

# **Access to Toilets Scrutiny Review Report**

**Health and Social Care Scrutiny  
Commission**

**May 2024**

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## Summary of recommendations

### **Toilets are an Equality and Public Health Issue: Recommendation One**

Recognise that a lack of adequate toilet provision disproportionately impacts on people with a Protected Characteristic, including older and disabled people, in particular. Poor provision is a Public Health issue and negatively impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents. A Toilet Strategy ought to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment, and this ought to include:

- i. Ensuring adequate provision for people who require a toilet more frequently,
- ii. Ensuring that all cubicles are large enough to accommodate walking aids,
- iii. Ensuring that different sex needs are catered for including ensuring provision recognises that:
  - Women take longer and require more toilets than men, and pregnant women often have a more urgent need,
  - Men with prostate cancer require sanitary bins.

### **Environmental Health: Recommendation Two**

The lack of adequate, decent toilet provision is leading to unsanitary conditions in public spaces, particularly parks and the street. Poor provision is an environmental health issue. The council ought to work with partners to ensure, as far as possible, that there is adequate provision to meet the needs of the whole population of Southwark, including homeless people.

### **Toilet cold spots: Recommendation Three**

Improve provision in Peckham Rye Station and the new Town Square by prioritising this in the Toilet Strategy and Town Centre plans. Together the council and Network Rail ought to provide more transparency on the plan, and options for toilets at Peckham Rye Station and new Town Square, and consult with local residents and stakeholders to bring clarity by 2025. In addition the council ought to improve Camberwell Green toilet provision by a) ensuring the library toilet is cleaned frequently enough b) engage nearby supermarkets and fast food places through a Community Toilet Scheme.

### **Community Toilets: Recommendation Four**

Invest in a refreshed Community Toilet scheme using London boroughs, such as , Richmond upon Thames and Lewisham, as examples .

Prioritise Peckham Rye, Camberwell and other toilet cold spots, in the revived Community Toilet scheme.

### **Anti Social Behaviour (ASB): Recommendation Five**

Toilets have a high value to the community and as such the cost of mitigating ASB is not a good reason to deny provision. ASB can be addressed through engagement with partners to improve location and design and make the most of local capacity to prevent and deter ASB. This ought to include understanding the types of possible ASB and working with the police (including the Designing Out Crime unit), TfL, council enforcement and community organisations to mitigate and prevent ASB. Consideration ought to be given to keeping toilets clean and well maintained, and the use of attendants where possible.

### **Southwark Borough Toilets: Recommendation Six**

The Commission welcomes the accommodation review of the council's estate and the potential this offers to open up more toilets to the public.

In addition the Commission recommends that the council works with wider stakeholders such as local GPs, the wider NHS, TfL and developers to maximise toilet provision in the existing estate and in future buildings.

The work on the accommodation strategy and engagement with wider stakeholders, to open up both the existing estate and expand provision, ought to be incorporated into a Toilet Strategy.

### **Information and Sign Posting: Recommendation Seven**

The Commission supports the continued use of AccessAble, which is a well used resource.

In addition the Commission recommends that :

- I. The website is kept updated in the short term, and over the longer term more work is done as part of a Toilet Strategy to provide accurate information to residents and visitors.
- II. The Great British Public Toilet Map [www.toiletmap.org.uk](http://www.toiletmap.org.uk) is updated, as this is an excellent resource.
- III. A map forms part of a revised Toilet Strategy / Community Toilet scheme and this would consist of a hard copy as well as digital offer. Lewisham have an excellent printed map that it would be useful to replicate in Southwark.

### **Toilet Strategy: Recommendation eight**

Develop a Toilet Strategy through engagement with a range of stakeholders, local people, mapping needs and gaps, co-creating solutions and provision of an action plan that interfaces with planning and regeneration.

### **Leadership: Recommendation Nine**

The Commission recommends that the Toilet Strategy is led by:

- I. The cabinet member for Public Health or a cabinet member with the Environmental Health and / or Streets for People brief in their portfolio,
- II. A senior officer.

It is envisaged that both the cabinet member and senior officers would have a role working across different departments, and with external stakeholders , in order to champion a cross council and borough strategy.

