilities at Achie Bridge are not of an acceptable standard, and whilst close to the main car park in the town, they are situated well away from any of the town’s visitor attractions. The facilities at Carlingwark Street are subject to recurring acts of anti-social behaviour, and are not of a high standard. Whilst currently situated at a bus terminus, the Council could ask bus operators to adjust their operating routes to ensure that the majority of transfers take place at the eastern end of town, adjacent to the Market Hill toilets. Savings associated with closure of these facilities would be £457 and £4,463 respectively.

11.2.2 Reduction of facilities at beaches to seasonal opening only

The Council operates three facilities in the Stewartry which are based at bathing beaches: Dhoon, Brighouse Bay and Sandyhills. Each of these is currently open all year round at present, and whilst conclusive data is not available, it is likely that the vast majority of usage takes place between the Easter and October holidays annually. Reduction of these facilities to seasonal opening only would save an anticipated £1,500, £1,000 and £1,000 respectively.

11.2.3 Shared facilities

There are no facilities in the Stewartry operational area which are based in shared locations with other Council services; however, the following facilities are located adjacent to village halls or, in the case of Carsphairn, the Heritage Centre: Carsphairn, Auchencairn, Dalry. New Galloway High Street is now adjacent to the Glenkens Community Arts Trust building. Clearly in the case of the first three facilities, there is potentially a high proportion of neighbouring facilities’ users who will use the public toilets, and in all four cases there may be room for exploring a more collaborative approach to sharing costs of provision.

11.2.4 Poor Standard Facilities

With the exception of New Galloway Achie Bridge, the toilets are generally of a reasonable standard given their location. However, there is a case for arguing that
the facilities which receive most usage (Market Hill Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright) would benefit from a more intensive inspection and cleaning regime.

11.3 Given all of the above, the savings measures which it appears most appropriate to place before the Area Committee are closure of the facilities at Achie Bridge New Galloway and Carlingwark Street Castle Douglas, and the reduction of opening at Dhoon, Brighouse Bay and Sandyhills to Easter-October only. The total saving which could be effected by implementing these actions is £8,420, whereas the total saving required is £3,631.

11.4 Four responses were received from Community Councils (Castle Douglas, Auchencairn, Dalbeattie and Balmaghie). These are attached as Appendix. In summary, comments are:

- Castle Douglas Community Council stated that closure of Carlingwark Street facility would inconvenience a great many people, and that it would be impractical to relocate the bus “comfort stop” to Market Hill. They further stated that loss of one facility would not sit well with the town’s “Food Town” status. They queried whether vandal-proof coin boxes could be placed at the conveniences;
- Auchencairn Community Council expressed pleasure that their facility would not be impacted by the recommendations;
- Dalbeattie Community Council queried the level of expenditure on their facility as compared to that at Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright (best estimate figures suggest that Dalbeattie toilets have less than 10,000 visitors per annum, as opposed to more than 20,000 in the others);
- Balmaghie Community Council also expressed a view that removal of the Carlingwark Street facility would be inconvenient for those visiting Castle Douglas, and that Market Street was too busy to accommodate further public transport stops.

11.5 Members have previously expressed a wish to see higher cleanliness standards at Market Hill, Castle Douglas and Harbour Square, Kirkcudbright facilities, which are the highest-use facilities in the Stewartry. An application for discretionary funding from the Stewartry Area Committee on 20 June 2007 was refused. This is a core service of Combined Services. However, if the Area Committee wishes to see additional cleans at Market Hill Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright, it will either have to generate savings in addition to the £3,631, or fund the additional expenditure from its own controllable budget. It is suggested that closure of the Carlingwark Street facility would enable additional cleaning hours to be procured for these facilities.

