

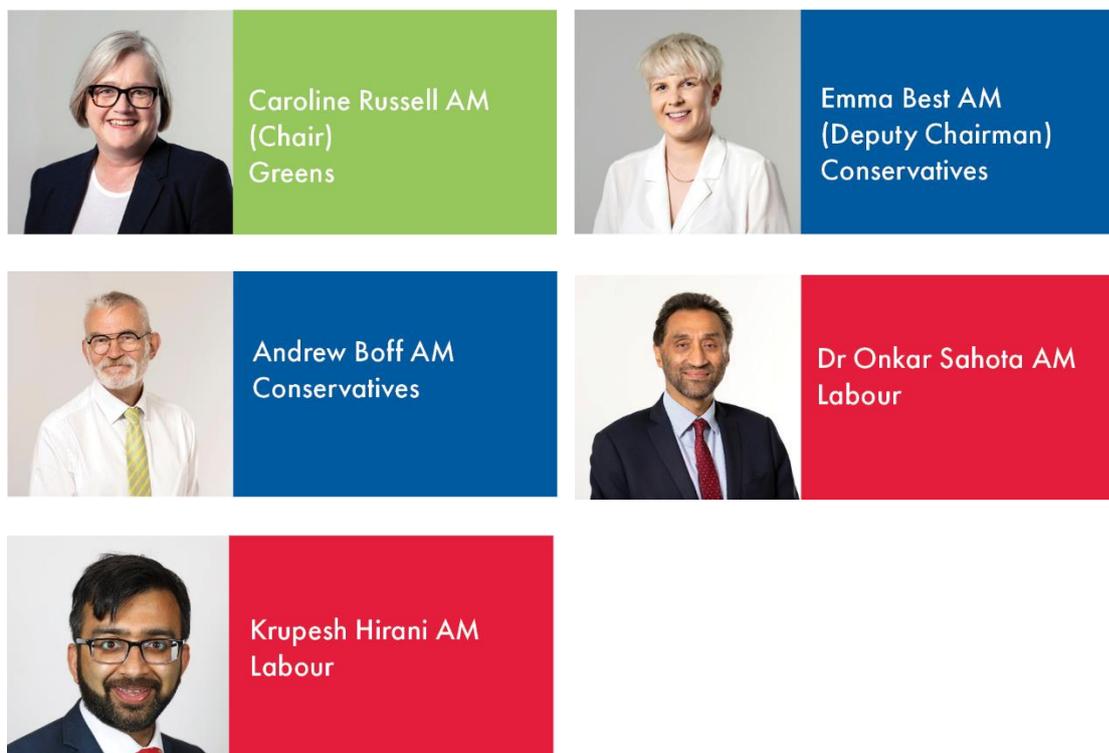
An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in London, with a green map overlay. The map shows a grid of streets and a central area that is shaded in a darker green. Several people are walking on the street, some carrying bags or backpacks. The overall scene is captured from a high angle, looking down at the street.

The Toilet Paper: The London Assembly Health Committee's three principles for improving public toilet provision in London

London Assembly Health Committee

LONDONASSEMBLY

Health Committee



The Health Committee reviews health and wellbeing issues for Londoners, particularly public health issues. It also keeps a close eye on how well the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy is doing.

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Foreword



Caroline Russell AM
Chair of the Health Committee

Why is there a 'toilet taboo'? Why are toilets considered a 'nicety' not a 'necessity'? And why are there still not enough public toilets in London? Our investigation aimed to find out exactly what has happened to our toilets and, more importantly, how we can improve and increase provision across London.

We know Londoners are worried about the closure of public toilets and the effect this has on their everyday life. We did not, however, expect the volume of responses to our survey and the strength of feeling contained within them.

In total, 3,504 Londoners completed our survey and shared their experiences with us. The results show that 91.3 per cent of respondents do not feel toilet provision is adequate to meet their needs in London; and 94 per cent said they found it quite difficult or very difficult trying to find a public toilet in London in an area they are not familiar with.

The results of our investigation are clear – the decline in the number of public toilets is a threat to the health, mobility and equality of Londoners. To make matters worse there is no centralised data that maps overall provision in London, so there is no way of exactly knowing the scale of the challenge and the level of unmet need. What is clear, however, is how strongly Londoners feel about their missing loos and the urgent need for change.

Public toilets are integral to making London accessible, inclusive and economically viable. Public toilets matter to everybody, regardless of their age, class, ethnic origin, gender or disability. They are even more important to certain sections of our society, including older people, people with children, delivery and transport workers, trans people, disabled people, people with medical conditions, people who are homeless, and tourists.