## Introduction

This review is driven by members concerns that limited toilet provision is impacting on the mobility, health and well-being of disadvantaged groups, particularly older people, disabled people, pregnant women and parents and carers of young children. Moreover, the lack of adequate toilets is creating unsanitary conditions in our parks and on our streets.

The primary outcome the review aims to achieve is that the council develops a Southwark Toilet Strategy, with local stakeholders. The Commission believes this will enable the council to best lead on improved provision of toilets across the borough, as it can bring into play the resources of local business, the NHS, and other partners in order to improve local capacity, given the council's budget constraints.

## Context

### London and National Loo Campaigns

The review took place during a resurgence of campaigns over the last few years for more loos, driven largely by older people and older people's campaign groups, led in part by Age UK London.

The GLA health select committee wrote a report: The Toilet Paper in November 2021. This made several recommendations to the Mayor of London, including that Local Authorities develop Toilet Strategies and also included several actions for TfL to improve toilet information, accessibility and provision.

In May 2023 Age UK London hosted an event on toilets in partnership with London Councils. The theme was 'Improving public toilet provision in times of financial pressures'. This event brought together London Boroughs to share good practice, as well as hearing from Cardiff Council, who shared their work on a toilet strategy. Richmond upon Thames, Tower Hamlets and Lewisham councils showcased their Community Toilet schemes, and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design discussed the importance of inclusive design. Westminster Council shared their good practice on modernising loos in the West End and how they were tackling anti social behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Age UK London have produced several resources on producing Toilet Strategies, Community Toilet schemes and using planning and public information. Age UK London also supported local Southwark residents to campaign, and both Age UK London and local residents from Loos for Southwark have been instrumental in providing evidence for the review.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/london/publications/blogs/articles/london-councils-event-blog/>

## Changing Places Toilets

There is growing awareness of the needs of people with higher access needs – people who are most disabled, and expanding provision of Changing Places toilets.

Changing Places toilets (CPTs) are large accessible toilets that include specialist equipment such as hoists and adult-size changing benches so people with specific care needs can receive safe and dignified personal care away from home.

The government has provided funding for more Changing Places toilets to address this need and Southwark has made good use of this. There is also now a new legal requirement to install Changing Places Toilets in public buildings. This applies to any new builds or major refurbishments that are over specified sizes and includes large shopping centres, as well as big new places for recreation, including cinemas, sports stadiums and art galleries etc. In addition new hospitals and primary care centres must provide a Changing Place toilet.

## Contributors to the review

### Voluntary and community sector

- Loos for Southwark
- John McGeachy, Age UK London

### Officers

- Chloe Harvey, Thrive-to-25 Programme Manager, Children and Adult Services
- Matt Little, Principal Strategy Officer, Local Economy Team
- Stuart Robinson-Marshall, Head of Business Strategy, Housing and Modernisation
- Tara Quinn, Head of Parks and Leisure, Environment and Leisure

### Cabinet member

Councillor Evelyn Akoto, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

## Background

The council has reviewed its approach to toilets twice formally in the last twenty years:

- I. In 2005 Cabinet agreed a mini review and decided to open up more toilets in the council's estate, work with stakeholders, including local supermarkets, to increase provision, improve signage and close toilets not DDA compliant,
- II. In 2018 the Council Plan refresh undertook to create a network of accessible toilets and baby changing facilities - Changing Places toilets.

## How the Council Delivers Toilets

The council delivers toilets through:

- i. Public Conveniences it maintains on the street and in parks.
- ii. Opening up toilets in buildings owned by the council to the public, for example the office at Tooley Street, libraries and cafes in parks.
- iii. Working with partners to increase publicly available provision, for example in Leisure Centres, Network Rail owned stations, and encouraging provision of toilets as part of regeneration schemes.
- iv. Stipulating more provision through planning. The Soutwark Plan requires public toilet provision in town centres. Large schemes for main town centres that are 1,000 sqm or more must provide free public toilets.
- v. Delivering more Changing Places toilets by accessing funding and working with partners to install these in public places.
- vi. Supporting Community Toilets whereby the council works with business to open up toilets in café, pubs, supermarkets etc. to local people (although this is not currently active).
- vii. Provision of information on the council website and through [AccessAble](#).

