Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets

A Strategic Guide
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A Strategic Guide

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Foreword

The first public toilet in Britain was opened over 150 years ago – and for a long time the provision of state-of-the-art municipal facilities was a matter of considerable civic pride. But in recent years the state of the nation’s toilets has instead been the focus of increasing public concern. Over many years a significant number of public toilets have closed or been allowed to deteriorate, such that by 2005 a National Consumer Council survey recorded that two thirds of people thought that “public toilets in Britain are a national disgrace”.

A lack of accessible and good public toilets affects not only the quality of our town centres, parks or bus stations, it also reduces the dignity and quality of people’s lives. After all, they are one of the basic facilities that residents and visitors alike depend on. Good quality provision instils confidence in public facilities as a whole, helps to inspire positive impressions, and contributes to many other important aspects of life. Whether it is families with small children or older people, it is important that people have the confidence that the facilities they need are available when they are out and about. People rightly expect accessible, clean, safe and well maintained toilets.

Because good public toilets are so important, we need now to make the clearest possible case for improved provision by increasing accessibility and quality; providing further incentives and scope for improvement; and ensuring everyone is working together. That is why, for the first time, central Government is publishing a guide that aims to improve public access to better quality toilets.

The guide reviews the causes of decline, sets out a range of approaches that go beyond the traditional “municipal WC”, and encourages partnerships between local authorities, the private sector, and local people to devise solutions that are tailored to the needs of different people at different times of the day. The guide works with the grain of last year’s Local Government White Paper, particularly its focus on devolving freedom and powers to local authorities, local communities, and other local service providers to bring about the changes they wish to see.

It also accentuates the positive: there are some excellent examples of local authorities leading the way in developing fresh approaches to promoting public access to toilets, often involving the private sector, and engaging pro-actively with local communities to ensure that their needs and priorities are met.

It seeks, above all, to take the taboo out of toilets, to stimulate discussion, to achieve better provision, and to promote a positive shift in attitudes and approaches to the whole issue of toilet provision and use.
The guide is published by Communities and Local Government, but could not have been written without the advice of a Steering Group of organisations and individuals with a particular interest in these issues (see Annex A for membership details). I would like to extend my thanks to them all for their assistance in what I am sure will make a real difference to people who live, work, and visit our communities.

Baroness Andrews OBE
Communities and Local Government
“The ready availability of public toilets is an important issue for everyone using public transport. The Department for Transport is particularly keen to ensure that toilets at train stations and on trains and aeroplanes are available and accessible to disabled passengers. I therefore welcome this Guide which supports and supplements the work that we are doing to help transport operators and local authorities make access improvements that really matter.”

Rosie Winterton
Department for Transport

“Good quality public toilets are essential for families of all types, but particularly for mothers, fathers, and carers with young children, and those with or caring for those with a disability. Good quality facilities make a practical difference to the quality of life of many in our communities.”

Beverley Hughes
Department for Children Schools and Families

“All too often people are restricted in their ability to get work, to shop or to enjoy their leisure time because of a lack of appropriate toilet facilities. Inadequate provision also has a significant effect on public health and environmental issues, particularly in terms of street cleanliness and disease control. I am very pleased to be able to endorse this Guide and look forward to seeing its impact play through, both in terms of meeting the specific needs of disabled and older people and promoting the health and wellbeing of local communities.”

Ivan Lewis
Department of Health

“Access to high-quality public toilet facilities plays an important part in all our lives, but as Minister for Disabled People, I frequently learn about the particular impact that a lack of such facilities can have on many disabled people: preventing or restricting their opportunities to take part in everyday activities like shopping and leisure pursuits. That is why I welcome this Guide, which I hope will act as a stimulus to the provision of improved public toilets and, consequently, overcome a further barrier to disabled people’s active participation in our society.”

Anne McGuire
Department for Work and Pensions

“I am pleased to support this initiative – creating a welcoming environment would encourage more visitors to our town centres, increasing the opportunities for business growth for retailers and other enterprises. This guide will make an important contribution to the development of town centres.”

Shriti Vadera
Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
The case for public toilets
Section 1
The case for public toilets

Introduction and scope

In July 2006 at the British Toilet Association’s conference, Public Toilet Provision – the Way Forward, Phil Woolas, then Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion, undertook to “pull everybody together to produce a strategy for increasing public toilet provision in this country”. This guide fulfils that commitment.

It aims to encourage better public access to toilets in our cities, towns, and other public places. It covers England, but the issues considered will be of interest to other parts of the UK.

In this document we set out the elements of a new approach to improving public access to better quality toilets:

- **Section 1** – makes the case for public toilets in terms of ensuring that local people and visitors are able to rely on decent and dignified provision when they are away from home. But we also emphasise that decent public toilets serve public health and well-being in many different ways.

- **Section 2** – examines why public access is now worse than it has ever been and where the barriers to improvements are.

- **Section 3** – sets out a new approach based on removing legal barriers to enable local government to raise additional revenue, by highlighting and exemplifying the local and strategic powers available, and by identifying new approaches that local government, the private sector, and local communities can adopt to help achieve positive change.

The guide has been written for as wide a readership as possible: local authorities, statutory service providers, the business community, organisations working in the tourism industry, and the general public. We all use public toilets, and promoting greater access to better quality facilities is an important issue for everyone.

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1 For the purposes of this guide, public toilets are premises that are available for public use that have toilets and/or urinals and normally have hand washing and drying facilities.
Making the case for public toilets

Serving local communities – promoting pride of place

“Customer expectations of council services continue to rise and the increasing population of older citizens will mean that even more people will require toilet facilities that are accessible, clean and safe. This issue will not go quietly away.”

Places – where we live, shop, work, take recreation – are more accessible and attractive when public toilets are well planned, designed, maintained, clearly signposted, and available when people need to use them (including late at night). They are one of a range of amenities that help to attract a more diverse range of visitors, encouraging them to spend longer in towns and city centres, and to visit again.

Wherever people live, they want their local public places to be clean, safe, and green, with a range of things to do, supported by good quality services and amenities. As later sections of this guide show, most people expect to find good quality public toilets when they are out and about; for some it is fundamental to their health and comfort.

People expect to find good quality toilets in town and city centres – for some it’s a matter of fundamental importance

² Report on Public Toilets in Camden – Camden Quality of Life Panel, April 2007
Public access to toilets is important for local shops and businesses too. Businesses operate to turn a profit, and customer footfall is the lifeblood of the retail and leisure sectors. Yet however alluring the window display, however good the sales pitch, people need first to feel drawn into the area. People respond to, and recognise, areas that show a strong brand image, a sense of civic pride, where it is obvious from the street furniture, local environment, and signage that people are welcomed, that their needs are understood and catered for.