It is unacceptable that when Londoners leave their homes for leisure or work they are unable to find a toilet. We need to normalise defecation, menstruation and urination and view them as natural bodily functions, even if we feel uncomfortable talking about them. The absence of toilets does not remove those bodily functions; instead, it removes our freedom to enjoy public spaces. For reasons of public health, hygiene and sanitation, Londoners need to be able to find

public toilets; use them with confidence; and trust that they will be available, safe, suitable to their needs and clean for use.

Our 21st century global city needs 21st century toilets. Everyone has the right to access a toilet. To enshrine this right, we need government to make the provision of public toilets compulsory and ensure there is ringfenced funding for local authorities to make this happen. Based on the results of our survey, independent advice from a range of experts and desk research, this report sets out three key principles to stimulate improvement in provision:

- **Duty** – all levels of government should have a duty to provide public toilets. The government has a duty to make the provision of public toilets compulsory and to provide ringfenced funding for local authorities to achieve this purpose. Regional and local government should also use the tools at their disposal to improve provision.
- **Directions** – all Londoners and visitors have the right to be able to find a toilet that suits their needs in a way that is accessible to them.
- **Data** – Londoners need toilet policymaking to be based on current data, so that population needs can be met and improvements can be measured.

These principles need to be underpinned by enhanced leadership and ownership of this agenda across national, regional and local government. Our report includes recommendations to deliver short, medium and long-term change, and critically increase momentum for the far-too-longstanding 'Cinderella' of public services.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Committee Members for all their advice and input to the report. We are also very grateful to those who participated in our investigation by speaking at our meeting, and the many Londoners who submitted views and information.

Executive Summary

This report by the London Assembly Health Committee sets out three key principles to stimulate an improvement in the provision of public toilets in London.

Duty – all levels of government should have a duty to provide public toilets. The government has a duty to make the provision of public toilets compulsory and to provide ringfenced funding for local authorities to achieve this purpose. Regional and local government should also use the tools at their disposal to improve provision.

Directions – all Londoners and visitors have the right to be able to find a toilet that suits their needs in a way that is accessible to them.

Data – Londoners need toilet policymaking to be based on current data, so that population needs can be met and improvements can be measured.

In order for these principles to be achieved, the recommendations successfully implemented, and public toilet provision improved, we need to see enhanced leadership and accountability at national, regional and local levels. As this report explains, public toilet provision currently exists in a policy vacuum, with no statutory obligation to deliver at any level of government. In London, although there are detailed provisions within the London Plan to deliver public toilets in new developments, there is no mention of public toilets in the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy. As the Committee heard repeatedly across its investigation, the provision of public toilets is a health and equality issue. Implementing the recommendations in this report would help to make London a healthier and more equal city.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

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.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor and London Councils should provide an opportunity for local authorities to share best practice on their community toilet schemes, including how to run them successfully and how to ensure that information and directions about such schemes are clear, consistent and accessible.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should engage with large businesses and retail chains on the high street, to encourage them to open their toilets to the public and advertise that they are doing so.

Recommendation 4

To make current public toilets more financially viable, and to stimulate provision of new public toilets, the Mayor should convene local authorities and prospective commercial partners to explore innovative practice with regards to advertising and broader commercial opportunities in public toilets.

Recommendation 5

TfL should share, in a public forum, the results of their current review of toilet provision across the network and any actions that will be taken as a result of the findings.

Recommendation 6

TfL should create an action plan for how they will enable the wider public, not just paying passengers, to access toilets situated behind the barrier in stations.

Recommendation 7

The Mayor, local authorities and TfL should all improve the quantity and quality of information on how to find the types of publicly accessible toilets that Londoners require, with the information provided in a range of formats that suit the diverse needs of Londoners.

Recommendation 8

TfL should add an easy-to-find toilet map on their TfL Go app, ensure it is available in accessible formats and contains accurate data on facilities and opening times.

Recommendation 9

TfL should meet with disability charities including Crohn's and Colitis UK, and Changing Places, to review their provision for people with disabilities and people with long-term health conditions and join the "not every disability is visible" campaign.

Recommendation 10

Each local authority should produce a toilet strategy based on population need and current provision.

Recommendation 11

Using the principles of the Health Inequalities Strategy, the Mayor should review the health inequalities implications of current public toilet provision in London, and use that analysis to help drive improvements in provision with partner organisations.

Recommendation 12

The Mayor and London Councils should work with local authorities to review the quality of accessible toilets to ensure they are genuinely accessible for Londoners with all disabilities.

The challenge

‘Spending a penny’ should be simple; yet our investigation has found that for many Londoners and visitors to the city, trying to find a public toilet is far from an easy feat.

