

Winchester City Council Public toilet improvement strategy 2023-28

Introduction

Public toilet provision is important to the council. The availability and accessibility of good quality public toilet facilities allows the area to be enjoyed by more people and for longer periods of time. For those in the population that have specific health needs, public toilets are a vital facility that are required if they are to be able to participate in daily activities that others take for granted. This often requires the provision of specialist facilities that are appropriate for complex health needs. We want all residents to live healthy and fulfilled lives, to feel safe and secure in their neighbourhood, and enjoy the recreational and cultural opportunities that the district offers.

Our Vision

Residents and visitors to the Winchester District have access to toilets in key locations which are comfortable, clean, safe, well maintained and cater to the whole community.

Strategy objectives

Availability

Provide toilets available to the public, directly and through partnership, to residents and visitors in key locations across the district

Sustainability

Ensure public toilets are delivered in an environmentally responsible manner

Inclusivity

Public toilets will meet the needs of all our residents, with a range of toilets available to meet the needs of families, those with restricted mobility and disability and others with protected characteristics

Safety

People feel safe and comfortable accessing local toilet provision which is free of anti-social behaviour.

Cost-effectiveness

Ensure the proper management of public toilets is affordable, at a time when local authority budgets are under extreme pressure

Cleanliness

Toilets are regularly cleaned and maintained, in line with levels of use and meeting community expectations.

Background

In 2022 the Council commissioned the British toilet Association to undertake an independent review of the current stand-alone toilet provision covering their condition, quality of maintenance and the cleaning regime and suggesting potential areas of improvement. The City Council Asset Management Team has also carried out a full condition survey of all the Council's toilets.

Both these pieces of work confirmed the need for considerable works to be done to bring our toilets up to standard and highlighted opportunities to make our provision better.

User number surveys took place August to September 2023 for the Council run public conveniences across the district. These surveys will help us to understand how often our toilets are used, and when. A deeper understanding of this usage will allow us to consider economical options going forward. This information will also allow us to consider if some toilets are not well used and if the money used to provide these facilities could be better used elsewhere. The town and parish councils may also be better placed to provide and maintain such facilities through economies of scale with other local contracts which they may have in place already.

Moving forward

There is an identified need to increase provision of toilets in Winchester Town, cater better for the needs of users with accessibility needs, reduce levels of antisocial behaviour and damage and improve the maintenance and cleanliness of public toilets across the district. However, the Council, in common with other local authorities across the Country is facing severe financial challenges and needs to consider approaches other than direct provision and work with others to find financially sustainable solutions to public needs.

Availability

The Council is committed to retaining toilets in key locations and seeking additional provision where sufficient demand exists but needs to look at reducing costs through rationalising provision, working in partnership with others and looking at cost recovery where appropriate.

Stand alone toilets

The City Council currently has 11 traditional stand-alone public toilets with street access open in the district, 4 in Winchester Town, 3 on the edge of town or park and ride car parks and 4 in the market towns across the district.

A new temporary toilet facility has been provided at North Walls Park in Winchester to replace the facilities which were accessible in the former River Park Leisure Centre. Opportunities will be sought to re-provide these as part of any future plans for this area.

The British Toilet Association report highlighted that there was insufficient capacity in central Winchester particularly at times of high demand over the summer and at Christmas.

A threat to provision of public toilets in the centre of Winchester is that the Market Lane toilets are not in the City Council's ownership and the lease has relatively few years to run. The Council is seeking to renew the lease, but if it cannot be renewed alternative provision in the area will be needed.

Some additional toilet provision could be provided in the city centre by reopening toilets in Middle Brook Street. These were closed due to high levels of anti-social behaviour and damage, which also

allowed for the available budget to be used for enhanced cleaning in Market Lane and Abbey Gardens toilets.

Public facilities

These may be available to the public where circumstances and opening hours allow, examples in the Winchester District include the Winchester Sport and Leisure Park and the Hampshire Cultural Trust run Discovery Centre. Opportunities will be sought to increase availability where possible.