But businesses also respond to other motivations. Family businesses and independents, for instance, may have connections with their local area going back generations. National chains, on the other hand, often have a strong social or community support ethos as part of their corporate policy, providing free or subsidised goods and services – and sometimes funding too – for local community initiatives. Businesses operate as part of communities and hold as much of a stake in supporting local community amenities and promoting civic pride as local authorities themselves.

**Attracting visitors**

“We have been surprised by the strength of feeling in relation to this issue. Our toilets are a matter of significant inconvenience in terms of location, accessibility, and condition, which impacts on public health, the image of the town, and limits the quality of life for many people. For Swindon to become a major leisure destination, our public toilets must meet the standard expected by service users. Many local people see this as a priority and this must be a priority for Swindon Borough Council.”

Public toilet provision is also an important issue for areas relying on tourism income, or seeking to develop their profile as a visitor destination. The UK visitor economy was worth £85 billion in 2005, 80 per cent of which was from domestic tourism. And a significant proportion of tourists, particularly from other countries, favour city destinations.

A 2005 survey by Changing Lives N-Vision (Future Foundation) showed that people aged over 55 and families with children are most inclined to take holidays and short breaks in this country. At the same time, these groups are more likely to place a higher value on being able to access a toilet.

Visitors from other countries overwhelmingly favour city destinations, and as the ‘city break’ market takes off, there are opportunities for regional towns and cities to close the gap on London.

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Being able to access a toilet is a fundamental need for any visitor. Tourists need more local information, more signposts. They cannot simply go home, into work, or their local pub to use the toilet. Tourists choose their destinations carefully, drawing on their previous impressions, talking to friends and family, looking up feedback on the internet. Sense of destination – the extent to which it has met a visitor’s needs and made a strong and positive impression – is therefore vital to secure repeat trade and sustainable economic development.

Transport operators – like any commercial business – need to respond to feedback from surveys on levels of customer satisfaction. They will only make the most of their commercial opportunities if they provide the facilities that their passengers demand.

Delivering the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is a key national priority. The Games will attract a huge number of extra visitors, and it is vital that they take away a positive experience of visiting the Olympic Park and the surrounding areas. Ensuring good public access to toilets is just a small part of the much bigger planning and design process, but it will be one of the vital details that will determine people’s view of the Games and their overall impression of the UK as a place to visit.
Public toilets and other policy priorities

The extent to which people have easy access to good quality toilets also affects their general health and well being – and that of the whole community. Enabling different people, with different needs, to make use of public toilets at different times of the day and night can have a significant impact on issues like public health and exercise, public behaviour, use of public transport. For all these reasons, this guide is important across a range of public policy areas.

- **Social Equity and Inclusion:** a lack of clean, accessible and safe toilets impacts on some people more than others. Some people may feel unable or reluctant to leave their homes and visit areas where they fear they will not be able to find a public toilet. Older people (a growing section of the population in our ageing society), mothers, fathers, and carers with young children, disabled people and people with chronic health problems – all need easy access to suitably equipped public toilet facilities. And equalities legislation places special responsibilities on public authorities in relation to facilities for men/women and disabled people (see Annex B for more detail).

- **Healthy Communities:** a lack of toilet facilities at the right time in the right place contributes to dirty streets that are unsanitary, unpleasant and can spread infection. Public toilets in places like parks and promenades help to encourage people who may need regular toilet access to take exercise and stay physically active.
• **Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities**: public toilets that are badly designed, badly maintained, and poorly located generate a sense of neglect, attracting vandalism, anti-social behaviour and social disorder. A lack of available and appropriate facilities at the right time during the day and night encourages street fouling, and cleaning up the mess is a significant and costly task in some town centres at the weekend. These issues, if not tackled effectively, can generate a cycle of decline, leading to more entrenched social problems, and seriously impairing quality of place and quality of life for local people.

• **Sustainable Transport**: we want to encourage people out of their cars and back onto public transport, cycling and walking. But people will not leave their cars at home unless they are confident that they can find a toilet at public transport interchanges and in city centres. Disabled people, too, need to know that transport facilities, services and infrastructure will be accessible. *Inclusive Mobility*, the Department for Transport’s guide to best practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure, stresses the need for toilets to be no less accessible for disabled people than for non-disabled people.
Understanding the causes of declining public access to toilets
Section 2
Understanding the causes of declining public access to toilets

Introduction

The previous section explained why good public access to toilets is important not just because it helps to create good quality places that are attractive and prosperous, but also because it promotes a range of other public policy aims.

This section briefly reviews the evidence for declining provision of public toilets, the consequences, and the causes.

Annex B of this guide provides a short summary of the key pieces of legislation and policy guidance covering public toilets. For the purposes of the discussion below, there are two key points to bear in mind:

• the provision and maintenance of toilets in public places is at the discretion of local authorities who have a power, under section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 ("PHA 1936"), to provide public conveniences, but no duty to do so. Whether or not they choose to provide these facilities is at their discretion, and has to be weighed in the balance against other local service demands

• under section 87(3)(c) of PHA 1936, local authorities are allowed to charge for use of all public conveniences, but not urinals. However this exception will be removed by the Sex Discrimination Act (Amendment) Regulations, which are expected to be implemented early in 2008, as explained in more detail below.

What is the current position on public access to toilets?

An issue of increasing public concern

In recent years, thousands of people have written letters, signed petitions, attended events, or participated in surveys – highlighting their concern about the availability and quality of public toilets where they live.
Extracts from correspondence received by Government Ministers:

“I am a disabled person and for many years it was a struggle for me to find disabled toilet facilities in most places. Consequently I felt like a prisoner in my own home.“

“there are no toilet facilities in the area … this is very distressing if you need to go and are a long way from home.”

“[Where I live] has several areas without any public toilets, yet the Council complains of people urinating in public.”

Several letters highlight the real impact, beyond basic inconvenience, that this has on people’s quality of life: older people thinking twice before travelling too far from home, families with small children forced to avoid town centres that have no public toilets – for men and women – with baby change facilities, people with mobility impairments and their carers facing a lottery in finding available, accessible, and suitably equipped toilets.

A range of surveys\(^4\) provide telling evidence of public attitudes towards toilets:

- most people have encountered a public toilet in an unacceptable condition
- 84 per cent of people in one survey said they wanted more public toilets, with higher percentages in younger and older age groups
- most people are less concerned about who provides or maintains toilets, so long as there is greater public access to them
- fewer people now use local authority toilets, most use toilets in shopping centres, pubs and cafes or
- survey data suggests that people would be prepared to pay to use a public toilet providing it was clean and well maintained; and, if asked to pay, most people think that 20 pence would be a reasonable charge for using a good quality toilet
- the majority of train passengers are not satisfied with toilet facilities on trains (satisfaction levels have remained constant over the last two years at around 40 per cent).