Public toilets matter, and they matter for different reasons to different sections of society. From older people being reluctant to travel too far from home for fear of being ‘caught short’, and parents with young children struggling to find changing facilities, to disabled people and their carers unable to find an accessible toilet, and tourists who may not even know how to find the nearest toilet. As this report will show, there is a real concern about both the quantity and quality of public toilet provision in London.

Reports from the London Assembly’s Health and Public Services Committee on public toilets in 2006,¹ updated in 2011,² estimated the decline in local authority-maintained public toilets in London to have fallen from 486 in 2000 to 419 in 2004, and to just 393 by 2011 (see Figure 1 below).

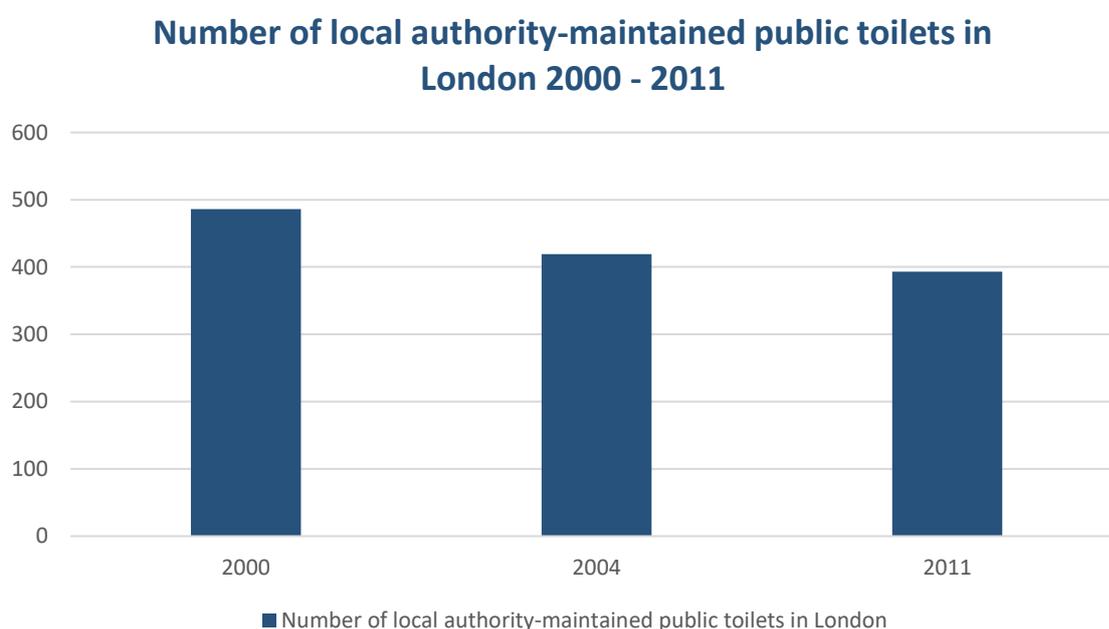


Figure 1: Decline in public toilet provision in London 2000 – 2011

¹ Health and Public Services Committee, London Assembly, [An urgent need: the state of London’s public toilets](#), March 2006

² Health and Public Services Committee, London Assembly, [Public toilets in London: update report](#), July 2011

Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide an updated figure, as there is no centralised data on overall toilet provision across London. This absence of new data makes it difficult to know the extent of the problem and where in particular there are gaps in provision across certain boroughs.

However, as several reports have highlighted, there is a consistent downward trend in the provision of public toilets by local authorities³ and London appears to be no exception. In 2016, based on Freedom of Information requests to local authorities, the BBC reported that at least 1,782 facilities had closed across the UK in the last decade.⁴

The principal reasons behind this are cost and the fact that there is no statutory duty for local authorities to provide public toilets. The state of our public toilets needs to be an issue of public and political interest, and yet seems to sit in a policy vacuum with no statutory instruments to enforce increased provision. As the King's Fund, an independent charitable organisation working to improve health and care in England, notes: *"This issue is not yet getting the attention it deserves."*⁵

Furthermore, the toilets that are available to the public can be difficult to find. There is no official centralised source that covers the diversity of toilet provision in London, and information is incomplete and patchy. Awareness of where toilets are, when they are open and the facilities offered – such as disabled access or baby-changing facilities – is necessary if those that rely on public toilets are going to be able to take advantage of their provision.

There is also the issue that toilets need to be fit for purpose – to be clean, to feel safe, and to be accessible for all disabled people. At present, as our survey results of 3,504 Londoners suggest, there are far too many toilets in London that fail to meet these requirements.