## Toilets are an Equality, Public Health and Environmental Health Issue

The commission is particularly concerned that that the lack of adequate toilet provision disproportionately impacts on many people with a Protected Characteristic and residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

- Older people and disabled people who will often not leave the home unless they can be sure of adequate provision.
- Parents with young children particularly need toilets.
- Pregnant women need toilets more frequently and urgently.
- Women need more toilets than men, as they spend longer in toilets.
- Homeless people and people living on the street are in dire need of adequate provision.

Loos for Soutwark evidence highlighted that people with limited mobility often require larger cubicles to accommodate walking aids, including shopping trollies. People frequently travel with luggage, and other bags, and toilet cubicles should be designed to accommodate easily. While airports have mastered this problem, and provide large enough cubicles, railway stations, and other public places have often not yet managed to provide adequate facilities. This can be a particular problem in stations where safety announcements order passengers not to leave their luggage unattended, but tiny cubicles, with Sanitary Bins, and inward opening doors make this extremely difficult.



The Commission heard that race is a barrier to accessing public provision in cafés and pubs, and informal arrangements can mitigate against black and brown people, who are more likely to be refused access.

Men with prostate cancer need bins and there is a campaign to support this: [Boys need Bins](#). This campaign is working to raise awareness about male incontinence and the need for bins in male toilets. They have been campaigning with a number of national organisations, including the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Bladder and Bowel Continence Care to get the government to make it law to have bins in all male toilets nationally.

## **Environmental Health**

Poor provision is an environmental health issue and negatively impacts on the health and wellbeing of the community.

The lack of adequate provision for homeless people and people living on the street is a particular cause for concern. This is causing unsanitary conditions, with people defecating and urinating in the streets and parks because there are no public toilets. The toilet needs for this segment of the population are particularly acute and must be considered in the recommended toilet strategy.

In addition there are other residents who are using public spaces for toileting, including parents are holding children over drains in the street because of poor provision, and men urinating in the street at night.

### **Toilets are an Equality and Public Health Issue: Recommendation One**

Recognise that a lack of adequate toilet provision disproportionately impacts on people with a Protected Characteristic, including older and disabled people in particular. Poor provision is a Public Health issue and negatively impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents. A Toilet Strategy ought to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment, and this ought to include:

- i. ensuring adequate provision for people who require a toilet more frequently,
- ii. ensuring that all cubicles are large enough to accommodate walking aids,
- iii. ensuring that different sex needs are catered for including ensuring provision recognises that:
  - Women take longer and require more toilets than men, and pregnant women often have a more urgent need,
  - Men with prostate cancer require sanitary bins.

### **Environmental Health: Recommendation Two**

The lack of adequate, decent toilet provision is leading to unsanitary conditions in public spaces, particularly parks and the street. Poor provision is an environmental health issue. The council ought to work with partners to ensure, as far as possible, that there is adequate provision to meet the needs of the whole population of Southwark, including homeless people.

## Toilet cold spots

The commission heard that toilet provision is particularly poor in Peckham and Camberwell.

### Peckham

Peckham Rye Station is due to have a toilet – however it is unclear if this will only be a Changing Places toilet and if other toilets will be provided in addition, and if they will be located behind a barrier. There is a preference amongst many people for toilets to be located in front of the barrier, however TfL's current guidance for new facilities is that they should be located in the ticket hall after the barrier, as they believe this helps to ensure facilities remain in a better condition for all users. At the same time TfL states that they expect staff to allow people through the barrier to use toilets wherever possible<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the Peckham Rye station upgrade there is also a council led Town Centre upgrade. Provision of a new town square, adjacent to Peckham Rye Station, was granted planning permission in 2016, and this included new public toilets to be created in the arches adjacent to the new square. Members of the commission have heard that concerns about anti-social behaviour (ASB) may hinder delivery in Peckham, however ASB can be mitigated through engagement and good planning. The council is a partner in the regeneration of the station led by Network Rail and leading the new square development at the front of the station, and as such, can use its influence to ensure provision meets the public's needs and ASB is addressed.

