

Report of the Director of Environment
Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee
10th June 2019
Draft Local Toilets Strategy

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1. BACKGROUND

Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017: Provision of Toilets came into force on 31 May 2018 and places a duty on each local authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area.

Local authorities in Wales now have the responsibility to:

- assess the need for toilet provision for their communities;
- plan to meet those needs;
- produce a local toilets strategy; and
- review the strategy, update and publicise revisions.

There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide public toilets and the duty to prepare a strategy does not in itself require local authorities to provide and maintain public toilets themselves, but they are required to take a strategic view across their area on how these facilities can be provided and accessed by the local population. In doing so it is envisaged that local authorities will consider a full range of options for making facilities available to the public.

The Act also acknowledges that local authorities may need to make decisions in the future to close or reduce current provision and does not seek to prevent such decisions; instead, if such circumstances arise, the Act requires us to use the Strategy to maintain provision by working with private businesses, community groups and other public services to offer alternative facilities within the area.

2. CURRENT POSITION

Public toilets matter to everybody and remain a high profile issue. They are however, even more important to certain groups within society, including people with mental or physical disabilities

and their carers, the infirm or elderly, people with babies or young children and people of all ages who are coping with a range of medical conditions. These groups can be disproportionately affected by poor provision. This can contribute to increased social isolation and inactivity, as well as affecting people's ability to maintain independence and dignity in later life.

A draft strategy (Appendix 1) has therefore been prepared that incorporates feedback following a Needs Assessment survey that was undertaken during October / November 2018. A total of 507 responses were received. The analysis of those responses is detailed from page 11 in the draft Local Toilets Strategy (Appendix 1 to this report).

The draft strategy therefore sets out proposals that may be considered over the next two years to enhance and maximise the use of existing facilities and to promote additional, appropriate and accessible toilet provision for public use.

To do so, Carmarthenshire County Council proposes to:

- Review all current toilet facilities – position/mapping and opening times
- Identify and encourage other council facilities to become more publicly available
- Establish partnership links with public/private companies and organisations
- Consider the development of a community/comfort/partnership toilet scheme
- Encourage appropriate portable toilet provision to event organisers
- Ensure that consideration is given to the incorporation of Changing Places facilities in any appropriate future developments
- Where appropriate, consider implementing charges for access to certain public toilets to reduce misuse and vandalism
- Improve communication and information on available toilet facilities
- Provide information on public toilets in Carmarthenshire to the Welsh Government Mapping Application (LLE)
- Consider opportunities for integrating guidance and policy requirements in respect of the provision of public toilet facilities as part of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan 2018 -2033

Carmarthenshire Local Toilets Strategy Consultation

The draft Local Toilets Strategy consultation exercise was undertaken between the 25th March and the 12th May 2019 via the consultation facility on the Council's website.

The aim of this consultation was to gather public opinion on the proposals put forward for the future of public toilet provision in Carmarthenshire following the initial public toilet needs assessment in 2018.

Consultation Process

A questionnaire was produced to gather public opinion on the following proposals:

- Reviewing all current toilet facilities, collating information on opening times, location and facilities provided.
- Identifying appropriate council facilities where toilets could be made publicly available.
- Establishing partnership links with public/private companies and organisations for the provision of toilets.
- Considering the development of a community/comfort/partnership toilet scheme.
- Encouraging appropriate portable toilet provision to event organisers.
- Ensuring consideration is given to the incorporation of Changing Places facilities in any appropriate future developments.
- Considering implementing charges for access to certain public toilets to reduce misuse and vandalism where appropriate.
- Improving communication and available information on public toilet facilities, potentially through improved signage and mapping.
- Making information on public toilets in Carmarthenshire available through the Welsh Government Mapping Application (LLE).
- As part of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan 2018 -2033 opportunities for integrating guidance and policy requirements in respect of the provision of public toilet facilities will be considered.

The questionnaire was also sent to relevant representative groups for people who may be more reliant on the use of public toilets. The consultation received 232 responses and the results are summarised below.

Summary of Results

Overall the proposals put forward were welcomed by respondents, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with every proposal. The average level of agreement with proposals was 81%. The most popular proposal was the identification of appropriate council facilities where toilets could be made publicly available, with 94% of respondents agreeing that this should be done. The proposal that received the most opposition was considering the implementation of charges for access to certain public toilets, with 34% of respondents opposing this. However, the majority of respondents supported the introduction of a small charge where necessary and this was further supported through the general comments section of the consultation.