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\(^4\) These include: straw poll as part of the research for the London Assembly’s report *An urgent need: the state of London’s public toilets* (March 2006); ENCAMS omnibus survey 2006; Help the Aged’s report *Nowhere to go: public toilet provision in the UK* (May 2007); National Consumer Council Public Toilets Omnibus Survey, February 2005; and the National Passenger Survey.
Yet there is a positive story to tell in terms of improving quality. Since 1987, the British Toilet Association’s ‘Loo of the Year’ awards have promoted and recognised high standards in all types of public toilets. Their five star rating and inspection criteria have become a quality standard and provide a basis for assessing the performance of different local authority areas. 52 English local authorities participated in the 2007 awards scheme, and of the 287 toilets entered, 276 achieved three stars or more.

**Decreasing public provision**

But at the same time there are now fewer public toilets and the quality of provision in some areas has declined.

Hard data on public toilet provision is patchy: figures have not been compiled on a consistent basis, and they do not cover the full range of toilets that people can use in any area. The two main sources of information are figures for local authority toilets compiled by the Audit Commission until 2000, and Valuation Office Agency data used for rating commercial and industrial property, which is updated every five years.

Although this information draws on separate data sources, the figures highlight a consistent downward trend: over many years a significant number of toilets have closed or have been allowed to deteriorate. Reductions have occurred in all English regions, but especially so in London and the south-east and in some metropolitan areas in the midlands and the north.

**Consequences**

This decline in overall numbers has had a disproportionate impact on some people:

- **Women** make up slightly more than half of the UK population, and a higher proportion of older people. Yet the balance of toilet provision for men and women is at best 50:50 and more typically 70:30 in favour of men, because cubicles take up more room than urinals. Women, with or without babies and young children, may be reluctant to use facilities in pubs, and some initiatives that aim to increase public access to toilets – eg late night ‘pop-up’ urinals in town centres – do not cater for the needs of women.

- We also have an **ageing population**: the 2001 census shows that the 65+ age group had increased by 31 per cent (to 9.7 million) whereas those aged 16 and under had fallen by 19 per cent (to 11.5 million). Help the Aged’s report *Nowhere to go: Public toilet provision in the UK* (May 2007) showed that more than half of older people found that a lack of local public toilets prevented them from going out as often as they would like.

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6 Bristol Women’s Forum public toilet survey (Sept. 2006).
There are around 10 million disabled people\(^7\) in Great Britain\(^8\), and disability rates increase with age. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which requires service providers to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to allow disabled people to access those services, has helped to boost the provision of accessible toilets. But there are also around 40,000 people in the UK with profound and multiple disabilities\(^9\) who cannot use standard accessible toilets because they need special equipment (eg a hoist and a changing bench) and support from one or two carers. The lack of suitable facilities can prevent them from taking part in everyday activities that others take for granted (see ‘Changing Places’ campaign in Section 3 below).

Parents and guardians of young children and babies who need to be able to use suitable facilities in both male and female public toilets.

\(^7\) The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disabled person as ‘someone with a mental or physical impairment which has a substantial, long-term adverse effect on the ability to undertake normal day-to-day activities’.

\(^8\) Family Resources Survey, commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions.

\(^9\) ‘Changing Places’ website.
What has caused the decline of the public toilet?

Much of the concern expressed about public toilets has been directed at local authorities: municipal toilets continue to close and the remaining stock is often in poor condition. Whilst this view overlooks the positive steps that many local authorities have taken to improve the quality of their provision, it highlights that the issue of public access to toilets has strong links in people’s minds with the decline of the municipal ‘WC’.

Four main factors have contributed to this situation:

1. Changing attitudes
   Attitudes towards municipal provision of toilets have shifted significantly over the last 150 years. From the 1860s onwards, local authorities vied with each other to create beautiful and hygienic cities. Many places were equipped with magnificent public toilets, with no expense spared, showing off the latest developments in sanitary engineering and architecture\(^\text{10}\).

   But society has changed fundamentally, for instance we all now have toilets and washing facilities within our own homes. The role and functions of local government have also evolved and expanded. They now have to manage a wide range of competing demands, some statutory, some discretionary, within the resources available to them. As a result, the importance attached by local councils to public toilet provision may no longer be as high as it once was.

2. Costs and usage
   There are costs attached to providing public toilets. Revenue streams are needed not only to cover basic cleaning and maintenance, but also rates, electricity, water supply, and sewage treatment. Older toilet blocks may need to be upgraded to meet modern health and safety legislation, and to make them fully accessible.

   At the same time evidence from various studies suggests that people increasingly prefer to use toilets in managed buildings such as shopping centres.

   Local authority toilets therefore risk falling into a cycle of decline where low usage – eg for toilets located in remote or secluded areas – creates an atmosphere of neglect, discouraging public use for the purposes intended and attracting anti-social behaviour, graffiti and criminal damage, which in turn increases maintenance costs.

   A situation where maintenance costs are high or rising, and public use is falling, is not sustainable.

\(^{10}\) Taking Stock: An Overview of Toilet Provision and Standards, Dr. Clara Greed 2005.
3. **Sharing knowledge of alternative approaches**

The impact of public toilet closures has tended to be greater in areas where there is limited knowledge of good practice and alternative approaches. The British Toilet Association’s ‘Loo of the Year’ awards show that a wide range of organisations – local authorities, shopping centre managers, hotels, cafes and restaurants, the tourism industry, hospitals and transport providers – are taking positive steps to provide good quality public toilets. There are also examples of local authorities and the private sector working together to develop creative approaches. But the profile of public toilets – the active sharing of ideas, issues and good practice – remains patchy across the country, with public access to toilets being variable as a result – even in adjacent local authority areas.

4. **Legislative barriers to charging**

The Public Health Act 1936, which allows local authorities to charge for use of toilets but not urinals, has in effect prevented charging as to do so for cubicles but not urinals is not consistent with the principle of gender equality. This has denied local authorities a valuable revenue stream, and for many years Councils have often felt forced to choose between leasing out their toilets to private operators, ripping out urinals, or closing toilets with urinals.
Public access to toilets – a new approach
Section 3
Public access to toilets – a new approach

This section forms the core of this guide. It sets out how, at a strategic level, central government, working in partnership with local authorities, the private sector, and communities, can promote better public access to toilets.

A shared ambition

Central and local government, the business community and commercial sector, voluntary and community organisations, local communities and interest groups: all respond to complex and varying motivations, but we share a common ambition to create quality places where people can thrive. There is no single approach suitable to all areas that will reverse the decline in public access to toilets. But by working in partnership, and adapting a range of approaches to the needs of different areas, significant change for the better can be achieved.