³ The Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilet](#), 23 May 2019

⁴ BBC News, [Public toilets wiped out in parts of UK](#), 31 May 2016

⁵ The King's Fund, [A lav affair: do we care enough about public toilets?](#), 26 April 2019

"Due to the lack of public toilets, I don't go out as much..."

"I can never find one..."

"There is only ever one disabled toilet, used by everyone and they are filthy..."

"Uninviting, unclean, rarely found!"

"I find most public toilets are not kept clean and are a horrible experience to use..."

Figure 2: Direct feedback from survey respondents

Why are public toilets so important?

Providing accessible and clean toilets is not a nicety but a necessity. A decline in the provision of public toilets can have significant consequences for the overall wellbeing and health of Londoners – and, more broadly, the cleanliness, safety, security and prosperity of our streets, green spaces and parks. Research has shown that public toilets are vital components in creating sustainable, accessible, inclusive cities.⁶ Tourists and visitors also rank the availability of toilets high in their lists of reasons a location is worth visiting.⁷

Toilets are important for our health and wellbeing, and a lack of accessible toilet provision can compound discrimination and inequality for many different groups for different reasons – as Figure 3, below illustrates.

⁶ C Greed, [The role of the public toilet: Pathogen transmitter or health facilitator?](#), 1 May 2006

⁷ House of Commons, Communities and Local Government, [The provision of public toilets: Twelfth Report of Session 2007-08](#), 22 October 2008

<p>For the 1.1m people aged over 65 in London</p> <p>More likely to have continence issues</p> <p>More likely to have mobility issues</p> <p>May already be socially isolated or lonely</p> <p><i>Source: AGE UK London</i></p>	<p>For the 1.2m disabled people in London</p> <p>Greater need for an accessible toilet</p> <p>May have greater risk of developing urinary tract infections (UTIs)</p> <p>May need the toilet for wider health care needs</p> <p>May require a RADAR key</p> <p><i>Source: Papworth Trust</i></p>
<p>For people with babies and small children</p> <p>Greater need for an accessible toilet as may have a pushchair</p> <p>Need to use toilets frequently and in a rush</p> <p>May need baby-changing facilities</p>	<p>For the 500,000 people with Crohn’s and colitis in the UK</p> <p>Unpredictable and urgent need to go to toilet</p> <p>20 per cent of people with Crohn’s and colitis have a stoma which will need emptying in a clean environment.</p> <p><i>Source: Crohn’s and Colitis UK</i></p>

Figure 3: Toilets are essential for different groups for different reasons

At an individual level, there are physical and mental health consequences when adequate public toilet facilities are not available. People report dealing with a lack of access to toilets by restricting fluid intake and ‘holding on’, leading to risk of dehydration, UTIs and potential kidney damage.⁸ Karen Hoe OBE, National Development Manager, Changing Places,⁹ informed the Committee:

“A lot of our Changing Places users have to then purposefully dehydrate themselves, so they do not need a toilet while they are out. That then has an impact on health conditions and bladder infections. Some of our users have had to even result to surgery to have their bladders removed. It is a constant challenge not being able to find a toilet when they are out which can result in being completely isolated, restricted and not leaving the house.”

⁸ The King’s Fund, [A lav affair: do we care enough about public toilets?](#), 26 April 2019

⁹ The [Changing Places](#) campaign wants toilets installed in all public venues, so that everyone, regardless of their access needs, disability, or reliance on the assistance of carers or specialist equipment, can use a toilet facility with dignity and hygienically.

“Due to the scarcity of toilets, I plan my trips away from home, knowing how long I can stay out without needing to go to the toilet; this includes avoiding drinking a couple of hours before going out.”

Health Committee survey respondent

A lack of adequate public toilets can also affect public health interventions that encourage people to go out and about locally, for example, to increase physical activity and reduce obesity. A fear of going out may also increase feelings of social isolation. There are also broader public health implications in terms of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation. The health impact of public toilet closures, as recently witnessed during the closure of some public toilets during the pandemic, can lead to problems of street urination and defecation.

Principle 1: Duty

All levels of government should have a duty to provide public toilets. The government has a duty to make the provision of public toilets compulsory and to provide ringfenced funding for local authorities to achieve this purpose. Regional and local government should also use the tools at their disposal to improve provision.

Recommendation 1

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Recommendation 2

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Recommendation 6

TfL should create an action plan for how they will enable the wider public, not just paying passengers, to access toilets situated behind the barrier in stations.

The evidence

It is clear from the Health Committee's investigation and previous research that there is currently inadequate provision of publicly accessible toilets in London. As Raymond Martin, Managing Director of the British Toilet Association, explained in the Health Committee meeting on the subject:

"We certainly do not have enough toilets to attract visitors and bring tourists or to look after the population in London for 9.5m people... There just are not enough toilets."

