



Caroline Russell AM

City Hall

The Queen's Walk

LONDON SE1 2AA

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 0AA

6 June 2020

Dear Minister,

Access to public toilets as lockdown eases

I have been working with campaigners such as London Loo Codes and Wantaloo who have been pushing for better public toilet provision in the capital. Since the lockdown, residents across London have contacted me about the problem of locked loos on high streets and in our parks. Take this one, for example: *"Richmond has, as I'm sure other places have too, become fairly rotten and smelly with human excrement and urine dotted around town, outside my door, and in the parks our families enjoy."*

As this resident has so clearly expressed it, without public facilities, people resort to using our streets and green spaces as open toilets. This is worsened by the fact that coffee shops and public houses, desperate to keep their businesses afloat, have started to sell takeaway beverages. Alcohol and coffee are both diuretics so allowing these to be available for sale, without the conveniences needed to capture their consequent outpourings, is aggravating the situation.

In 'normal' times, the UK's lack of loos has an equalities impact, which the Royal Society for Public Health highlighted in their report, "Taking the P***, The Decline of the Great British Public Toilet". People with disabilities and chronic illnesses feel restricted by a 'loo leash' as the fear of not having access to a toilet prevents them from going out. Older people, families travelling with small children and those who are menstruating or pregnant also experience these same constraints.

In January, I proposed an amendment to the Mayor of London's budget for £18m that, if passed, would have made all Transport for London (TfL) toilets free to use and added 32 new automatic toilets, 32 new toilets blocks including both accessible and conventional toilets, and six changing places toilets alongside new or existing accessible toilet blocksⁱ. It is time for the Government to consider how to open up existing public toilets safely and how to improve provision when all too many high streets, tourist sites and open spaces are reliant on toilets being provided by cafes, pubs and restaurants, most of which are currently closed or refusing access to their facilities.

The Government's Reopening High Streets Safely Fund has been very welcome and will help many high streets, particularly with social distancing measures. However, the issue of access to public toilets appears to have been overlooked. It has definitely been underfunded. TfL as a public body should be providing publicly accessible toilets. As part of the Government's bailout, it would be good if a condition was included that TfL implement the toilet improvement plan proposed in my budget amendment earlier this year.

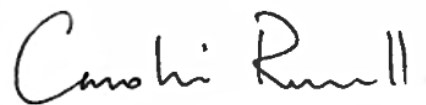
Further, will the Government pledge to support the Royal Society for Public Health's Calls to Actionⁱⁱ:

- The Government to make the provision of public toilets compulsory on a well-planned and regulated basis.
- Potty parity laws to be emulated in the UK to ensure fair provision for women.
- The Government to reverse years of funding cuts to local authorities and invest in our civic infrastructure.

- National and local government to pilot innovative new ways of financing public toilets, including a “spend a penny” campaign.
- Break down the toilet taboo: public loos and their role in assisting hygiene, hydration, exercise and more must be more freely addressed in public health discourse.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Russell". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Caroline Russell

Green Party Member of the London Assembly

ⁱ <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/caroline-russell/london-should-be-flush-with-free-loos>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/459f4802-ae43-40b8-b5a006f6ead373e6.pdf>