11.6 The additional cleaning hours at these facilities are required on the basis of significant visitor numbers to their communities which are not evidenced in Dalbeattie, albeit this town has a slightly higher population. The visitor numbers appear to impact on the cleanliness of the facilities, despite existing additional cleaning hours procured as a variation. The adjacent car parks in Kirkcudbright and Castle Douglas are visited by significant numbers of coach parties, as well as private motor vehicles, and the Kirkcudbright car park also hosts a large number of tourist-oriented events over the summer months. The savings achieved would enable a further 808 hours’ cleaning to be purchased in total.
11.7 The Group Manager Local Services (Wigtown) has proposed a pilot “Comfort Partnership” in that area, due to the need to identify significantly larger savings on current expenditure. Essentially, such a scheme provides grants to businesses or other organisations in exchange for providing public access to their toilet facilities. At this point in time, Stewartry Area Committee is asked only to await feedback from the pilot in Wigtown, and to note that such a scheme may enable the Council to better target its expenditure on key facilities.

11.8 Looking to future years, therefore, and in line with the new Strategic Vision, the Stewartry Area Committee is asked only to remit officers to progress discussions with owners of adjacent or shared facilities on the potential for sharing provision and costs.

12. Options Available

12.1 Seasonal opening only of Brighouse, Dhoon and Sandyhills toilets, with a consequent saving of £3,500.

12.2 Closure of facilities at New Galloway Ache Bridge with a consequent saving of £457, and Castle Douglas Carlingwark Street, with a consequent saving of £4,463.

12.3 Purchase of additional cleaning input hours at Castle Douglas Market Hill and Kirkcudbright Harbour Square from the “excess” savings of £4,789.

12.4 Alternatively, if Members are minded not to approve closure of Castle Douglas Carlingwark Street facility, no (or very limited) additional cleaning hours could be purchased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harry Thomson</th>
<th>Geoff Lewis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Manager Business</td>
<td>Corporate Director of Combined Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Services</td>
<td>Marchmount House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Report: 2 February 2007</td>
<td>Marchmount Avenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File Ref: 3/3/1</td>
<td>Dumfries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DG1 1PY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDICES – 1
Feedback received from Community Councils following consultation on proposals.

Background Papers
Combined Services Committee March 2006 – “Review of Public Convenience Provision within Dumfries & Galloway”;
Combined Services Committee April 2007 – “Public Conveniences”
Resources Committee, August 2007 – “Public Convenience Provision”
Dumfries & Galloway Council, October 2007 – "Motion by the Labour Group – Public Conveniences"
Dear Mr. Thomson

REVIEW OF PUBLIC TOILETS

In the opinion of Castle Douglas Community Council closing the toilets at Carlingwark Street would be most inconvenient to a great many people. They are well used by residents, visitors and people passing through on buses, most of which have travelled from Stranraer making Castle Douglas a very handy comfort stop. The Market Hill end of town is busy enough with the number of buses which stop there.

The loss in tourist trade would be quite considerable as many people associate places with the facilities which are available and to have a ‘Food Town’ with only toilets at one end of the town seems idiotic.

Years ago a coin slot was placed on these toilets and I know they were vandalised frequently I wonder if there isn’t vandal proof machines in this day and age.

The people of the town are 100% behind us in this.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Secretary

P.S. I apologise for missing the deadline for this reply – I sent an e-mail last week which unaccountably did no get through!
Mr Harry Thomson  
Group Manager Business/Acting Group Manager Local Services (Stewartry)  
Combined Services  
Abercromby Road Industrial Estate  
CASTLE DOUGLAS  
DG7 1LH  

08 October 2007  

Dear Mr Thomson  

REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES  

We thank you for your letter dated 18 September 2007. The Community Council discussed this at our meeting on 02 October. We were pleased and relieved that the recommendation to the Area Committee will be to retain the essential public toilet in this village.  

We suggest that when the Report is presented to the Stewartry Area Committee, that the Council will vote and agree to keep our Public Conveniences open.  