Our own survey results corroborate this overall decline in provision across London, with over 90 per cent of respondents stating it was difficult to find a public toilet. Provision was deemed particularly inadequate on public transport routes, in parks and on high streets.

Overall results show that 91.3 per cent of respondents do not feel toilet provision is adequate to meet their needs in London.

(3,074 respondents, figure calculated by removing 'neutral' responses), London Assembly Health Committee survey of Londoners, Sept-Oct 2021

94 per cent of respondents said that they found it quite difficult or very difficult trying to find a public toilet in London in an area they are not familiar with.

(3,403 respondents), London Assembly Health Committee survey of Londoners, Sept-Oct 2021

"There used to be quite a lot of toilets years ago and the council shut them down. I think that was wrong. Having available toilets may or will cut down people having to use a wall or go somewhere undignified."

Health Committee survey respondent

The Committee heard that in an era of reduced central government funding for local authorities, and ensuing efficiency savings, local authorities were increasingly looking to reduce costs across all areas, and public toilets were often the first services to be cut. The 2006 Committee report on public toilets concluded that for many local authorities it appeared to be more financially viable to simply close down toilets, rather than make the necessary investment to bring them into line with disability and health and safety regulations.¹⁰

The introduction of legislation to improve disabled access through the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (now replaced by the Equality Act 2010) has had the unfortunate consequence, in some cases, of several public conveniences being replaced by just one disabled-access toilet.¹¹ On top of this, many of the required accessible toilets are not fit for purpose, do not cater for all disabilities or are inconveniently located. There is also a cost associated with ensuring that facilities in locations such as parks can be maintained securely in the face of vandalism and various other forms of anti-social behaviour. In particular, this relates to the costs of staffing and maintaining toilets. In more recent years the increasing pressure on local authority budgets has also led to the privatisation or closure of many public toilets.¹²

The principal reasons behind this consistent downward trend are cost and the fact that there is no statutory duty for local authorities to provide public toilets. The Public Health Act 1936 gives local authorities a power to provide public toilets, but imposes no duty to do so.¹³ With no legal requirement in place to mandate local authorities to provide or run public toilets, the British Toilet Association believes the majority of local authorities across the UK do not allocate sufficient resources or actually have the funds to provide public toilets. Wales is the only part of the UK with a Public Health Act requiring local authorities to publish a local toilets strategy for their area.¹⁴

Furthermore, specific data on the loss or gain of public toilets is also not monitored in planning applications. Removal of a toilet does not require planning permission unless the toilets have been secured through planning permission, or where it involves the demolition of a building or structure.¹⁵

In a recent report, the Royal Society for Public Health stressed that public toilets should be considered as essential as streetlights, roads and waste collection, and equally well enforced by legislation and regulations.¹⁶ The first recommendation in the report calls on the government to make the provision of public toilets compulsory on a well-planned and regulated basis. The report states: *"The time is right to deal with the astonishing lack of legal action on public toilets provision, as a matter of urgency – and for all those for whom urgency of need has not been addressed. This could be done through minor amendments to existing legislation, for example the most recent Public Health Act (1936)".*

¹⁰ Health and Public Services Committee, London Assembly, [An urgent need: the state of London's public toilets](#), March 2006

¹¹ The Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilet](#), 23 May 2019

¹² The Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilet](#), 23 May 2019

¹³ House of Commons, Communities and Local Government, [The provision of public toilets: Twelfth Report of Session 2007-08](#), 22 October 2008

¹⁴ The Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilet](#), 23 May 2019

¹⁵ London Mayor, Questions to the Mayor, [How many public toilets have been lost in London in the last 10 and 20 years?](#), 18 March 2021

¹⁶ The Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilet](#), 23 May 2019

The same report also references London and observes that: *“where cities such as London have included public toilets in their plans, it may be possible to offer help and publicity to ensure that these are followed through without further delays”*. The Mayor's London Plan contains detailed policy guidance on the provision of new, free, publicly accessible toilets.¹⁷ The London Plan – the capital's overall planning strategy – states that more public toilets must be built in shops, leisure facilities and large public areas; and that they should be suitable for all users, including disabled people and families with young children, and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Committee also heard evidence that, in light of the closure of so many public toilets, local authorities were looking to diversify the provision of toilets, particularly through community toilet schemes. Community toilet schemes are toilets in local businesses and other public buildings. They are made available for public use, and local businesses are paid by the local authority to allow non-customers to use their toilets during opening hours. The payment to businesses covers the cost of cleaning, maintenance and staff time. Businesses display window signs to inform the public that their toilets are available for use. The schemes offer the opportunity to increase public toilet coverage at a much lower cost than providing the same number of traditional, local authority-maintained public toilets.

