

## Public Conveniences Summary

This assessment focuses on non-residential toilets as a sanitary service provided in the City.

In delivering this assessment the report:

- Identifies the current and forecast metropolitan situation relative to the total supply and demand for public conveniences, as distinct from those provided in residential dwellings, in order to ensure that appropriate and adequate provision is made;
- Identifies Councils current response, both regulatory and through direct provision of services, to the demand and to the maintenance of appropriate health outcomes for the community;
- Identifies and presents options for ongoing and future provision – including options to reduce, maintain, change or enhance levels of service provided directly and / or indirectly to the public;
- Recommends Council preferred options to meet ongoing demand and maintain appropriate health outcomes for the community.

This assessment considers the public access to non-residential toilets in terms of the:

- Contribution to achieving public health outcomes through ensuring the public have adequate access to clean and safe toilet facilities, while away from home;
- Capacity to meet reasonable expectations of Christchurch residents visiting public places;
- Capacity to meet reasonable expectations of tourists visiting public places.

## Identification of public health and other issues

The flowing perspectives and issues have been identified through consultation with stakeholders and interested parties, and also through complaints received by the Council about public toilets.

Public toilets need to be:

- Located in convenient places;
- Open at convenient times;
- Occur in sufficient quantities to reflect demand (e.g. at events);
- Hygienic, safe and secure (e.g. are clean at all times, have sufficient hand washing facilities, have sufficient lighting, have safe disposal for other wastes left by the public including sanitary items, condoms and syringes etc);
- Fully functioning and regularly maintained (e.g. all fixtures are fully operational, and septic tanks or composting toilets are emptied and cleaned appropriately).

## Council's role and other service providers

Public access to toilets, other than those in residential homes, is currently provided by a wide range of businesses activities, educational institutions and other organisations - with toilets located either within or associated with their facilities. These businesses and organisations have an obligation to provide toilet facilities for their staff and in most cases for their customers (for the purposes of this report these toilets are referred to as in the "Public Domain").

The provision of public toilets is not the primary driver for most organisations, consequently the extent and quality of the toilets is driven by staff and/or customer expectations and regulatory compliance. However, some businesses do view the provision of toilets as part of a complementary service (e.g. service stations generically provide toilet facilities, in much the same way as they provide free air for tyres). In general, the presence of staff at these businesses and the requirements of customers result in reasonable levels of monitoring toilets in terms of cleanliness, supplies and condition.

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Council is also engaged in a number of activities such as libraries, community centres, parking buildings and services centres, providing toilets for staff and visitors at these locations (for the purposes of this report these toilets are referred to as “Secondary Council Sites”). Separate to these are “public toilets” provided by the City Council and hire companies. The latter generically provide portable toilets for specific events or work sites (in this report these toilets will be referred to as “Primary Public Toilets”).

Within the Christchurch district there are over 171 Council-owned public toilets:

- 158 are located in or associated with parks;
- 13 are located in predominantly retail areas (including Cathedral Square).

## Assessment of the level of service

In this assessment of the sanitary services, a city-wide audit was made on the levels of service provided by Primary Council sites and a sample survey of both Secondary Council and Public Domain sites. In addition, a building condition assessment was completed on Primary Council sites to determine current maintenance issues and long term maintenance and renewal requirements.

The results of the Condition Assessment showed that on the whole the buildings were in relatively good condition – with some notable exceptions. Future maintenance and renewal requirements for surfaces, fixtures and fittings are planned based on the passing of time, industry standards and/or a decline in condition. It can also be triggered by other enhancement programmes associated with the facility.

The table below shows a comparative assessment of toilets available to the public throughout the city, on the basis of a Levels of Service audit of current provision. The audit graded sites on the basis of availability, location, cleanliness, and general amenity values. The level of service evident within the Primary Public Toilets varied considerably and the reference to Best Appropriate Practice relates to a selection of Council sites identified as “Best Appropriate Practice” to show what is achievable.

	Primary Public Toilets		Secondary Council Sites	Public Domain Toilet Sites			Comments
	All	BAP		Shopping Centres	Fast Food Outlets	Petrol Stations	
Availability	9.7	9.9	9.5+	9.5	9.6	9.0	
Location	8.7	9.2	9.5	9.9	9.9	9.9	
Cleanliness	7.0	8.4	8.0	9.0+	8.9	8.4	McDonalds cleaning exemplary
Amenities	9.0	9.3	9.0	9.5	9.5	9.0	



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Shopping centres and major fast food outlets perform well in terms of the provision of public conveniences due to their location at high usage points, availability during all normal shopping hours, high standard of amenity, and in particular, frequency and standard of cleaning. Petrol stations also performed well but with less consistency in terms of access for non-patrons, the standard of amenity and the level and frequency of cleaning.

As a large, diverse portfolio of properties, Council’s secondary sites scored better than petrol stations in terms of availability but inferior to other providers – with some facilities providing staff-only access. The general level of amenity was also inferior to shopping centres and fast food outlets as was the standard and frequency of cleaning. Location factors were however high. Within the secondary Council sites are several sub-groupings and their performance varied markedly. In general terms, for example, libraries performed very well on all criteria, whereas other community facilities such as parking buildings did not. Mostly this related to availability and cleanliness.

It is clear that the overall assessed performance of Private Domain toilets is at a consistently high level against the criteria used in the audit and that in general Council-owned facilities are inferior, in particular with regard to cleanliness.

While most of the Primary Council sites scored well, the cleanliness criterion was the poorest performing category by a significant factor and highlights the difficulty of keeping these sites clean with a lack of on-site monitoring by staff, and the open nature of the facilities.