We all have a stake and a role to play in establishing a fresh approach to public toilets in this country. An approach where:

• **central government** makes the case for public toilets, removes legal barriers, empowers local government and communities to take positive action, highlights opportunities and encourages innovation

• **local government** recognises the value of public toilets, stimulates local debate and responds to community concerns, galvanises other service providers to take action, and builds links with local businesses and communities

• **communities** are empowered to speak up about local issues that impact on people’s quality of life, and feel able to influence decisions that affect them

• **the commercial and private sectors** realise their potential in promoting public access to toilets - not only as a way to increase turnover but also as part of their shared responsibility to the local community.

To stimulate positive change, action needs to be encouraged at all levels across **four areas of opportunity**:

• Making the best use of available powers and removing legal obstacles.

• Adopting a strategic approach to public toilet provision.

• Highlighting tools and approaches.

• Encouraging and exemplifying innovation.
A. Making the best use of available powers and removing legal obstacles

Local authorities and their partners have a range of powers enabling them to improve public access to toilets, but these powers have not been used to their full potential in all areas. Central government can highlight the powers available, and remove legal obstacles that have limited local government’s scope to develop positive strategies for public toilet provision in their area.

Removing legal obstacles

“… until the legislative framework is changed, leasing and the removal of urinals remain the only means whereby councils can recover at least some of the costs of a public convenience service from its users”\(^{11}\)

The first thing we will do is respond to the concerns of local authorities about the impact of section 87(3)(c) of the Public Health Act 1936, which has effectively prevented them from charging for their toilets. The Sex Discrimination Act (Amendment) Regulations, which should come into force early in 2008, will remove the statutory prohibition on charging for the use of urinals, and create new scope and incentives for better provision.

No longer will local authorities be forced to remove urinals or close public toilets which they feel they cannot afford to maintain. This amendment will clear the way for Councils to plan afresh for public toilets in their area and unlock a potential source of funding, through charging, for providing and improving more and better toilets.

These new facilities in Wychavon show local authority toilets can be attractive, bright and clean

\(^{11}\) Cabinet Member report, City of Westminster, July 2007.
Whether or not a local authority chooses to charge for its public toilets will remain a matter for them to determine, taking account of local needs and alternative forms of provision, and the need to ensure no additional burdens are placed on the council taxpayer. Those that do so should ensure that charges are proportionate and reasonable and collected in a way that promotes easy access for all, including disabled people, people with young children and pushchairs, and travellers with luggage.

**Making best use of available powers**

- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976**

  Councils have powers under section 20 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to require toilets to be provided and maintained for public use in any place providing entertainment, exhibitions or sporting events, and places serving food and drink for consumption on the premises.

- **Building standards, environmental health, and licensing**

  Local planning authorities can use the updated British Standard BS 6465-1:2006\(^{12}\) as a basis for securing an appropriate level of provision, design quality, and accessibility for sanitary facilities in new buildings and buildings undergoing major refurbishment.

  Environmental Health Officers have an important role to play in reviewing plans and Premises License applications, advising on whether sufficient sanitary facilities are provided in terms of number, design, and layout. Where the provisions of BS 6465 would not be met, they may object to an application or propose additional conditions.

  Some local authorities have produced their own guidelines on toilet provision in commercial premises, and can offer advice to members of the public opening up a new business.

- **Leasing conditions**

  The Planning and Licensing process can be used to secure reasonable levels of toilet provision in new buildings, but would not be an appropriate means to secure greater public access to these toilets. However, Councils can choose to pursue positive letting policies in areas of high demand for public toilets. For example, in appropriate circumstances – such as leasing a Council building for use as a community café – a clause might be included allowing non-paying customers to use the toilet facilities.

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\(^{12}\) Code of Practice for the design of sanitary installations and scales of provision of sanitary and associated appliances.
• Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

BIDs are voluntary, business-led partnerships operating within a statutory framework where local businesses can decide by ballot to pay a levy for additional services. They enable businesses to take the initiative by prioritising and commissioning a range of services, building on existing public provision, to improve the local trading environment.

Funding from the Whitgift Shopping Centre, National Car Parks, and Croydon BID has been used to renovate and maintain two public toilets in the town centre area which had been closed for some years. The toilets are situated on a pedestrian access route joining a major car park and the Whitgift Shopping Centre.

B. Adopting a strategic approach to public toilets

Decisions about toilet provision should also form part of each local authority’s strategic planning, taking into account varying needs at regional, district and local level. City centres, transport hubs, and tourist hot spots will often be priority areas for public toilets, with perhaps more flexible forms of provision in smaller town centres, villages, and local centres of community activity. Some local authorities are already setting the pace in taking a planned approach to public toilet provision in their area, and making best use of the powers available to them.

Strategic planning

Sustainable Community Strategies set the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area. Working alongside other local strategies, such as Local Development Frameworks (LDF), they provide an opportunity and a context within which local authorities can review public access to toilets across their area, and make linkages with their spatial planning policies, balancing the needs of urban and rural areas, land use and urban design priorities, the development of town centres, shopping and leisure areas, links with strategic transport, and the demands of the 24 hour economy.

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames intends to use its Local Development Framework to encourage the provision of publicly accessible toilets (including facilities for disabled people and baby changing) in new developments or where changes of use are proposed, where this would be appropriate.
The Local Development Framework (LDF) can also be used to set out a local authority’s intention to seek contributions to fund public toilets for certain types of development. Planning obligations\textsuperscript{13} (sometimes referred to as Section 106 agreements) can be used to prescribe the nature of a new development to ensure certain benefits or to secure a contribution (financial or in-kind) from a developer to mitigate the impact of a development.

As part of the planning approvals for the new Wembley Stadium, Brent Council secured a £700,000 contribution for providing new toilet facilities at six sites on the route between Wembley Central Station and Wembley Stadium. This has enabled Brent Council to provide enhanced public toilet facilities in Wembley for local residents, shoppers and visitors 365 days of the year, and not just for visitors to events at Wembley Stadium and Wembley Arena.

The Government wants to encourage people to leave their cars at home and make better use of public transport, and they are more likely to do this if they are confident that they will be able to use accessible and clean toilets throughout their journey. Good progress is being made in some areas. Local authorities are well placed to bring together transport operators and other stakeholders to create a coherent approach to public toilet provision as part of their broader ambitions for strategic and spatial planning in their areas.

\textsuperscript{13} The use of planning obligations is governed by the Secretary of State’s policy tests set out in Circular 5/05. They should be directly related to the development and its impact, and the contribution sought should be proportionate in scale and kind.
Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets

The Department for Transport’s Access for All Small Scheme Funding has been made available to improve the accessibility of train stations. The Department is providing around £7 million a year, on a match funded basis, that train operators, local authorities and others can bid for to make access improvements that reflect local needs. So far, over 40 locations are benefiting from improved accessible toilet facilities under the programme. Further details of how to apply can be found at: www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/.

