



Public Toilets in Wales

August 2025

Background

The lack of and increasing shortfalls in public toilet provision in Wales is an issue that has been ignored for too long. It is an issue for residents, advocacy and access groups, and tourists, with many raising concerns about public health, sanitation, independence and equality.

Public toilets are an essential part of our communities, and an inadequate provision disproportionately affects older people, women, disabled people, people with medical conditions, outdoor and lone workers, and the homeless. Adequate provision is essential to give people the ability and confidence to participate in community life. Poor provision has a major impact – many affected are deterred from leaving their homes or restrict their time away from home, a large proportion will deliberately dehydrate themselves when they do go out.

The inability to access public facilities can cause distress, a loss of dignity, health issues, and isolation and loneliness. There are also concerns about the effect a lack of provision has on public sanitation, especially in town centre nighttime economy areas.

In 2011, Age Cymru's Community Calculator questionnaire found that older people in Wales rated access to public toilets in their communities as 3.3 out of 10.

In the same year, The Welsh Senate of Older People launched its P is for People campaign with a Day of Action in the Senedd. In 2012, an extensive survey was carried out across Wales, leading to research report and a campaign toolkit that were widely distributed.

The COVID lockdowns in 2020 forced facilities to close and many were not re-opened when restrictions were lifted, reducing provision even further, particularly in rural areas and those outside shopping centres.

In 2023, Wales Seniors Forum re-launched the P is for People campaign with another Wales-wide survey, which found that dissatisfaction with toilet provision had increased since the 2012 survey.

Also in 2023, the Older People's Commission for Wales published a briefing on public toilets in Wales, making a number of recommendations to Welsh Government and local authorities.

In 2024, Wales Seniors Forum submitted a petition to Welsh Government calling for funding and support for adequate public toilet provision. The petition was discussed by the Petitions Committee and recommendations were made for more oversight from Welsh Government, sharing of good practice, and for councils to consider the issue in terms of social impact, rather than financial. Although the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care expressed support, there has been no commitment for toilet provision to become a statutory requirement.

Following on from the petition, a roundtable discussion event hosted by Age Cymru proposed a Wales Toilet Alliance, which first met in November 2024. Attendees included representatives from the British Toilet Alliance, Crohn's & Colitis UK, Cancer Research and Genetics UK, Colostomy UK, Muscular Dystrophy UK, Transaid Cymru, Age Cymru, Cymru Older People's Alliance, Wales Seniors Forum, local health boards and local authorities. This report is a result of the Alliance's discussions.

Local authority public toilet strategies

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 recognises access to toilets as a public health issue. The Act does not require local authorities to provide facilities, only to provide assessment and planning. A number of groups and organisations representing older people, disabled people, people with health conditions, and families have criticised this, as it reduces the public health issue to an exercise in reporting, rather than addressing it and taking action. It is unclear what Welsh Government oversight is in place regarding the strategies.

In 2019, the first strategies were published by the majority of local authorities. Research carried out by Age Cymru on behalf of Wales Seniors Forum in June 2024 and May 2025 shows that four local authorities do not appear to have a strategy available – Bridgend, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot and Vale of Glamorgan. Requests have been made, but to date nothing has been received. Throughout the research, when requests for documents had to be made to local authorities, there was a marked lack of knowledge around responsibility for the strategies within the councils.

Strategy reviews are required every five years (or sooner if deemed necessary). Of the 18 local authorities that have strategies available to the public, 12 appear to have carried out reviews, although in some cases it is unclear whether the original strategy has been updated to take into account any new information. Caerphilly and Torfaen state that reviews were carried out in 2023, but no new documentation has been made available, despite requests.

Many of the local authorities' strategies acknowledge the lack of provision without committing to making improvements, although support for community toilet schemes and partnership working with businesses and external agencies were universally stated. In all areas where council-run facilities have been closed, budgetary restraints are given as the reason, especially in relation to maintenance and repairs because of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Of the strategies that have been published, all state that council properties such as libraries and leisure facilities will open their toilets to the public. The majority also state that they will work with the local health board to open toilets on their properties. While this does increase the number of facilities available in some areas, the provision is limited to office hours and does not increase access to public toilets in rural areas.

All published strategies state the intention to work in partnership with businesses. However, most local authorities have struggled to recruit businesses owing to concerns about anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Anecdotal evidence shows that the community toilet scheme funding does not meet the financial commitment required from businesses. Although larger businesses like supermarkets acknowledge that providing toilet facilities brings in and retains custom, small businesses are often unwilling to commit to the responsibilities that public toilets require. A number of businesses that have opened their toilets to the public avoid publicising the fact and are not registered on the Great British Toilet Map or on the local authorities' websites. Again, it is worth noting that these additional facilities only provide toilet provision during business hours and do not address the issue in rural areas.

