

Caroline Russell AM: Letter on introducing a statutory duty for councils to provide public toilets

Caroline Russell poses with a smile next to a banner with lots of yes votes for more public toilets on the tube network.

Key information

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Dear Secretary of State,

Introduce a statutory duty for councils to provide public toilets

I am writing to you to make the case for the Government to bring in the requirement that local councils have a statutory duty to provide public toilets with associated funding.

This is a duty I have been calling for since I was chair of the London Assembly Health Committee in 2021-22, when we investigated the lack of public toilets in London and how to improve and increase their provision. A [survey conducted as part of the investigation](#) found that 91.3 per cent of respondents did not feel toilet provision is adequate to meet their needs.

The resulting report – The Toilet Paper: The London Assembly Health Committee’s three principles for improving public toilet provision in London – made 12 recommendations. The most relevant to your portfolio was:

The government should make the provision of public toilets a statutory duty for local authorities, and the Mayor should be leading on this issue for London, lobbying with London Councils for the provision of ringfenced funding to enable this to be achieved.

This investigation built on previous work from 2017 when the Transport Committee examined bus safety in London, producing the report [Driven to distraction: Making London’s buses safer](#). One of the findings was that bus drivers face unnecessary distractions while on the road, such as needing the toilet, which makes driving

safely harder. This was recognised in Recommendation 5 of the report, which included the following:

TfL should undertake additional work with the operators to try and reduce the number of distractions facing drivers. This could include:

- **a commitment to deliver a toilet on each bus route (available at all times that the bus is in service) by the end of 2018.**

In addition to this cross-party committee work, during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 I wrote to then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government pointing out the serious [public health consequences created by the lack of public toilets](#) across London. The following year I incorporated my work with the charity Muscular Dystrophy to again call on the Mayor of London to [prioritise accessible toilets](#) being made available throughout London's transport network.

In August 2023, I published a [report that exposed the desperate gaps in public toilet provision](#) across the Transport for London (TfL) network, highlighting loo 'deserts' where new toilets are most needed.

I also pushed for [toilet funding in every Mayoral budget](#) since the 2020-2021 cycle. For the 2022 budget cycle, my budget amendment proposed a [£10 million investment for a brand-new London toilets fund](#) to give local councils access to money to refurbish, reopen and revitalise these essential local amenities. I followed this up the next year with another budget amendment calling for [£20 million to be invested in new, free, accessible toilets at TfL stations](#). In response, the Mayor of London proposed that Transport for London (TfL) carry out a feasibility study into doing so and included a recurring [£3 million investment for new toilets over five years](#).

All this work has resulted in toilets being upgraded to accessible and [new toilets being opened on the TfL transport network](#) as part of its plan that customers are within 20 minutes of a toilet without having to change trains.

While I'm pleased that my campaigning with Londoners has secured more toilets for London, the struggle to get here shows how the absence of a statutory duty – and the lack of ringfenced funding for installing, upgrading, and maintaining facilities – has held progress back.

Campaigners, including the London Loo Alliance, and I urge you to make the provision of free, publicly accessible toilets a statutory duty for Local Authorities because these facilities are essential civic infrastructure, not optional extras. Reliable toilet access allows older and disabled people, parents with young children and people with health conditions to move confidently around their communities. Sadly, current provision is all too inconsistent and, when budgets tighten, one of the first services to be cut. This leaves high streets, cultural and leisure facilities, transport hubs and parks effectively inaccessible for many. A statutory duty would create consistent standards nationwide and ensure every area meets the basic dignity, equality, and public health needs of the people who live, work, and travel there.

However, a statutory duty can only succeed if it is matched with the funding required to make these facilities reliable, safe, and genuinely accessible. Without a dedicated budget, councils are forced to choose between closing toilets, reducing opening hours, or allowing facilities to fall into disrepair – outcomes that undermine public health and exclude older people, disabled residents, families, and anyone who depends on predictable access. Sustained investment is also essential for accessible design features such as step-free layouts, Changing Places provision, and adequate lighting and security.

Based on this evidence and arguments, I urge you to make toilet provision a statutory duty for all local authorities, accompanied by the resources needed to deliver a consistent, dignified standard of provision for every community.

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