

Local Authority Public Conveniences Survey 2022



Briefing 22/25
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The Local Authority Public Conveniences survey was conducted by Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor.

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Local Authority Public Conveniences Survey

APSE conducted an online survey in March and April 2022, which was sent out to local authority contacts throughout the UK and 81 responses were received from APSE member councils providing a good representative sample.

A series of questions were asked covering the current provision, income generation, temporary and alternative provision, the approach and strategy for managing the provision.

The data collected through the survey is intended to provide a snapshot of the local authority public conveniences.

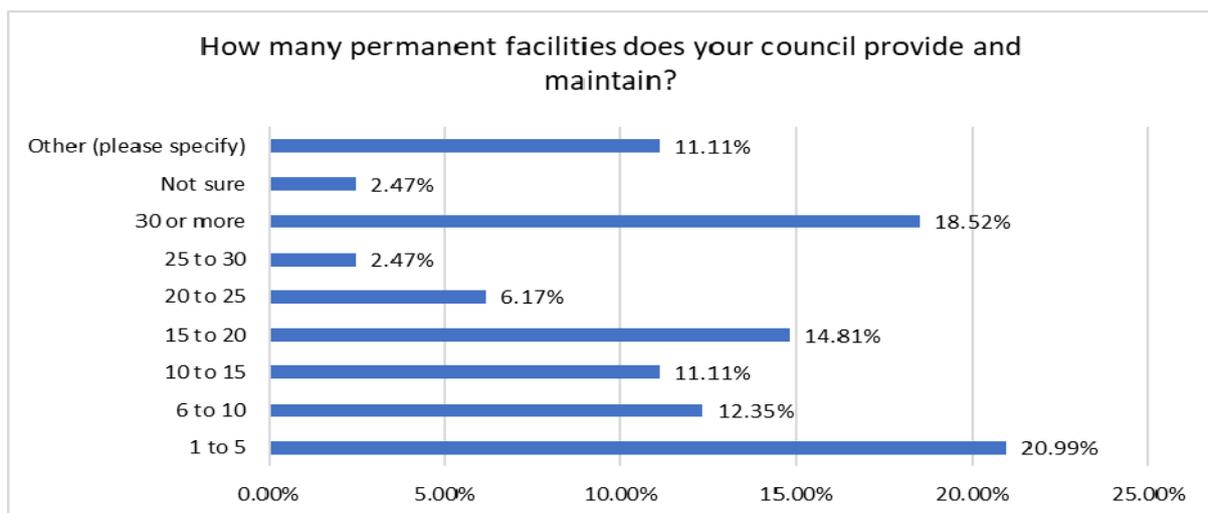
1. Results

Respondents were UK wide with 60.49% from England, 20.99% from Scotland, 7.41% from Northern Ireland and 11.11% from Wales. The survey therefore reflects APSE's UK-wide membership and provides a national picture.

2. Type of provision

How many permanent facilities does your council provide and maintain?

91.36% of respondents reported that they provided permanent facilities, and the graph below provides an overview of the number of permanent facilities that the council provided.



The responses provided demonstrate the range in the number of permanent facilities provided, with 20.99% advising that the authority had 1 to 5 facilities and 18.52% stating that the authority had 30 or more.

What type of permanent provision does your authority provide?

The vast majority of respondents (87.34%) reported that they provided separate male and female provision and 34.18% advised that they provided unisex / gender-neutral facilities. When it came to baby changing facilities, 43.04% have a separate facility, 40.51% report having this provision in the female toilets and 31.65% have the provision in male toilets.

It was also commented that local authorities provided separate disability-friendly provision and Changing Places provision.

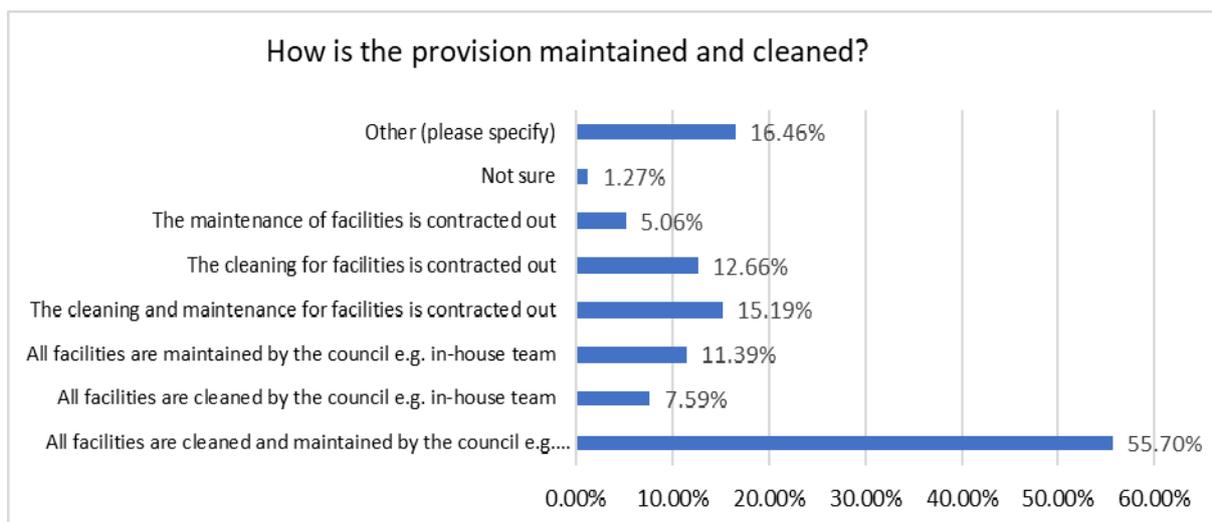
Do you provide temporary toilets?