The plans above, and a new Aylesham Centre redevelopment in the north of Peckham, are likely to deliver substantial improvements to toilet provision over the longer term, but none are due until at least 2026. In the meantime Peckham needs several toilets across the long length of Peckham Rye, and a revitalised community toilet scheme could deliver this over the short to medium term.

### Camberwell Green

Camberwell Green toilet provision is poor. The former automatic toilet located on the Green, was frequently out of action, and was removed when the contract expired in 2022. Camberwell Library toilet is located nearby, and open weekdays until 8pm, Saturday daytime and Sunday afternoon, however concerns were raised in the Commission that this is not cleaned frequently enough. There is potentially an opportunity in nearby supermarkets and fast food places to increase provision.

### Identifying additional cold spots

The Commission did not have the resources to undertake a systemic review of current provision of publicly accessible toilets across the whole borough. The cold spots identified in the review are therefore not meant to be taken as a definitive identification of all the places in the borough with poor provision – rather the

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<sup>2</sup> see Mayor of London's response to the GLA Toilet paper report, January 2022

Commission consider provision ought to be systematically reviewed as part of a toilet strategy and the below cold spots incorporated into this larger piece of work.

### **Toilet cold spots: Recommendation Three**

Improve provision in Peckham Rye Station and the new Town Square by prioritising this in the Toilet Strategy and Town Centre plans. Together the council and Network Rail ought to provide more transparency on the plan, and options for toilets at Peckham Rye Station and new Town Square, and consult with local residents and stakeholders to bring clarity by 2025. In addition the council ought to improve Camberwell Green toilet provision by a) ensuring the library toilet is cleaned frequently enough, b) engage nearby supermarkets and fast food places through a Community Toilet Scheme.

### **Toilet good practice**

The toilets at Sainsbury's East Dulwich were commended.

Southwark Park (Pavilion Café by the lake) has good toilets.

Dulwich Park will have the gold standard of a fully accessible Changing Place toilets that also meets heritage standards. This will cost £97,115, including the associated ground work costs. This is covered by DLUHC's Changing Places Fund. This will open up the park to disabled residents.

The East Street Market Toilets are good. They are located on Portland Street near the junction with East Street. The toilets are open six days a week, when the market is in operation. They do not have an attendant but are cleaned regularly throughout the day. Whilst the toilets were commended in the Commission as well kept, officers reported that the toilets are subject to vandalism on a regular basis.

### **Community Toilet Scheme (CTS)**

Community Toilet Schemes (CTS) enable members of the public to use toilet facilities in a range of approved local businesses and other organisations during their opening hours. Southwark had, until recently, a Community Toilet Scheme whereby the council would work with businesses to promote use of toilets, however this has fallen into disuse over the last few years and is no longer actively supported.

Age UK London has conducted research on London schemes and provided a guide to good practice<sup>3</sup>, drawing on the findings of by Public Toilets UK. This outlines the following characteristics of successful Community Toilet Schemes:

- i. Active management by the local authority with careful selection and monitoring of the selected sites.
- ii. The CTS receives full support from the local authority from inception and on a long-term basis.
- iii. The CTS has an agreed budget.

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<sup>3</sup> London Loos in-focus: Local authorities. Community Toilet Schemes www.

- iv. The local authority maintains a high level of public toilet provision in addition to that offered by the scheme. This allows for closures, holidays and the night time economy.
- v. The local authority proactively raises awareness of the scheme through community toilet maps (offline and online), other online information, signage, community noticeboards, newsletters and information in public buildings such as libraries and community centres.
- vi. The local authority provides additional toilet provision when there are major events that might cause problems with increased demand provided.

The Commission heard from the Local Economy team who said they are willing to liaise with businesses through their fora to promote such a scheme.

There are a variety of good Community Toilet schemes, including ones in the London boroughs of Richmond upon Thames and Lewisham.

Community Toilet schemes enable the opening up of more toilets, particularly during business hours, in a resource effective way. They do require some consistent investment from the council and cannot be the only solution.

#### **Community Toilets: Recommendation Four**

Invest in a refreshed Community Toilet scheme using London boroughs, such as, Richmond upon Thames and Lewisham as examples.

Prioritise Peckham Rye, Camberwell and other toilet cold spots, in the revived Community Toilet scheme.