Partnership/Community provision

Parish and Town Councils in the district already make contributions to the maintenance/ cleaning of City Council owned public toilets. Enhanced / community / local management of these facilities in partnership with the City Council will continue to be explored. Swanmore Parish Council operates its own public toilet block in conjunction with local leisure facilities.

We will encourage private sector toilet providers to promote their toilets for wider use and highlight these accordingly, especially in locations where it may not be viable to have a standalone facility. We will also consider the introduction of community toilet schemes, where local shops and cafes make toilets available to the public if that is appropriate.

Commercial/Retail sector

Most toilet facilities provided by commercial and retail businesses are intended solely for use by customers however larger shops understand that people come in to use the toilets and recognise that this may lead to people buying goods whilst inside. Our local shopping centres, The Brooks in Winchester and Whiteley Shopping Centre make provision for toilet facilities for all visitors. The Council does not have direct control over these facilities and as such they can be subject to change if shops relocate or close. The closure of large department stores in the city centre in recent years has impacted on this provision. The council will continue to work with in partnership with such providers to increase provision where possible.

Signage

Public toilets should be clearly signposted, with distances added where appropriate and practical. This will also entail working with providers such as shops and shopping centres, in partnership, to ensure that provision is complementary to that provided by the council.

Evening and late night provision

While having toilets open later provides a better level of service to customers it creates additional issues with antisocial behaviour and cleanliness. Consideration will still be given as to whether some toilets may be kept open late particularly for user groups such as taxi drivers and how that can be managed.

Sustainability

New facilities should seek to minimise use of resources both in use and construction and opportunities taken during refurbishments to reduce both water and energy use of existing facilities as appropriate to the size and location of the facility.

Inclusivity

When making decisions on toilet provision, our public sector equality duty and the needs of all those with protected characteristics will always be considered.

Disabled toilets and Changing Places

Currently all the Council's toilets have accessible facilities.

Changing Places toilets provides sanitary accommodation for people with multiple and complex disabilities who have one or two assistants with them. They need to be in situations where assistance is available in case of any problems.

Changing Places facilities are available at the Winchester Arc, Winchester Sport and Leisure Park, Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium, Whitely shopping centre and Tesco Extra at Winnall.

Currently there is no provision in the busiest part of the centre of Winchester and the Council will seek to fill this gap directly or in partnership with others

It is important that changing places provision does not replace traditional disabled toilets. Changing places provide for users accompanied by carers not for independent use and are very different.

Families

Baby change facilities should be provided in all male and female toilets and where possible, separate family rooms should be available.

Sanitary bins

Sanitary bins will be provided in all toilets.

Safety

It is important our toilets not only are safe but feel safe. Anti-social behaviour in our toilets makes the public uncomfortable using them and increases costs in maintenance and cleaning.

The Council provides a CCTV service which is monitored 24 hours a day. This should cover the entrances to toilets wherever possible.

Access to toilets may be provided through key cards, fobs or codes issued to individuals, for example to give access to toilets to taxi-drivers at night.

Refurbishments will use design deterrents as appropriate. If following refurbishment and/or introducing enhanced cleaning regimes anti-social behaviour continues to be a problem, subject to consultation, further measures may need to be taken.

Cost effectiveness

Improvements to our public toilets will have to be made in the light of the pressure on City council finances.

The provision of new and improved facilities will need to be dependent on a strong strategic case, evidence of need/use and available funding. Funding will be sought from outside sources and partnership working where possible and revenue savings reinvested where applicable.

Cleanliness

The council will strive to enhance levels and the quality of cleaning of all its public conveniences within the constraints of available budgets.

Toilets will be cleaned to a consistent schedule according to levels of usage and deep cleans undertaken at appropriate intervals.

Regular inspection of toilets will take place to ensure cleanliness and the prompt rectification of any repair needs or equipment malfunctions.

Refurbishments will be undertaken in a way which makes our toilets easier and quicker to clean effectively