

**SEPTIC TANK & 'NIGHT SOIL' EMPTYING SERVICE
(Report by Head of Operations)**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the future of the Septic Tank Emptying Service and Night Soil Service.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The District Council currently provides a service to residents for the emptying of Septic Tanks and 'Night Soil' (chemical closets) at properties that are not connected to the main sewer system. The Council charges for septic tanks, but is required by law to provide a 'night soil' service free of charge.
- 2.2 The origin of this service dates back to the days when very large numbers of premises in the District were not connected to the main sewerage system and septic tanks and earth closets were commonplace. The services are provided under the umbrella of the 1936 public health act., which requires Local authorities to provide a service for emptying earth closets free of charge.
- 2.3 The Council has no legal obligation to carry out the emptying of septic tanks, but is required to make a service available if asked to do so. This it can do either directly, or by directing any request to one of several local private companies that offer this service to the public.
- 2.4 As the Council needed, as part of its former sewerage and highway agency agreements, to operate a sewage tanker, it also established a septic tank emptying service.
- 2.5 The cost to the Council of providing this service has, historically been (net) nil, as the tanker was part funded by the work it carried out under agency agreements and the charges levied for the emptying of septic tanks, which were set at a level that met the rest of the operating cost plus administration.
- 2.6 Using this arrangement, the Council was also able to meet its obligations to empty night soil closets at (net) nil cost as these were carried out using the same vehicle. When the sewer agency arrangements ceased, there was still sufficient work required under highways agency to make retaining a sewage tanker financially viable. When the highways maintenance work was externalised in 2001, the existing tanker was owned outright by the Council and had a minimal cost to continue operating.

- 2.7 As the numbers of septic tanks have continued to reduce, the level of income received has reduced accordingly. When the tanker came to the end of its life in 2002 it was not replaced as the costs of purchasing and running a specialist tanker to carry out these collections could no longer be justified. This work has, since then been carried out for us by a private company.
- 2.8 The number of emptying requests has reduced as more and more premises are connected to mains drainage. Current income generated by the service is no longer sufficient to cover the costs of providing the service. This report makes proposals to redress that situation.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The current budget and expected outturn is shown below:

| | Budget | Expected Outturn | Shortfall |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| | £000 | £000 | £000 |
| Nightsoil | 3 | 10 | 7 |
| Septic Tanks | -21 | 0 | 21 |
| | -18 | 10 | 28 |

- 3.2 The budgets above still reflect the historical situation when the Council ran its own tanker to carry out works for sewers, highways agency and the consequent spare capacity used on septic tanks and nightsoil.
- 3.3 In addition to the above, a small amount of the Operations Division administration time is spent arranging the emptying service with our contractors.
- 3.4 The current fee for emptying septic tanks is £101.35 per 1000 gallons. This cost is in line with charges levied by private companies undertaking the same work. Raising the charges any higher to generate additional income to cover the costs of emptying night soil is likely to further reduce the numbers using the service. Based on current usage, we would need to raise our charges to £130 per 1000 gallons to recoup the cost of providing the night soil service, a 30% increase. Local private companies providing these services have prices that range from £100 to £170 per 1000 gallons.
- 3.5 The budgets need to be adjusted from -£18k to +£10k and this shall be addressed in the MTP process.
- 3.6 If the Council ceases to arrange septic tank emptying, the administration time can be diverted to improving other service areas.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The council is not required by law to offer 'in house' septic tank emptying services. It did so historically because it had the capacity to

do so as part of other agency works, and by doing so, it generated income that offset the cost of providing a night soil service.

- 4.2 Changed circumstances and a major reduction in incomes generated result in the septic tank service being no longer able to generate sufficient income to meet the costs of the night soil service, which the council is required by law to continue to provide.
- 4.3 We have in the recent past, attempted to operate the service in conjunction with an adjacent local authority that still operates tankers, but is not practical as the service response was unreliable and administrative costs increase.
- 4.4 In order to resolve the nightsoil matter, current and future budget provision needs to be made to meet the costs of providing the service. At current costs, the budget required will be £10k per annum (an additional £7k per annum).
- 4.5 As the septic tank service is no longer being operated to utilise spare capacity nor makes any contribution to the night soil service, members may wish to consider whether this service, which is commercially available, should continue to be provided by the council.

5. DECISION

- 5.1 Cabinet is requested to:
 - agree the cessation with immediate effect of Septic Tank emptying services, with users of the service being re-directed to private sector companies in the area that provide the service.
 - note that a correction to the existing budget is being addressed in the MTP review.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Budget 2003/04

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