#### **Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)**

The Commission heard that concerns about anti-social behaviour are sometimes given as reasons not to open toilets, or restrict provision. An example of this is Peckham Rye station and Town Square where members and residents reported that concerns about ASB have been cited as a potential obstacle to delivery.

Officers said that anti-social behaviour has been an issue in Southwark and that Belair Park toilet suffered an arson attack and East Street Market Toilets have been destroyed twice, and immediately repaired, though this still means they are out of use sometimes. Despite this members reported that East Street Market Toilets are well looked after and appreciated.

The former GLA building (The Old London City Hall), is currently under new ownership and the public have been consulted about future uses. A top public concern is that the toilets, which include a Changing Place, will remain open. These toilets have previously been subject to ASB, and as a result of this, there have been changes made to reduce ASB by amending the delivery and design. It is hoped that the consultation will model keeping this provision open and reducing ASB further through engagement and good practice.

AGE UK London conducted some desk top research on the Commission's behalf on this issue, and provided a report: 'Publicly Available Toilets: problem reduction guide'<sup>4</sup>, and taken together this evidence made the following points:

- i. Being clear that the value of clean , safe toilets, including the economic benefits to the entire community (such as business on the high street) and positive impact on resident's health and wellbeing is of more importance than the cost to maintain public toilets.
- ii. Find out what the specific type of ASB that people are concerned about is, as vandalism , drug use, sex work or using a toilet for shelter have different causes and approaches to mitigate.
- iii. Take a partnership approach to develop measures and address concerns proactively. This can be by using various strategies such as regular monitoring, security measures, and cleanliness protocols, to ensure that the facilities are well-maintained and safe for all users. CCTV can work well.
- iv. The Police have a Designing out crime unit that undertake assessments, and regularly review Southwark's planning applications. Methods that increase safety through design include ensuring that toilets are located in places where there is good oversight by the community, that they are appealing and attractively designed, accessible and easy to maintain.
- v. Collaborate with local law and council enforcement and community organisations to deter any anti-social behaviour in the vicinity and to develop a realistic plan based on capacity.
- vi. Where possible include attendants as their presence deters many forms of ASB.

### **Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) : Recommendation Five**

Toilets have a high value to the community and as such the cost of mitigating ASB is not a good reason to deny provision. ASB can be addressed through engagement with partners to improve location and design and make the most of local capacity to prevent and deter ASB. This ought to include understanding the types of possible ASB and working with the police (including the Designing Out Crime unit), TfL, council enforcement and community organisations to mitigate and prevent ASB. Consideration ought to be given to keeping toilets clean and well maintained, and the use of attendants where possible.

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<sup>4</sup> PUBLICLY AVAILABLE TOILETS PROBLEM REDUCTION GUIDE  
(Getting to where you want to go!)

Third edition. Formerly - Public Conveniences: Problem Reduction Guide  
Hertfordshire Constabulary Crime Prevention Design Service & The British Toilet Association  
Originally authored by Staffordshire Police Crime Reduction and Community Safety Unit

## Opening up Southwark's Toilets

### The council estate

Since 2005 Southwark has opened up toilets in the council's estate to increase public access.

There is now an accommodation review looking at buildings in the council's control, and as part of this work, they will be looking at increasing the amount of toilets that could be opened up to the public. There are around 200 buildings in the council estate, and officers indicated that up to half may be able to be opened up to the public.

### Opening up Southwark stakeholders estate toilets

There are also other stakeholders in the community who have a vested interest in better local toilet provision in the borough, whom the council could work with.

GP practices - which are independent businesses - could be asked to allow their facilities be used by the local community. The wider NHS could also be encouraged to open up their estate to the public.

TfL is also committed to improving toilet provision where funding allows. In 2022 TfL commenced an audit of its London underground facilities to make decor improvements, enable station toilets to be used over a longer period, facilitate access across the barrier, and increase information.

The Mayor for London spatial plan has a specific plan (Policy S6) that requires large developments, such as shopping centres or large community spaces, and those where new large-scale public realm is created, to provide free publicly accessible toilets suitable for a range of users.

### Southwark Borough Toilets: Recommendation Six

The Commission welcomes the accommodation review of the council's estate and the potential this offers to open up more toilets to the public.

