



5 September 2024

Petition P-06-1453

Wales Seniors Forum response to the Petitions Committee

Wales Seniors Forum recognises the financial challenges of providing traditional public toilets and acknowledges the strategic approach set out in the response from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. However, the response does not give due consideration to wider public health issues and the effects that a lack of toilet provision has on local economies.

Research has shown that older people and people with certain health conditions are more affected by poor provision, but the effects on and actions of the wider population must also be considered, especially in areas of heavy footfall in the night-time economy. If there are no toilets available, many will resort to public urination, leading to higher cleansing costs and a risk to health.

As noted in the response from the Secretary, a lack of facilities isolates some cohorts. What is not noted is the effect that this might have on the local economy; the individual is affected, but local businesses also lose out on custom and income. Many areas of Wales are reliant on tourism; without sufficient provision of toilets, the outdoor tourist sector will suffer.

Although Wales Seniors Forum recognises the need for local toilet strategies, our research has shown that this requirement needs further consideration and better implementation. As of 1 August 2024:

- 4 local authorities have no strategy information available on their websites and have failed to respond to requests for the documents
- 6 local authorities do not have any strategic review or statement of progress available

The hands-off approach from Welsh Government has resulted in a postcode lottery, with some local authorities following the statutory guidance and the review process closely, and others falling behind or not carrying out the requirements. Two local authorities have made impressive progress through co-production and partnerships, retaining a number of facilities that would otherwise have been closed. Therefore, Wales Seniors Forum would like to know if there is any oversight from Welsh Government and whether there is any structure for local authorities to share good practice?

It appears that while many of the strategies and reviews were informed by public consultation, and some local authorities made efforts to engage more widely, the majority of respondents were engaged online and in some cases, the numbers were low. This appears to have resulted in a 'cut and paste' approach to the strategies in some areas, which fail to take into account local demographics and needs. More guidance is needed to ensure that local authorities are indeed taking every opportunity to talk to the public and representative groups.

The research that was carried out by local authorities indicates that there is a lack of knowledge of the community toilet scheme amongst the public and businesses. Most local authorities seem to have experienced difficulties in recruiting local businesses to open their facilities to the public. This could be due to concerns about misuse of the facilities or the cost of maintaining and cleaning the facilities; Wales Seniors Forum members have been informed by some businesses that the grant is not enough to cover costs.

Standalone public toilets now receive 100% relief from business rates; we would like to know if Welsh Government has considered offering rates relief to businesses that make their facilities available to the public?

While some of the reviews carried out by local authorities show a slight increase in public familiarity with the toilet logo, Wales Seniors Forum has noted two issues with the sticker:

- The logo does not feature a contrasting toilet seat, which is not dementia-friendly. Only Cardiff Council has noted this and developed its own dementia-friendly logo
- Preference amongst the public is for more street signage

Although there are various online resources that provide maps and locations of publicly accessible toilets, these are only available if you have access to a smartphone; older people and those on low and fixed incomes often do not have smartphones. It is also worth noting that these resources are not always up to date; Wales Seniors Forum members have noted that some toilets are still listed that are now closed.

Wales Seniors Forum feels that while the current strategic approach is the correct one, given the financial constraints, more oversight, support and funding for local authorities is needed from Welsh Government in order to ensure a consistent level of provision across Wales. While we recognise that every area has different needs, more support is needed at a national level to enable local authorities to identify and work with delivery partners and businesses.