Yours sincerely  

Jack Martin  
Chairman  

Cc: Local Councillors  
    Derek Crighton, Area Manager Stewartry
Dear Mr Thomson,

Review of Public Conveniences

Thank you for your letter of 17th September to Community Councillor Alex Howie which has been passed to me for reply.

After discussion at our recent meeting, we wish to make three points.

(a) While we recognise the need to contain and reduce costs within the current financial climate, it is important to understand that clean and attractive public toilets are an essential part of our drive to attract and increase visitor numbers to our Town.

(b) We are somewhat surprised at the cost level of toilet cleaning in wonder about the base of the figure of £7023.00 shown for Dalbeattie. Is this a direct cost, or are there indirect overheads attached. If so, what are they please?

(c) We are similarly surprised at the cost difference between Dalbeattie and our two sister Towns of Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright. We would like to think that there is some parity in these matters. Assuming that we are dealing with direct costs, will you please let me know the difference in cleaning hours between Dalbeattie and the others?

Yours sincerely

Brian Atwell
Vice Chair, Dalbeattie Community Council
DEAR Harry,

REVIEW OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

Ref: Letter 3.3.1, dated 18th September 2007.

Thank you for your letter and the opportunity to comment on the key four actions recommended by the Resources Committee in order to reduce the current costs of public conveniences in the Stewartry.

Removal of Secondary Facilities:
We are of the opinion that the closure of the smaller facility in Castle Douglas is fundamentally flawed. Castle Douglas is a very popular tourist destination and almost without exception visitors park their car at Market Hill before walking down King Street, browsing in shops along the way and perhaps stopping off for a cup of tea. Their walk down to the bottom of the Street is likely to take longer than they anticipated so a comfort break at Carlingwark Toilets, for some, is liable to be a lifesaver. As regards the location of this facility, you quote that it is subject to recurring anti-social behaviour. Our understanding is that the Council has a multi-agency strategy and action plan in place to tackle anti-social behaviour in Dumfries and Galloway - are you saying that the objectives of this strategy are not being met? Is it right that this facility should close because of the behaviour of a few? Equally so, if the Carlingwark Toilet is not of a high standard, is the reason for this shortfall in standard due to lack of maintenance funding over the past years? Turning now to the fact that bus operators use this immediate area as a terminus: you suggest that the operators might wish to ensure that the majority of transfers take place at the eastern end of the town, adjacent to the Market Hill Toilets. We would refute this; there is already a considerable amount of bus/ other vehicular congestion in and around Market Street. Would it be wise from a road safety viewpoint to add more vehicles to an already busy part of town?

24th October 2007
You may wish to consider two alternative options: firstly, reduce the opening times to seasonal opening only and then in partnership with the bus companies that use the area around Carlingwark Toilets as a terminus think about providing the driver with a key to the Toilets in order that they can be used by passengers as and when required. Secondly, the other alternative is to consider having the comfort break for bus passengers in Gatehouse of Fleet.

Reduction to Seasonal Opening:
Of the three facilities in the Stewartry that are based at bathing beaches, we concur that there is merit in reducing the opening times to seasonal opening only – say between the Easter and October holidays.

Transfer of Responsibility:
In your letter you state that there are no facilities in the Stewartry operational area that are based in shared locations with other Council services. Perhaps we don’t fully understand the rationale of this statement, but have you considered the amenities in the Town Hall and Community Centre in Castle Douglas.

Acceptable Standards:
Castle Douglas is considered by some to be the jewel in the crown within the Stewartry. Consequently, from a tourism point of view, the Toilets at Market Hill should always be clean and well maintained. It is therefore essential that a high standard of cleanliness is maintained at all times and if this means additions to the cleaning rota, so be it.

We are copying this letter to Derek Crichton, Area Manager Stewartry, to keep him in the picture.

Yours sincerely,

Des Hadnett
Secretary
Balmaghie Community Council

Copy to:
Derek Crichton, Area Manager Stewartry.