

Briefing: Public Toilets

The Campaign for Public Infrastructure (CFPI) advocates for investment in the civic facilities needed for healthy, thriving communities.



Problem:

We are losing our public toilets.

A lack of political will, shrinking local authority budgets, and limited incentives have resulted in environments that prevent people from leaving their homes, restricting access to work, leisure, and social interactions.

- Local Authority expenditure on public toilets **has halved since 2010** (–£64m).
- Business Rates show **a quarter of toilets closing** in that time, down from 5,100 to 3,900.
- **Three quarters (74%)** feel there are not enough public toilets in their area.
- One in five (20%) **leave home less often** as a result.

Solutions:

The UK has a profound opportunity to invest in public space to ensure accessibility, inclusion, and promote activity. The CFPI believes that the UK Government should:

- **Embed public toilet investment within infrastructure funding bids by defining processes for valuation within the Treasury Green Book.**

Limited Local Authority resources have increased dependence on ring-fenced grants. Councils can receive up to 250 grants. Up to a third are competitively allocated.

Infrastructure grant bids, including the Levelling Up and Towns Fund, are appraised by the Treasury Green Book. In 2020, the Green Book was revised, requiring proposals to consider place-based impacts. The Levelling Up White Paper claimed:

“By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK.”

(Levelling Up White Paper, 2022)

- **Provide consistent maintenance resourcing and accountability for public toilets through the Public Health Outcomes Framework and Ringfenced Grant.**

Local Authority Public Health Directors are measured by Public Health Outcomes, defined by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). The majority of funding comes from the Public Health Grant, which totals £3.4bn for 2023/24.

Public Health Outcomes and Grant Functions include physical activity, obesity reduction measures, and social inclusion. Public toilets and Community Toilet Schemes are absent.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities was launched in 2021 as:

“a distinct shift in focus at the heart of government in addressing the unacceptable health disparities that exist across the country to help people live longer, healthier lives and reduce the pressure on the health and care system.”

(Department for Health and Social Care, 2021)

- **Create a new model of public toilet accessibility financing by building on the success of the Changing Places Fund.**

Changing Places toilets in England are larger accessible toilets with equipment for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets. 1,800 Changing Places toilets are registered in the UK. Visit changing-places.org for more.

The 2020 Budget mandated Changing Places toilets in new public buildings and launched a £30m Changing Places Fund for local authorities that concluded in 2023, stating:

“Where people shop, go out, or travel should not be determined by their disability. That’s why the provision of Changing Places toilets is so important.”

(Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021)

Opportunity:

By empowering local authorities to resource public toilets and establishing robust accountability, the CFPI asserts that widespread concerns of vulnerable communities regarding the accessibility and appeal of public spaces can be addressed.

For more information and to discuss parliamentary activity, please contact Francis Thomas, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, via FThomas@cfpi.org.uk

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