All 18 published strategies commit to working in partnership with voluntary organisations, town and community councils, and other external agencies. Those local authorities that have focused efforts on partnership working have successfully prevented the closure of over 100 previously council-run facilities across Wales. It is difficult to assess the exact number as some strategies are unclear, however the following local authorities report some success with the partnership model:

Blaenau Gwent – three toilets retained by community councils or businesses

Caerphilly – six toilets reopened by community councils and third parties

Conwy – three toilets run by town and community councils

Denbighshire – one toilet run by a community council

Gwynedd – strategy states that 50 closures were prevented by partnership working

Merthyr Tydfil – one toilet taken over by a community council

Newport – strategy states that ‘many’ toilets were sold or transferred to community groups

Pembrokeshire – ten toilets are fully or partially funded by town or community councils and five have been fully transferred

Powys – 56 toilets transferred to community groups, private businesses, and town and community councils

Rhondda Cynon Taf – strategy states that asset transfer arrangements have led to an increase in Changing Places and accessible toilets

The community partnership model is a successful one if there is capacity and funding to commit to pursuing opportunities.

It is worth noting that while local authorities acknowledge the importance of tourism, a high number of council-run toilets have limited opening hours and seasonal opening hours or closures. There is very little provision for night-time economies or for tourists that choose to visit Wales outside the traditional season.

Although some strategies list the availability of accessible facilities, it is unclear if these facilities are provided alongside standard toilets. RADAR keys are widely available online for anyone to purchase cheaply – anecdotal evidence shows that this wider access has led to vandalism and anti-social behaviour at these sites. Some groups have reported accessible facilities that have been double locked to prevent vandalism, making them inaccessible to those who need them.

It is unclear how many Changing Places toilets are available in most areas. Cardiff Council appears to have focused some efforts on increasing the number of Changing Places facilities, devoting a large section of the strategy to the improvements being made in this area. The majority of new facilities in Cardiff are located in the community hubs.

Very few of the strategies mention gender-neutral or ‘toilets for all’ facilities. In areas of new development, the strategies seem to indicate that toilet facilities are inclusive to all.

In order for public toilets to be accessible to the public, information on locations needs to be available to all. In all cases where local authorities carried out and published public consultation, the majority of respondents note that signage for public toilets is inadequate. While all published strategies state that community toilet scheme businesses and council properties will display the Welsh Government sticker, it is unclear how familiar the sign is to members of the public. Cardiff Council’s strategy notes that the Welsh Government logo is not dementia friendly and uses its own version of the sticker with a contrast seat. Both street signage and public awareness of the toilet logo need to be improved.

The Great British Toilet Map is only available online, excluding those without a smartphone and anyone in an area with poor mobile coverage. There is also evidence that the Map is not up-to-date, with some reporting that closed facilities are still shown on the map. Although most local authorities’ strategies state that information on toilet locations is available, they refer to pages on their websites, again excluding those who are not online.

Key points

Funding pressures faced by local authorities have led to the closure of up to 30 council-run toilets in recent years, although the data in the strategies is often unclear. In comparison to other services, the maintenance and staffing costs to provide public toilets may be judged to be less important, but a lack of facilities leads to a number of issues.

Older people, disabled people, carers, people with medical conditions, and pregnant women are disproportionately excluded from participation in community life.

Rural areas have fewer and sometimes no facilities, increasing the likelihood of social exclusion in those communities. This also affects outdoor and lone workers, who may have to deliberately dehydrate themselves when travelling and working.

Popular tourist areas often lack enough toilets for the number of tourists that visit every year, which can lead to public urination, hygiene concerns and environmental impacts.

It should be recognised that adequate provision of toilet facilities enables members of the public to confidently participate in and contribute to Welsh communities, improving opportunities for inclusion and for economic growth.

Calls to action

More oversight and involvement are needed from Welsh Government. The local authority strategies to be reviewed and the progress of implementation monitored.

Provide funding for local authorities to help to maintain and improve public toilets.

A framework for good practice to be produced, emphasising the need to view the issue in terms of public health and wellbeing, and to include support for partnership working with town and community councils on asset transfer arrangements.

More investment in working with businesses to promote their inclusion in community development and improvement.

More investment in accessible, Changing Places and gender-neutral facilities. More consideration of varying needs is required at the planning stage.

Improve on-street signage and increase public awareness of the community toilet logo.

Make information about the location of toilets accessible to all and available in all formats, including hard copy.

Make bins and stoma bag/incontinence pad changing facilities available in all council-run, local authority and Welsh Government building toilets.



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