Swansea Public Toilet Strategy

(in accordance with Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017)

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1   Introduction

1.1   Public toilet provision is an important piece of infrastructure within any geographical area. 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. This applies to urban / city centre areas and to coastal / countryside / tourist areas.

1.2   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.

1.3   There has never been a statutory duty requiring local authorities to provide public toilets and so their provision has always been subject to a range of competing pressures including public demand, political priorities and budgetary realities.

1.4   However, it is generally accepted that all councils have a significant role in the provision of public toilets to support local communities, particularly those with greater needs, and promote active participation in life and enjoyment of the public realm.

2   Background - Legislation

2.1   The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 received Royal Assent on the 3 July 2017. Part 8 of the Act placed a duty on each Local Authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area.

2.2   The duty to prepare a strategy does not in itself require LAs to provide and maintain public toilets themselves, but they are required to take a strategic view across their area on how these facilities can be provided and accessed by their local population. In doing so it is envisaged that LAs will consider a full range of options for making facilities available to the public.

2.3   The Act provides that a strategy must include an assessment of the community's need for toilets, including changing facilities for babies and changing places facilities for disabled people. The strategy must also provide details of how the Local Authority proposes to meet the identified need.

2.4   The Act is underpinned by guidance from Welsh Government, which Local Authorities are required to have regard to and to read in conjunction with the Act. There is no requirement for the strategies to be presented to the Welsh Government for approval, as the strategies should be subject to Local Authorities' existing scrutiny structures and public scrutiny.

2.5   The guidance provides a timetable for publication and review of the strategy, as well as the publication of regular progress statements. (See Appendix A)

3   Background - Swansea

3.1   Swansea's Public Toilet Strategy has been developed in the context of its Corporate Plan, fitting within the "Economy and Infrastructure" well-being objective: Using our cultural assets to support individuals, businesses and communities; and ensuring Swansea is a place characterised by sustainable communities with sufficient good quality housing and places for work and leisure.

3.2 The original strategy was prepared in 2019, with support from the British Toilet Association, based upon an initial needs assessment that looked at the existing provision and compared it with the needs of the Swansea, its population, visitors and economic development. From this an initial action plan was proposed.

3.3 The draft strategy, including its needs assessment and action plan, were put out to public consultation in 2020 (see Appendix D) and, following a delay linked to COVID, the final strategy was approved by Swansea Council's Cabinet in November 2021, alongside a progress report.

3.4 The strategy and its action plan have been broken down into six areas of work:

- Strategy Development
- Governance
- Communication
- Facilities
- Development
- Funding

3.5 Subsequent reviews of the strategy are carried out in line with the timetable set out in Appendix A.

4 Strategy

4.1 This is the process of writing and reviewing the strategy.

4.2 Whilst the strategy itself sits under the Corporate Plan, its development and implementation are also driven by the council's Strategic Equality plan.

4.3 The equality objective that the strategy is most closely aligned to is:

Health: Seek to promote good physical and mental health and reduce health inequalities through the provision of sport, culture and leisure opportunities and a healthy built and natural environment.

4.4 The underlying principle for carrying out the needs assessment and developing the action plan is to assess and improve upon the equality of access to public toilets, prioritising provision for those who are most disadvantaged.

5 Governance

5.1 A formal structure has been established to oversee the strategy, the development and implementation of its action plan.

5.2 An internal Working Group, drawn from relevant council departments, drives the day-to-day delivery of the strategy's action plan and oversees its review.

5.3 A Stakeholder Group, with representation from key bodies across the public, private and third sectors provide the Working Group with specialist input, information and feedback, on behalf of the bodies they represent.

6   Communication

6.1   There are three strands to the strategy's communications plan:

- Progress updates on the strategy's development and delivery;
- Online information about Swansea's public toilets, the facilities available and where to find them;
- Physical signage identifying where public toilets are and providing directions.

7   Facilities

7.1   It is important that Swansea Council provides public toilets to the highest standard we can, with the resources we have at our disposal. The cleansing, maintenance and management arrangements are key to achieving this.

8   Development

8.1   The context in which the strategy operates is changing all the time, and there will always be pressures that will impact upon the scope of the strategy and its capacity to deliver its action plan

8.2   However, the strategy should be able to respond to these pressures and identify ways that the existing provision can be improved upon and supplemented.

8.3   The needs assessment will provide guidance as to the areas of development that should be prioritised.

9   Funding

9.1   As already highlighted, there is no statutory duty to provide public toilets and no single pot of money to ensure their provision and upkeep; nor is there money readily available to finance new developments.

9.2   The resources of the strategy are drawn from different council services, and therefore subject to the different budgetary pressures that those services face

9.3   It is important that the strategy is cognisant of this. The strategy needs to be able to articulate a clear business case for all areas of work that it oversees and to quickly identify potential new opportunities for funding, should they arise.

10   Priorities

10.1   As stated above, the statutory duty to produce a public toilet strategy does not bring any new money to provide extra toilet facilities. However, for this strategy to be relevant it must maintain a close relationship between its needs assessment and its action plan.

10.2   Priority actions will focus on:

- Protect and make best use of existing budgets;
- Focus on identifying and improving areas where there people are disadvantaged by the lack of toilet provision; and
- Develop proposals to improve the availability and accessibility of Swansea's public toilets

11   Further Information

11.1   The strategy is informed by the following documents:

Appendix A: The Process for Preparing and Reviewing a Public Toilet Strategy

Appendix B: Needs Assessment

Appendix C: Action Plan

Appendix D: Consultation

Appendix E: Swansea Public Toilets

Appendix F: Models of Toilet Provision