Many disabled people find it difficult or impossible to use toilet facilities on aircraft. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) is the statutory advisor to the Government on the transport needs of disabled people. The DPTAC Aviation Working Group has developed and will shortly publish an accessible toilet specification for the aviation industry. This aims to ensure that all disabled people, whether they are wheelchair users or not, are able to gain access to, move within, and use toilet facilities on aircraft.

Local government reform – devolution and empowerment

Greater public access to better quality toilets will also be encouraged through the new performance regime for local authorities and local authority partnerships.

Through the package of measures set out in the Local Government White Paper¹⁴, central government is giving local government, other local public service providers, and local people more freedom and powers to bring about the changes that they wish to see in their communities.

The devolutionary approach that lies at the heart of the White Paper represents a significant and positive step towards reinvigorating local democracy, towards making public services more responsive to what communities want. In return for greater freedoms, local authorities must strengthen their links with communities and show that they are taking devolution right down to the doorstep.

¹⁴ Strong and prosperous communities: the local government white paper, Communities and Local Government, October 2006.
The new performance framework for local authorities and their partners reduces the 1,200 previous performance measures to a set of only 198. Up to 35 indicators will be selected from this set (plus 17 statutory education and early years targets) for inclusion in Local Area Agreements, which will form the only basis for triggering performance management interventions by Government.

The national indicators (NIs) focus on high level outcomes and the extent to which there is good public access to toilets will impact on a number of these including:

- NI 4 – percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality;
- NI 5 – overall/general satisfaction with local area;
- NI 138 – satisfaction of people over 65 with both home and neighbourhood;
- NI 140 – fair treatment by local services;
- NI 195 – improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of graffiti, litter, detritus and fly posting).

But local people themselves will also have new powers to influence the provision of services and amenities in their areas. The Action plan for community empowerment, published by Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association in October 2007, sets out a range of actions that will be taken forward in the coming months to give communities a greater say in local decisions.

Neighbourhood management partnerships, tenant management organisations, community forums, local voluntary and community groups, all have a valuable role to play in connecting people and local service providers. The new performance framework should stimulate a new debate around what priorities really matter to local communities and how these can best be delivered. This is as true for public access to toilets, as it is for the wide range of other local service priorities.

People-power can, and does, make a difference.

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A report on Public Toilets in Camden was published in April 2007 by the Camden Quality of Life Panel formed by local residents. The report highlighted the level of local public concern about public toilets and set out a number of recommendations. Camden Council responded positively by setting up a community toilet scheme in Kentish Town, securing free public access to toilets in six participating businesses.

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The public toilets at Upton Upon Severn were re-opened in June 2007 following local petitions and protests against their closure a year earlier. Malvern Hills District Council Leader, Serena Croad, commented: ‘Reopening the toilets is a priority because it is important to the people of Upton. It’s also a clear indication that our new administration is listening to what people want and will help them get things done.’

C. Highlighting tools and approaches

Local authorities are continually devising new and better ways of delivering their priorities in a changing world. Central government can highlight and encourage alternative approaches that have proven effective whilst leaving it up to local authorities to decide the best means of delivery in their areas in a way which avoids placing new burdens on council taxpayers. There is also a wealth of information, guidance material, and case studies on public toilets. Annex C highlights some of the resources and reference materials that have proved useful in writing this guide.

Changing Places campaign

The Changing Places campaign aims to increase the provision of toilets for people with profound and multiple disabilities who need special equipment and support from carers. The campaign is promoted by a consortium of organisations working to support the rights of disabled people.
Changing Places toilet provision ensures that there is enough space for disabled people and their carers; they also have the right equipment, including a height-adjustable changing bench and a hoist. Having these toilets in key public places would make a dramatic difference to the lives of thousands of people. There are now 33 Changing Places toilets in England, with more planned, and in addition a Changing Places Toilet won the UK Winner’s Trophy for the best ‘away from home’ toilets at the 20th Anniversary Loo of the Year Awards held in December 2007:

The Trafford Shopping Centre in Manchester won the UK Winner’s Trophy for the best ‘away from home’ toilets at the 20th Anniversary Loo of the Year Awards held in December 2007.

Beverley Dawkins, Chair of the Changing Places Consortium said “We are delighted that the overall winner of the Loo of the Year Awards is a venue which provides a Changing Places toilet. This shows that providing fully accessible toilets which enable those with profound disabilities to visit your venue is becoming increasingly recognised as an essential part of good toilet provision”.

Communities and Local Government is working with members of the Changing Places Consortium and others to look at provisions for sanitary facilities generally, and in particular the needs of people with complex and multiple disabilities. This is linked with the first five-yearly review of the British Standard BS 8300:2001 (Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice). Significant additions to the guidance are being prepared, which should be included in new guidance for the revised Standard.

**Advertising and leasing**

In some places with high visitor numbers, such as busy shopping centres and tourism areas, advertising and leasing arrangements may have a role to play as part of a mixed approach to public toilet provision.

Under leasing arrangements, a private operator pays a rental to operate toilets owned by a local authority; in return they maintain the facilities and keep any revenue generated by charges. In the past, the restriction on charging for toilets managed by local authorities has encouraged leasing arrangements, but with the removal of the restriction local authorities will be able to charge for their toilets without entering into rental agreements should they choose to do so.

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16 Details can be found on the Changing Places website: www.changing-places.org
Automatic Public Toilets can be funded by on-street advertising at prominent places over which the local authority has jurisdiction. Such arrangements have been used in areas such as Liverpool, Swindon, and Wigan. Public attitudes towards automatic toilets are mixed, but they have been designed to be accessible and can be used freely by people with RADAR keys.

In the London Borough of Bexley, JCDecaux provide and maintain three Pillar design Universal Superloos free of charge in exchange for commercial advertising. This arrangement helps to meet local public needs whilst taking over responsibility for cost and servicing from the Council. With a Contract Term of 15 years, this is a long term solution which enables the Council to provide high quality, maintained public toilets at no cost.

RADAR – the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation – operates a National Key Scheme which offers independent access to disabled people to around 7,000 locked public toilets nationally.
Use of signage, branding, and web-based tools

Promoting public access to toilets is not simply about increasing provision, it is also about improving the quality and cleanliness of toilet facilities, signage and other information about what is available. This is important for local people and visitors alike.

Many local authority websites and local libraries provide information on where public toilets are located in their area, the facilities available, and opening times.

Brighton and Hove City Council’s website\(^\text{18}\) contains information on over 70 local toilets including location, opening hours, facilities, and distance to the nearest alternative. Their site has links to other relevant sources of information including the British Toilet Association’s ‘Loo of the Year’ awards, radar key application forms, customer feedback, and ‘News Flush’ – providing the latest information on public toilets in Brighton and Hove.