Councillor Julia Neden-Watts, Chair of the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sport Committee at the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, highlighted the success of the community toilet scheme in Richmond to the Committee. She explained that before the pandemic, they had approximately 70 premises involved, including businesses and community organisations, and described it as a “cooperative partnership”. She also stressed that community toilet schemes are generally more suited to small to medium-sized enterprises and other community organisations, and that for larger businesses a different approach was required.

However, the Committee heard that community toilet schemes, or improving access to toilets in larger businesses, should not be seen as the main solution to the overall challenge of provision. The implementation of community toilet schemes is not consistent between local authorities and the schemes therefore do not provide the coverage or reliability that local authority-maintained toilets can. For example, access to community toilet schemes depends on the opening hours of participating organisations; this may particularly limit the availability of toilets late at night. Furthermore, community toilet schemes may not have the same levels of disabled access as local authority-maintained toilets, and locations may not be appropriate or suitable for certain groups.

Our survey results also showed that many Londoners do not feel comfortable using toilets in cafes, restaurants or pubs without buying something. These results do not pertain to community toilet schemes but more generally, highlighting the need for accessible toilets in public places.

¹⁷ Mayor of London, press release, [Mayor plans for more public toilets to be built across London](#), 28 November 2017

69 per cent of respondents said that they do not feel comfortable using toilets in cafes, restaurants or pubs without buying something.

(3,122 respondents), London Assembly Health Committee survey of Londoners, Sept-Oct 2021

Raymond Martin, Managing Director of the British Toilet Association, suggested to the Health Committee meeting that greater plurality of provision was required, within the context of increasing supply in the short, medium and long term. He observed that a lack of money and a lack of ownership for the provision of toilets were key barriers, and more innovative financing models needed to be explored. He said:

"Somewhere we have to find funding. Whether it comes directly from the government or it comes through sponsorships, or whether it comes through the likes of these community toilet schemes."

Mr Martin urged the Committee to consider a wide range of solutions. He said there needed to be further investigation to explore the benefits of indirect and direct advertising in toilets to make them at the very least cost-neutral; and consideration on how toilets could help redevelop high streets and form a wider package of support in terms of improving sanitation and hygiene considering COVID-19.

Mark Evers, Chief Customer Officer, TfL, reassured the Committee that he understood the importance of accessible public toilet facilities across the TfL network, and that they were currently reviewing toilet provision. He also noted that part of the challenge was that the geographic distribution of toilets is more skewed towards the outer parts of London where there are older stations, and there are fewer within central London. There was also discussion on how to allow free access to toilets in TfL stations to the wider public. In some stations, toilets are situated before the barrier (the 'gate line') and so are accessible to the public; but at others the toilets are situated beyond the barrier and therefore only accessible to paying customers, unless a TfL employee uses their discretion to allow a member of the public through without paying. Easing access to non-paying members of the public would help improve TfL's public toilet provision offer.

Principle 2: Directions

All Londoners and visitors have the right to be able to find a toilet that suits their needs in a way that is accessible to them.

Recommendation 7

The Mayor, local authorities and TfL should all improve the quantity and quality of information on how to find the types of publicly accessible toilets that Londoners require, with the information provided in a range of formats that suit the diverse needs of Londoners.

Recommendation 8

TfL should add an easy-to-find toilet map on their TfL Go app, ensure it is available in accessible formats and contains accurate data on facilities and opening times.

Recommendation 9

TfL should meet with disability charities including Crohn's and Colitis UK, and Changing Places, to review their provision for people with disabilities and people with long-term health conditions and join the "not every disability is visible" campaign.

The evidence

The Committee heard evidence of the inadequacy of information and signposting regarding publicly accessible toilets in London. It was suggested that information was patchy, incomplete and difficult to find. Several expert witnesses at the meeting mentioned that the quality of information needed to be improved, noting significant variations in the information provided between London boroughs. It was noted that some boroughs provided detailed, user-friendly information about public toilets in their areas, including both borough-maintained toilets and community toilet schemes, whereas others provided no information at all.

Our survey results revealed Londoners wanted clearer information and signposting, with more websites and maps as the most popular suggestions for action from respondents. The importance of clean and safe toilets that were open beyond working hours was also stressed by many survey respondents.

64 per cent of Londoners said that they would like to see a website with all toilets listed.

62 per cent of Londoners said that they would like to see more maps at key location points.

The preferred type of signage or information to find a publicly accessible toilet differed by age groups. Respondents aged 60 or over favoured location maps over a website or app, while younger age groups preferred a website.