Word count analysis of the further written comments revealed common themes which can be seen in the graphic below (Figure 1). Overall, 10% of respondents said that they were concerned that a lack of public toilet provision could negatively impact on quality of life, which could disproportionately affect people with disabilities, women, people with children and elderly people. A further 15% of respondents made negative comments regarding the possible implementation of charges at certain public toilets. Further analysis showed that 31% of these negative comments were due to concerns that toilet users may not have the correct change to be able to pay to use a public toilet. It was suggested by a respondent that this could be overcome by enabling contactless payments. On the other hand, replies were received from respondents who commented that they would be happy to pay a small charge to use a public toilet, especially if it made the difference between them remaining open or having to close.

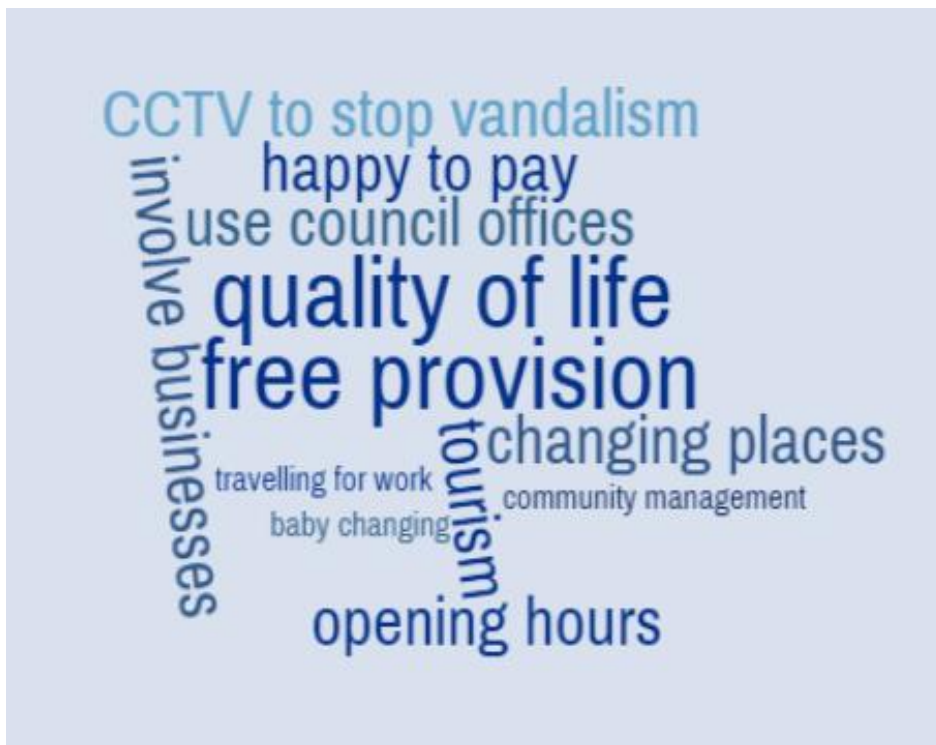


Figure 1 Word Count of Common Responses to Proposals

As demonstrated by the high levels of agreement on the proposal, many respondents were keen to increase availability of council office facilities and to involve businesses in a partnership scheme. However some comments expressed concern that private businesses would not see any benefit in making their facilities available or that once part of a partnership they would be under no obligation to honour the scheme. It was suggested that private businesses may be able to install a donations box for users to cover the cost of making their facilities publicly available.

It was felt that there should be more provision in areas that attract tourism such as beaches and country parks, to make these areas more accessible to people who may rely on public toilets or Changing Places facilities. There was also call for further provision in towns and villages with the suggestion that local community groups could assist in the maintenance of these facilities.

Following the results of the survey, it could be seen that there was strong support for the proposals put forward. There was also an understanding among respondents that the authority may need to consider additional approaches such as community toilet schemes to be able to maintain public toilet provision in Carmarthenshire in the future.

3. CONCLUSION

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 requires that we produce a Local Toilets Strategy for Carmarthenshire. Due to financial pressures, traditional stand-alone public conveniences have been in decline in recent years. The draft Local Toilets Strategy therefore sets out proposals which could increase the number of toilets becoming open and available to everyone, yet at a minimal cost to the Authority directly.

4. RECOMMENDATION

Members are invited to review the content of the draft strategy and offer views on what improvements, if any, are required to the draft strategy before it is presented to the Executive Board for approval and adoption.