Taking a broader perspective, Bristol’s ‘Legible City’ concept\(^\text{19}\) aims to improve connections between different elements of the urban environment: better coordination of projects, information and branding – including small details like signposting and mapping of local toilets – can help to shape an image for towns and cities that makes a lasting and positive impression on local people and visitors.

D. Encouraging and exemplifying innovation

The examples below highlight what can be achieved when local partnerships take the initiative and think creatively about new ways to promote public access to toilets. Communities and Local Government will work with these areas to develop a practical toolkit for other partnerships that are interested in exploring these approaches, to be published in the Spring.

Community toilet schemes

Community toilet schemes provide an excellent means by which local authorities, working in partnership with local businesses, can transform public access to toilets in their areas.

Originally devised by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and now being adopted elsewhere, the scheme allows the public to use toilet facilities in participating businesses, which receive an annual payment in return to cover their costs.

\(^\text{18}\) www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=b1116143
\(^\text{19}\) www.bristollegiblecity.info for more details.
The Richmond scheme has grown quickly to include 70 participating businesses in all parts of the borough, and particularly in areas of high demand, providing a range of facilities at all times of the day and late at night. The scheme is cheaper to run than the Council’s previous arrangement, and ensures access to a greater range of toilets that are clean and safe, located within managed buildings, and available when people need them.

Local businesses have come to welcome the scheme enthusiastically:

“When I was first asked to join the Community Toilet Scheme I was sceptical. I now see it is a very good idea and have been happy to recommend it to other licensees in the Twickenham Pub Watch which I currently chair. The programme has been about getting local businesses like ourselves to work with the Council to improve the place for everyone – I certainly think it is working.”

Stuart Green
Manager of the Cabbage Patch public house, Twickenham

As have local Councillors:

“…Councillors and the wider community increasingly see the Community Toilet Scheme as an effective way of providing widespread provision of safe and pleasant, publicly accessible and well-managed toilets for more hours of the day and at a lower cost than the rapidly failing conventional approach. It also strengthens links between business and the rest of the community which is an integral part of the Community Plan. Individually tailored to the needs of each community, we see this as an approach which could be applied across the country.”

Councillor Martin Elengorn
Cabinet Member of Environment

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Annex D provides a more detailed case study of Richmond’s community toilet scheme: how it was set up and operates, its success factors, impact, and related points of interest.

‘SatLav’

By exploiting the latest technological developments, councils can make it easier for local people to find out in seconds where their nearest public toilet is. Mobile phones are now becoming one of the primary means by which people access local information when they are out and about.

On 29 November 2007, Westminster City Council launched the UK’s first ever text service to help people find their nearest toilet. Anyone in Westminster with a mobile phone can now text “toilet” to 80097 and, for a 25p fee, will receive details of the nearest toilet and opening times. The service covers 40 council-run and leased toilets in the city and other public conveniences operated by the Greater London Authority and London Underground. In addition, a number of high profile stores including Marks and Spencer, Debenhams, John Lewis, House of Fraser, and the Cardinal Place shopping centre in Victoria, are listing their toilet facilities through the scheme.

Conclusion

We set out in this strategic guide to promote a shift in attitudes towards public toilets. That will take time, but there are already encouraging signs that more and more areas are starting to take positive action.

Local authorities will continue to play a leading role in ensuring that local people and visitors can access good quality public toilets in areas, and at times, of high demand. By removing the legislative barrier to charging, we will help local authorities to maintain good quality public toilet facilities where they deem appropriate.

But we are increasingly seeing, and want to encourage, partnership approaches that free up access to a far greater range of well-maintained and suitably equipped toilet facilities that are already provided by retail, entertainment, and commercial operators: flexible approaches that respond to the needs and expectations of different people, in different places, at different times of the day.

We have stated the case for better public access to good quality toilets, have set out a new ambition and a new approach, and have illustrated what can be achieved. We will follow-up in the Spring with a practical toolkit for areas wishing to explore some of the more recent approaches in more detail.

By working together, central and local government, the private sector, and communities can make a real difference in promoting better public access to toilets for us all. By doing this, we will help to raise the quality of life for all those who live, work and visit our communities.
4
Annexes
Annex A

Public Access to Toilets Steering Group – Membership

Baroness Kay Andrews  Parliamentary Under Secretary of State – Communities and Local Government (Chair)
Richard Chisnell  British Toilet Association
Alice Bodley  ENCAMS
Cllr. Chris Knight  London Borough of Camden
Liz Dobson  Nottingham City Council
Steve Robinson  Chartered Institution of Wastes Management
Natalie Salmon  Disability Rights Commission
Dave Huckerby  Adshel/Clear Channel UK
Ian Barry  Association of Chief Police Officers
Dr. Clara Greed  University of the West of England
Shelley Gould  Mayor of London/TfL
Dr. Leith Penny  Westminster City Council
Joanne McCartney  Greater London Assembly
Pamela Holmes  Help the Aged
Sharon Casswell  Wychavon District Council
Simon Quin  Association of Town Centre Management
Stuart Barrow  Visit Britain

Project Secretariat
Peter Matthew  Communities and Local Government
Rachel Arrundale  Communities and Local Government
Mike Desborough  Communities and Local Government (Project Manager)
Elaine Smith  Communities and Local Government
Laura Cane  Communities and Local Government
Tim Eligott  Communities and Local Government
Annex B

Public Toilets – Note on Statutory and Policy Context

This Annex provides a selective commentary on the main regulations and policies relating to public toilet provision and standards. Further guidance and commentary can be found in the ENCAMS Knowledge Bank on Toilets (see Annex C).

Public Health Act 1936

The provision and maintenance of toilets in public places is at the discretion of local authorities who have a power, under section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 (“PHA 1936”), to provide public conveniences, but no duty to do so.

It is therefore for local authorities to decide whether they should provide public toilets and, if so, how many. In doing this, each local authority must balance competing local demands for a broad range of public services against the need to avoid excessive burdens on local taxpayers.

Section 87(3)(c) of PHA 1936 is due to be amended in early 2008 to allow local authorities to charge for use of all public conveniences, including urinals. This is consistent with the EU Gender Goods and Services Directive principle of equal treatment and the Directive’s requirement for the removal of discriminatory legislation.

Building regulations and building standards

Building regulations set mandatory scales for toilet provision in dwellings only; workplaces are covered by the Health and Safety (Workplace) Regulations.