The following details criteria used in the evaluation with the average scores for the 171 Primary site toilets.

Toilets are clean and hygienic with no build up of excessive litter	80%
Litter bins are installed internally and available adjacent externally to the site	57%
The site is free of unpleasant odour	84%
Sanitary bins are supplied and clean	46%
Automatic flush unit is operational and sufficient to dispose of waste	97%
Soap dispensers and automatic hand driers are fully functional	35%
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>66%</b>

Particular issues that impact on the performance of cleaning at Primary and Secondary Council sites are:

- Only one public toilet staffed (Cathedral Square);
- Cleaning regimes only as good as the last person using the facility, therefore, frequency of cleaning is a crucial factor in maintaining standards and public perceptions;
- Some surfaces more difficult to clean and maintain hygiene standards than others;
- Toilet facilities managed and cleaned by a range of different parties / contractors with a lack of consistent standards;
- Audits of cleaning standards required;
- Accountability for public toilets as a service is managed by different parts of the Council.

Councils options, and proposed response to these issues, are detailed later in the report and in more detail within the Assessment.



## Current and future demand

Demand for public conveniences is influenced and modified by compliance and customer expectations, however, in total capacity terms it is driven by population. This needs to account not only for the resident population, but also tourist numbers and those outside the immediate geographic area who frequent the city for work, leisure or other reasons.

In the context of a total city wide provision of toilets in public places by Primary, Secondary and Public Domain providers, the current supply is considered adequate. The standard of some facilities, however, is less than adequate and presents a modest degree of public health concerns. More detailed demand analysis is required to inform site specific requirements – with options to expand, maintain or contract (over time) the number and nature of facilities provided at individual sites.

While site specific provision falls outside the statutory requirements of this assessment, the Special Consultative Procedure provided a legitimate vehicle for individuals, groups and the wider community to express their desires for additional or different facilities at specific locations. No specific funding is available for such sites and initiatives, however, these are now being considered within the context of the 2006 to 2016 Long Term Council Community Plan.

## Options to meet demand

Public Domain and Secondary Council toilets are subject to the Building Act and Building Code in terms of toilet design and capacity. Most of these sites take responsibility for the toilets on behalf of their staff and customers, based on user expectations and compliance. This also applies to parks and locations where Council encourages large numbers of residents and tourists to aggregate, such as in Cathedral Square or at Council-run events.

However, the Building Code fails to require retailers to provide facilities for their customers in the same way that a Shopping Centre must. While true for all retailers, this inconsistent approach is most noticeable with the larger retail outlets, such as supermarkets, large format warehouse-styled retailers and bulk retailers. Similar issues exist with the provision of toilet facilities within nightclubs and other late night venues. Anecdotal evidence suggests inadequate toilet facilities are provided, which in turn contributes to anti-social behaviour in adjacent public areas.

In light of these factors, the following options are available:

1. **Status Quo.** Provision by a mix of Council and non-Council providers is adequate to meet the overall demand. This does not address differences in the quality of the toilets provided.
2. **Improve level of service at existing Council-owned toilets.** Options to achieve this include:
  - Increase the frequency of cleaning;
  - Rationalise cleaning contracts and develop consistent cleaning standards for Council facilities;
  - Improve signage to encourage the reporting of damage or cleanliness problems to the Council;
  - A quick response cleaning service when notification of problems is received by the Council;
  - Greater auditing of the cleaning standards delivered by service providers;
  - Upgrading surfaces, fixtures and fittings to those more resistant to vandalism and easier to clean;
  - Staffing all or more Public Toilets\*.
3. **Increase provision of Council-owned toilets in retail locations.** Council could choose to provide toilet facilities in retail areas to address the lack of services provided by the retailers linked to the limitations of the Building Code.
4. **Reduce provision of Council-owned toilets in retail locations.** Council could rely more fully on businesses to provide services for their customers.
5. **Lobby for changes to the Building Code.** Council could lobby central government for amendments to the Building Code that would require the retail sector, including nightclubs to provide (or enhance) sanitary facilities.
6. **Complete site specific monitoring of demand.** Commission monitoring to develop demand profile for specific groups of sites – identifying current demand on a seasonal basis and at peak demand periods, etc. This would enable services to be customised better to demand.

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7. **Improve community awareness of availability and standards.** Explore opportunities to improve awareness of the availability of public conveniences for residents and tourists, the standards they should expect and the options available for them to raise concerns.
8. **Charge for access to public toilets.** Some cities in other parts of the world charge for access to public toilets as a means to fund the service. The same could be implemented here.
9. **Options for sanitary waste disposal from vehicles.** Some provision for sanitary waste disposal from trailer homes and motor homes exists with camping ground facilities and truck stop facilities (ostensibly for livestock). However, the adequacy and appropriateness of these needs to be researched and alternate options considered (this is not covered within the existing document).



### Council's Preferred Options.

The recommendation of the assessment is for adoption by Council of a combination of options included within 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9 outlined above. Where there is no existing funding within Council's budgets, the initiatives should be considered within the context of the LTCCP.

Once detailed site specific demand profiles have been identified (and improved clarity exists around the private sectors provision of toilet facilities for public access), Council needs to indicate clearly and consistently its provision of service relating to options 3, 4 and 8, and options for additional onsite staff at some locations (part of option 2\* above).

With regard to 24-hour, central city public conveniences, additional facilities are most likely to be safe and effective if staffed and delivered as part of a wider strategy for addressing behavioural problems within the central city. This wider strategy is outside the scope of this assessment and the role that public conveniences may or may not have in this strategy is yet to be determined.

*Public conveniences*