(3,504 respondents), London Assembly Health Committee survey of Londoners, Sept-Oct 2021

"I would just like to know how to find out where toilets are situated"

Health Committee survey respondent

The lack of integration between the various sources of information was also highlighted in the context of TfL. Currently, members of the public need to look at each individual station to see if a toilet is available and accessible. However, Mark Evers, Chief Customer Officer, TfL, informed the Committee that while the TfL Go app is primarily a journey planner and status update tool, he recognised that for many people a toilet is an important part of the journey planning. He said TfL would hope to 'layer' more information onto the app in the future.

Equality of access was also raised as an important factor when considering the provision of toilets across London. As referenced earlier, certain groups can be disproportionately affected by a decline in public toilet provision and this situation is compounded when the few toilets that are accessible to your needs are far away and/or you cannot find a toilet. While the National Key Scheme, otherwise known as the RADAR key scheme, offers disabled people independent access to locked public toilets around the country – including in shopping centres, pubs, cafés, department stores, and bus and train stations – it does not solve the problem of the lack of accessible toilets overall.

As Karen Hoe OBE, National Development Manager, Changing Places, explained in the Health Committee meeting, for their quarter of a million members who need access to Changing Places toilets, which have the specific equipment these members need, access is essential:

"Sometimes people have to travel, sometimes miles and hours, to access a facility that when they get there hopefully is open, not vandalised and is fit for purpose... We do look at encouraging how their accessibility is promoted, their trading hours, their openings hours and also the access route. It is not just the opening hours but how they can access the venues in terms of not having to go through turnstiles, gates and ticket desks in order to access them."

Access was also raised as key concern by Ruth Wakeman, Director of Services, Policy and Evidence, Crohn's and Colitis UK:

"You cannot tell by looking at someone that they have Crohn's and colitis and often they might look very young, fit and healthy. About half the people with Crohn's and colitis have been challenged or have had negative comments from really well-meaning members of the public who have challenged them about using accessible toilets. Obviously, that has a real impact on people's confidence and people feeling that they can use accessible toilets."

Crohn's and Colitis UK is campaigning to have a signage scheme called 'Not Every Disability is Visible'. Based on a survey of their members, over 80 per cent of people with Crohn's and colitis would feel more confident about using an accessible toilet if it has the appropriate signage.

Our survey results revealed that finding a suitable toilet was even harder if you had a disability or a long-term health condition.

A slightly greater than average proportion of respondents who said they had a disability found it difficult to find a toilet in an unfamiliar place.

A slightly greater than average proportion of respondents who said they had a long-term health condition found it difficult to find a toilet in an unfamiliar place.

Equality of access is a similarly important for transgender people. Stonewall notes:¹⁸ *"Having facilities that everyone can use – like gender-neutral single stall toilets and changing rooms with private space – makes life easier for lots of people. Many businesses and institutions have been*

¹⁸ Stonewall, [The Truth about trans](#), accessed 2 November 2021

taking this approach for a long time now as it benefits families, people with disabilities and many LGBTQ+ people."

Although constituting a small number of respondents to our survey, all trans respondents (both trans women and trans men) found it difficult to find a public toilet in an unfamiliar area. One respondent told us *"as a trans man, going into men's public bathrooms can be quite intimidating and even dangerous in some circumstances so it usually leads to me not going at all, which ends up causing pain and discomfort"*. Another said, *"I very rarely see gender-neutral toilets that are easy to access. They're usually either an accessible toilet with a sticker on the door or are only in one part of a building. I cannot use gendered toilets because of the fear and risk. The rates of UTIs in the trans community is extremely high for this reason. The standard should be gender-neutral"*.

Principle 3: Data

Londoners need toilet policymaking to be based on current data, so that population needs can be met and improvements can be measured.

Recommendation 10

Each local authority should produce a toilet strategy based on population need and current provision.

Recommendation 11

Using the principles of the Health Inequalities Strategy, the Mayor should review the health inequalities implications of current public toilet provision in London, and use that analysis to help drive improvements in provision with partner organisations.

Recommendation 12

The Mayor and London Councils should work with local authorities to review the quality of accessible toilets to ensure they are genuinely accessible for Londoners with all disabilities.

The evidence

A key challenge in terms of both planning toilets and understanding the requirements for more toilet provision is the lack of data available. As the ecosystem for publicly accessible toilets has diversified with a range of providers – not just local authorities but also, for example, businesses – it has become increasingly hard to map the number of publicly accessible toilets in London.