The updated British Standard (BS 6465-1:2006) is a Code of Practice for the design of sanitary installations and scales of provision of sanitary and associated appliances. It gives recommendations on the design of sanitary facilities and the recommended scale of provision of sanitary and associated appliances in new buildings and those undergoing major refurbishment. This standard applies to private dwellings, residential and nursing homes for older people, workplaces, shops and shopping malls, petrol stations, schools, theatres, cinemas, exhibition centres, libraries, museums, hotels, restaurants, licensed pubs, nightclubs, sports facilities, public toilets and temporary toilets.

Standards are guidance only and are not binding.
Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995

Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, includes provisions covering access to services and facilities. It requires service providers (including public authorities) to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled people to access those services which it would otherwise be impossible or unreasonably difficult to access. This might mean, for example, changing a policy or procedure (such as amending a “no animals” policy to allow an assistance dog to accompany a disabled person onto the premises), providing an auxiliary aid (such as information on opening times or charges in large print or Braille), or making adjustments to the physical features of a building (for example by providing a ramp at the entrance to a building where steps exist, wider doorways and larger cubicles for access by wheelchair users).

However, the DDA only requires service providers to do what is “reasonable” in all the circumstances, including the cost of the adjustment and its practicability. No public service should have to close down just because it is not “reasonable” to make adjustments so that it is accessible to disabled people.

The extension of the DDA 1995 by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 gave all public authorities duties to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. The Disability Equality Duty, which came into force on 4 December 2006, requires public authorities to consider the needs of all sectors of the society they serve, and how they make sure they are delivering services, and carrying out functions, in a way that promotes greater equality for disabled people. In addition, the preparation of Disability Equality Schemes enables local authorities to consider what action they may have to take to improve access to toilet facilities for disabled people.

The Equality Act 2006

The Equality Act 2006 gave all public authorities general and specific duties to promote gender equality, and the requirement to prepare Gender Equality Schemes gives public authorities an opportunity to consider what positive action could be taken to ensure more balanced access to public toilets for men and women.
Other relevant legislation

The *Highways Act 1961* enables Highway Authorities to consent to the siting of public conveniences on the highway. However, there are no regulations requiring train, or other transport, operators to provide toilets for their passengers.

The *Public Lavatories (Turnstiles) Act 1963* prohibits the use of turnstiles in any part of a public lavatory controlled or managed by a local authority (this does not apply to other providers of toilet facilities). This provision responded to public concern about the safety of turnstiles and the access problems they cause for disabled people, people with luggage or pushchairs, pregnant women etc.

Powers contained in the *Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003* allow the Police, Local Authority Officers, and Community Support Officers to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to anyone caught graffiti-ing or vandalising property such as public toilets.

The Health and Safety Executive’s *Purple Guide* covers health, safety and welfare at music and similar events. This includes advice on sanitary facilities.

The *Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998* (as amended) set out minimum access standards for toilets when they are installed on trains and require, where they are fitted, that cubicles closest to the wheelchair space(s) be accessible to a wheelchair user. Of twenty different train designs introduced since the regulations came into force, all but one included on-board toilets.

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20 DTLR response to written Question (Hansard 12 November 2001, column 512W).
Annex C

Resources and information on public access to toilets

The following represent a small selection of the resources that have proved useful in compiling this guide. There is a vast array of material available via the internet, and the range of material is expanding all the time, particularly as local authorities highlight the positive steps that they are taking to improve public access to toilets.

Legislation, general and technical guidance on public toilets

Public Health Act 1936
www.legislation.gov.uk
[Other legislation referred to in this guide may be accessed via the same site.]

British Standard – Sanitary Installations (BS6465-1:2006)
Available for purchase via www.bsi-global.com/en/Shop/

Public Conveniences: Policy, Planning, Provision, April 2001
Chartered Institution of Wastes Management
www.ciwm.co.uk/iwm-pubs/itm01860.htm

Inclusive Mobility – guide to best practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure
Department for Transport
www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/tipws/inclusivemobility

Knowledge Bank on Toilets
ENCAMS
www.encams.org/knowledge/toilets/

General Studies and Reviews

An urgent need – the state of London’s public toilets, March 2006
London Assembly Health and Public Services Committee

Who Put the P in Policy? The reality of guidelines and legislation in the design of the accessible toilet
Bichard J, Hanson J and Greed C
http://eprints.ucl.ac.uk/2999/

Taking stock : an overview of toilet provision and standards, 2005
Greed C
www.built-environment.uwe.ac.uk/staff/staffPublications.asp?staffid=c-greed
Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets, 2003
Greed Dr C

The Accessible Toilet Resource, 2007
Hanson J, Bichard J and Greed C

Independence and healthy living – the need for accessible loos (presentation slides)
Hanson Prof J
www.sparc.ac.uk/workshops/02_24_westfocus_on_ageing/pdf/Julienne.pdf

Local Authority Reports
(a selection referred to in compiling the strategic guide)

Draft Strategy for the provision of public conveniences in Cambridge
Cambridge City Council

Public Conveniences – Review of charging policy and modernisation of the facilities at Chesterton Road and Cherry Hinton Hall
Cambridge City Council

A Public Toilet Strategy for Doncaster, July 2003
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
www.doncaster.gov.uk/about/chamber/default.asp?Nav=FPDecNotes&KDID=2701

Ambitious for access – New fully accessible toilet and changing facility in Nottingham City Centre, Sept 2005
Nottingham City Council
www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/changing_place_toilet

Swindon Borough Council
www2.swindon.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000285/M00003041/AI00013460/ReferencesfromEOLAppendix2PublicToiletsTaskGroupReport2.pdf

Public Conveniences: Introduction of charges at 11 sites in the city and associated minor works, July 2007
Westminster Cabinet Member Report
Other Reports and Reviews

Public Toilet Survey, Sept 2006
Bristol Women’s Forum
www.bccforums.org.uk/women/page34g.html

Fletcher, Clara
www.londonshealth.gov.uk/PDF/ops_hia_finalreport.pdf

Taking control of incontinence, 2007
Help the Aged

Nowhere to go – public toilet provision in the UK, 2007
Help the Aged

Media Features

A Public inconvenience, September 2005
Geoghegan, Tom
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4285740.stm

Community care Award carer Winner; Nottingham Changing Places Project, Feb 2007
Community care.co.uk
www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2007/02/01/103128/
community-care-award-carers-winner-nottinghams-changing-places.html

Westminster’s loos convenient for an incredible 15 million users per year, Jan 2007
Westminster Council
www.westminster.gov.uk/councilgovernmentanddemocracy/councils/pressoffice/news/pr-3569.cfm

Loo of the year, Sept 2005
Westminster Council
www.westminster.gov.uk/councilgovernmentanddemocracy/councils/pressoffice/news/pr-2888.cfm

Not your bog standard toilet – Westminster City Council Launches Luxury Loo, May 2007
Westminster Council
www.westminster.gov.uk/councilgovernmentanddemocracy/councils/pressoffice/news/pr-3712.cfm
Most citizens in England have to use public toilets at some time, but there are many who do not feel that they are able to do so with confidence. A number of councils have recently outlined plans to improve facilities for the public, with a number of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of public toilets in London and other cities.