In addition the Commission recommends that the council works with borough stakeholders such as local GPs, the wider NHS, TfL and developers to maximise toilet provision in the existing estate and in future buildings.

The work on the accommodation strategy and engagement with wider stakeholders, to open up both the existing estate and expand provision, ought to be incorporated into a Toilet Strategy.

## Information and Sign Posting

Southwark maps out toilet provision on the council website but the map is not always accurate.

Southwark uses AccessAble, which officers reported is a well used resource. AccessAble has launched a brand new mobile App which provides detailed access guides to thousands of places across the UK and Ireland. These guides provide step

by step descriptions of what accessibility is like at a particular place, and is created after a visit by an AccessAble Surveyor. Currently 30 community sites are listed in Southwark and officers are working to ensure information on those places is up to date.

The Great British Public Toilet Map ([www.toiletmap.org.uk](http://www.toiletmap.org.uk)) was commended by Loos for Southwark. It shows toilets of all kinds and can be filtered for specific facilities including 'accessible' and 'baby-changing'. There are currently 57 toilets mapped within Southwark.

The Commission considered that paper copy maps would be useful, as produced by Lewisham. The Local Economy Team indicated they could play a role in ensuring business engagement and distribution, and anticipated that libraries would stock copies.

### **Information and Sign Posting: Recommendation Seven**

The Commission supports the continued use of AccessAble, which is a well used resource .

In addition the Commission recommends that :

- i. The website is kept updated in the short term and over the longer term more work is done as part of a Toilet Strategy to provide accurate information to residents and visitors.
- ii. The Great British Public Toilet Map [www.toiletmap.org.uk](http://www.toiletmap.org.uk) is updated, as this is an excellent resource.
- iii. A map forms part of a revised Toilet Strategy / Community Toilet scheme and this would consist of a hard copy as well as digital offer. Lewisham have an excellent printed map that would be useful to replicate in Southwark.

## **Toilet Strategy**

Strategies are important as lots of different parts of the council have responsibility for different aspects of toilet provision. In addition the council can work with partners and other borough stakeholders, through fora such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, to collaborate on a borough wide toilet strategy. A good plan will bring these together.

Age UK say a good toilet strategy should include:

- i. Meaningful ongoing community engagement with residents. This should be a diverse group, including older residents, representative of the wider community. It is important that meaningful consultation is inclusive and that people without the internet are included.
- ii. A needs assessment based on mapping existing toilets available for public use, identifying gaps by working with communities and other partners to identify solutions.
- iii. An action plan to review and improve public information about provision. Consideration should be given to the quality of signage, maps, website

information, and the use of newsletters, media, posters and leaflets to raise awareness about toilet locations.

- iv. An aim to mainstream public toilet provision into strategic policy such as urban planning policy.

### **Toilet Strategy: Recommendation Eight**

Develop a Toilet Strategy through engagement with a range of stakeholders, local people, mapping needs and gaps, co-creating solutions and provision of an action plan that interfaces with planning and regeneration.

### **Leadership**

Developing and delivering a Toilet Strategy will take leadership from both elected members and officers to pull together the work of different council departments, build partnerships with community stakeholders, and engage with the public.

The Commission consider that either the cabinet member for Public Health or the cabinet member with the Environmental Health and Streets for People brief in their portfolio is best placed to provide strategic leadership. Likewise a senior officer from either the Public Health team or Environment Department would be well placed to provide officer leadership.

### **Leadership: Recommendation Nine**

The Commission recommend that the Toilet Strategy is led by:

- III. The cabinet member for Public Health or a cabinet member with the Environmental Health and / or Streets of People brief in their portfolio
- IV. A senior officer

It is envisaged that both the cabinet member and senior officers would have a role working across different departments, and with external stakeholders , in order to champion a cross council and borough strategy.



## Acknowledgements and thanks

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission 2023/24 members:

- Councillor Suzanne Abachor (Chair)
- Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Sandra Rhule
- Councillor Sam Dalton
- Councillor Esme Dobson
- Councillor Nick Johnson
- Councillor Sunil Chopra

Julie Timbrell, Project Manager and report author.

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