A key finding from the 2011 report from the Health and Public Services Committee was the inadequacy of information about public toilets in London. The report called for Londoners and visitors to be able to access a list or map showing all of the publicly accessible toilets in a particular locality. A key recommendation was for the GLA Group, boroughs and other toilet providers in London to adopt a standard open-data format developed by the Committee.¹⁹

However, despite these recommendations and efforts, there is still no centralised and up-to-date information source that adequately captures the diversity of provision, location and accessibility details. While there are a number of private and voluntary initiatives to create web-based resources showing public toilet locations, such as the Great British Public Toilet Map,²⁰

¹⁹ Health and Public Services Committee, London Assembly, [Public toilets in London: update report](#), July 2011

²⁰ Public Convenience, [The Great British Public Toilet Map](#)

their effectiveness still depends on the quantity and quality of data provided, and the ability of Londoners to have the access and know-how to use these resources.²¹

The Health Committee meeting heard from several key witnesses on the importance of collecting current data on provision. Raymond Martin, Managing Director, British Toilet Association, stressed the need for improved data at the national and regional levels:

"I think London probably needs its own mapping system. I will agree it needs a London-centric map that shows where those accessible toilet facilities are, and all that data collection probably needs to flow through".

The Committee also heard that collecting data was essential in terms of not just being able to provide current and easy to access information to Londoners, but more broadly being able to meet and plan for unmet need. As Councillor Julia Neden-Watts, Chair of the Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sport Committee at the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, explained:

"It is almost like we need an audit, an inventory and a consultation and a conversation about it so that we know what we are comparing with what, where the obvious shortfall is and what is working quite well. Almost a mix-and-match approach or a tailored approach for different authorities might be required. An urban environment might be a bit different from where you have got lots of parkland or suburban houses where people are mostly using their own toilet. It is complicated."

Councillor Julia Neden-Watts suggested that local authorities need to understand how frequently toilets are in use and where, therefore, there may be gaps. She stressed this was a particular concern with the ongoing roll-out of the community toilet scheme in Richmond:

"We need to know the data. We need to know the footfall and how much does it increase a businesses' footfall through the door... Perhaps a useful way to tackle it is in partnership with either the business improvement district in the town centres or local traders' association in your neighbourhood centres. You do not want just one poor brave business saying, 'Yes, we will do it', and having the whole neighbourhood coming in to use the toilet. You want to make sure that there is a well-distributed provision."

The Committee also heard that it was essential to map the needs of all Londoners, to ensure that there was adequate provision for people who may frequently need the toilet and may have specific accessibility needs. Karen Hoe OBE, National Development Manager, Changing Places, told the Committee of the Campaign's work to make sure they understood the needs of their members and critically where the gaps in toilet provision were so they could work to fill in the gaps with relevant providers:

²¹ Health and Public Services Committee, London Assembly, [Public toilets in London: update report](#), July 2011

“About a year ago we launched a public survey, one of the largest surveys within the disabled community, to consult with where Changing Places needed to be seen. We have lots of statistical data on both geographical locations and venue types. If the public want to see them in day out venues, public parks and visitor attractions, we will work closely with organisations such as National Trust, Merlin Entertainment, all the people that currently do host Changing Places and we can connect them and work collaboratively to say, ‘Look, they have done this. Here is a case study. Here is a testimonial.’”

About the investigation

This investigation was carried out by the London Assembly Health Committee. The terms of reference were as follows:

- to consider the current barriers and challenges around access to and information on the provision of public toilets, with reference to groups who may have particular access needs, including older people, people with children, delivery and transport workers, trans people, disabled people, people with medical conditions, people who are homeless, and tourists
- to consider how to improve access and information provision across London
- to explore the diversity of current toilet provision in London, and consider how to improve and increase provision of different types of toilets in the short, medium and long term
- to consider and evaluate the impact of Mayoral action on public toilets, with reference to progress to date in light of previous Health Committee investigations on this subject matter in 2006 and 2010; and to establish how the Mayor will deliver on his manifesto commitments relating to public toilets.

This report was informed by desk research, and information from a range of experts and a survey of 3,504 Londoners who submitted their views of the provision and quality of toilets in London.

The Committee engaged with a range of experts as part of the Committee meeting on this subject. We would like to thank the following contributors:

- Karen Hoe, Changing Places Manager
- Ruth Wakeman, Director of Services, Policy and Evidence, Crohn's and Colitis UK
- Raymond Martin, Managing Director, British Toilet Association
- Mark Evers, Chief Customer Officer, Transport for London (TfL)
- Councillor Julia Neden-Watts, Richmond Council

Comments on the findings and recommendations of this report are welcomed. Any comments will be considered as part of the review and evaluation of this investigation.

Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email assembly.translations@london.gov.uk

Chinese

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Vietnamese

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Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

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اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا منکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Arabic

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