Westminster Welcomes Call for more London Loos, Aug 2007
Westminster Council
www.westminster.gov.uk/councilgovernmentanddemocracy/councils/pressoffice/news/pr-3891.cfm

Council outlines improvement programme for public toilet facilities, July 2006
Wolverhampton City Council

New city centre facility officially opened, June 2008
Wolverhampton City Council

What passengers want from Stations, June 2005
Rail Passenger Council
www.passengerfocus.org.uk/news-and-publications/

Miscellaneous

Response from the Inconvenience Committee of Blue Badge Guides to, Public Toilets in London: Investigation by London Assembly
The Guild of Registered Tourist Guides
www.blue-badge-guides.com/inconvenience.html

Public Toilets, One of a series street environment fact sheets, June 2007
I’DGO
www.idgo.ac.uk/design_guidance/factsheets/public_toilets.htm

A playlist for public service, July 2005
National Consumer Council: Mayo Ed
www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/poldocs/NCC094_playlist.pdf

Customer Focus in Public Service, Oct 2006
National Consumer Council: Mayo Ed
www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/speeches/NCC061_customer_focus.pdf
Useful Web Gateways

British Toilet Association: www.britloos.co.uk/

British Toilet Association
Loo of the Year awards: www.loo.co.uk

Changing Places: www.changing-places.org

ENCAMS: www.encams.org

Chartered Institution of
Wastes Management: www.ciwm.co.uk/

Help the Aged: www.helptheaged.org.uk

Department for Transport: www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/

World Toilet Organisation: www.worldtoilet.org
Annex D

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames’ Community Toilet Scheme (CTS)

Context

Richmond has a resident population of 182,000 and attracts around 4.5 million visitors a year.

During the early 1990s the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames leased five Automatic Public Conveniences (APCs) across the Borough, which cost up to £85K a year to run. These supplemented the Council’s own provision of public toilets in parks and other public places, but they proved unpopular with local people and usage was low – equating to an average of £8 per visit. The Council recognised that the combination of old style public conveniences and APCs would never cope adequately with demands of a modern society.

Building on two pilots in the late 1990s the Council initiated their Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) in 2004 as a partnership approach to improving public access to a greater range of clean and safe toilets. At the same time the decision was taken to close all but five of the remaining on-street conventional public toilets.

The Community Toilet Scheme

Under the CTS, members of the public can use toilet facilities in a range of approved local businesses during their opening hours; purchase of goods or services is not required. Participating businesses undertake to keep their toilets safe, clean, and hygienic, easily accessible, and well-stocked. In return, they receive an annual payment (currently £600 +VAT), and the Council also maintains public liability insurance.

The scheme quickly grew to include 60 businesses by 2005, and currently has 69 partners across the borough, with concentrations in high demand areas such as Twickenham, Richmond, and Mortlake.
A wide range of businesses participate, including pubs, restaurants, cafes, community centres, retail stores, Council offices, and supermarkets. The scheme is actively managed by the Council to ensure a good geographical spread of participating businesses, taking account of local needs, high standards of toilet provision and maintenance, access to toilets at all times of the day and well into the evening, provision of accessible facilities for disabled people, and baby-change. Of the 69 partners currently in the CTS:

- Almost half (34) have facilities for disabled people
- Almost a third (22) have baby-change facilities
- Nearly half (28) are available during the morning
- All but two (67) are available during the afternoon
- Three quarters (52) are available during the evening (some until past 12 o’clock).

The scheme is helping to address issues such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle and social inclusion in the borough; with more toilets around the borough older people, parents and people with health problems are still able to confidently maintain a more active lifestyle and enjoy the local environment.

**Success factors**

Various factors have helped to make the CTS a success:

- a dedicated Council officer co-ordinating the scheme, engaging with stakeholders and building relationships, with ‘sales-based’ targets to drive sign-up
- “corporate” buy-in at all levels of the Council and consistent messaging across relevant Council departments
- an explicit partnership-based approach, led by the Council, but managed in a way that responds to the differing needs and motivations of local businesses
- a strong brand image and marketing: window stickers for participating businesses highlight the facilities offered, recognise the public service they are providing, and give people the confidence to use the facilities in the knowledge that they will be welcomed; on-street signing in tune with the local environment and street-scene; continuous community engagement and feedback – leaflets, maps, and web-site material.
Impact

Local businesses have shown great interest in the CTS, and the scheme continues to grow. Businesses report an increase in customer footfall, and there is anecdotal evidence of increased trade.

“When I was first asked to join the Community Toilet Scheme I was sceptical. I now see it is a very good idea and have been happy to recommend it to other licensees in the Twickenham Pub Watch which I currently chair. The programme has been about getting local businesses like ourselves to work with the Council to improve the place for everyone – I certainly think it is working.”

Stuart Green
Manager of the Cabbage Patch public house, Twickenham

Taking all costs into account, the CTS is around £20K per annum cheaper for the Council than the APC leasing arrangement. And compared to five APCs, local people now have access to nearly 70 toilets under the CTS, thus ensuring a standard of provision that the Council could not provide on its own. The position regarding the remaining five on-street conventional public toilets and a holistic approach to more fully include within the total provision parks and perhaps library toilets are all under consideration.

“After some initial scepticism, Councillors and the wider community increasingly see the Community Toilet Scheme as an effective way of providing widespread provision of safe and pleasant, publicly accessible and well-managed toilets for more hours of the day and at a lower cost than the rapidly failing conventional approach. It also strengthens links between business and the rest of the community which is an integral part of the Community Plan. Individually tailored to the needs of each community we see this as an approach which could be applied across the country”

Councillor Martin Elengorn
Cabinet Member for Environment

Local people are now able to access a far greater number and range of toilets in the Borough, toilets that are clean and safe, located within managed buildings, and open where and when people need them.

“The Richmond Community Toilet Scheme plays a part in dealing with the concerns of older people about facing the local public toilet facilities.”

Mr Ron Cooper
Chairman of Richmond upon Thames for Older People
Related points of interest

Local businesses, particularly independent businesses, saw participation in the CTS not solely in terms of increased trade, but as part of their own responsibility to the local community.

Since the CTS began, there have been no reported incidents of vandalism or anti-social behaviour. Although under the CTS premises have a right to refuse entry in exceptional circumstances, this has not had to be invoked.

The Council operates a monitoring procedure to spot check each toilet is complying with the scheme and meeting cleanliness and other criteria. This year members have been asked to sign up to a guidance sheet and specify that they will undertake, amongst other criteria, to keep the toilets clean and clutter free, etc.