Half of the respondents (50%) stated they did not provide temporary provision, 18.75% reported that the council does provide temporary provision and 31.25% make temporary provision available on an occasional basis.

The main reasons given for providing temporary provision were reported as being for events, to support the night-time economy, to support tourism and also while the permanent provision was being refurbished or is unavailable.

How is the provision maintained and cleaned?

The survey asked how the provision is maintained and cleaned to gain an understanding of the model that local authorities have adopted. The graph below outlines the responses received.



Over half of the respondents 55.07% report that the facilities are maintained and cleaned by an in-house team, 15.19% state that the cleaning and maintenance is contracted out and 12.66% have contracted out the cleaning of the facilities.

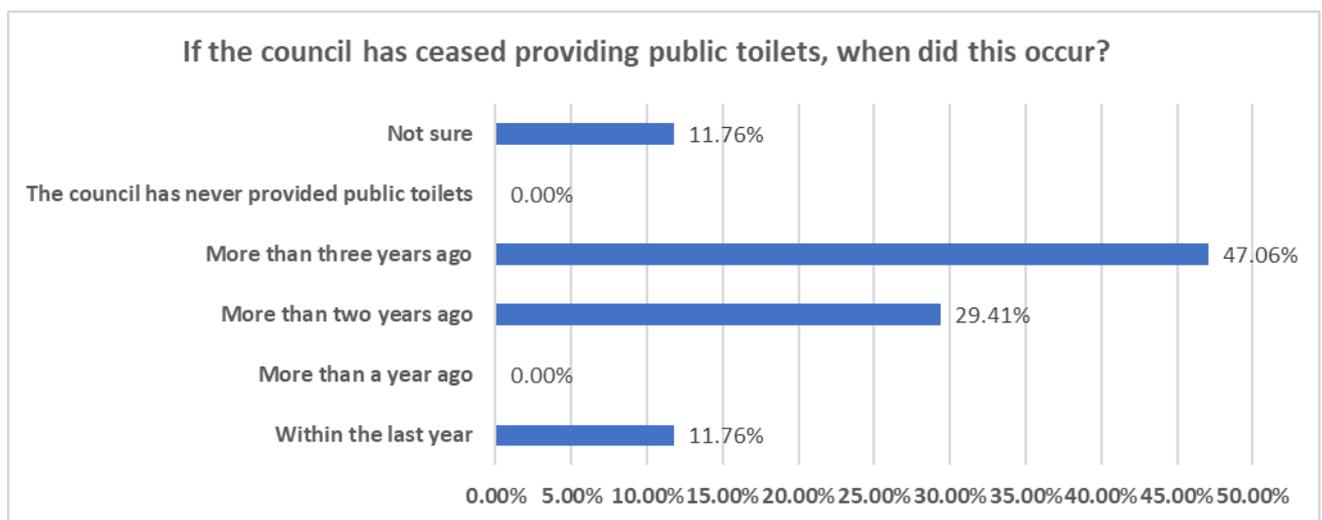
In response to the question, it was also reported that some authorities have a mixture of in-house and contracted out cleaning. The reason given for a mixture was due to either the location of the facilities or to assist with the maintenance and cleaning in periods of high demand, for example in popular tourist hot spots.

How has the overall level of provision provided by the council changed since 2012?

APSE was keen to understand how provision had changed over the last decade. The responses from the survey show that over half of the respondents (58.03%) report that the provision provided by the council has decreased or significantly decreased since 2012. By comparison, only 8.64% report that the provision has increased. None of the respondents stated that they had significantly increased the provision and 27.16% advise the facilities provided have remained the same.

If the council has ceased providing public toilets, when did this occur?

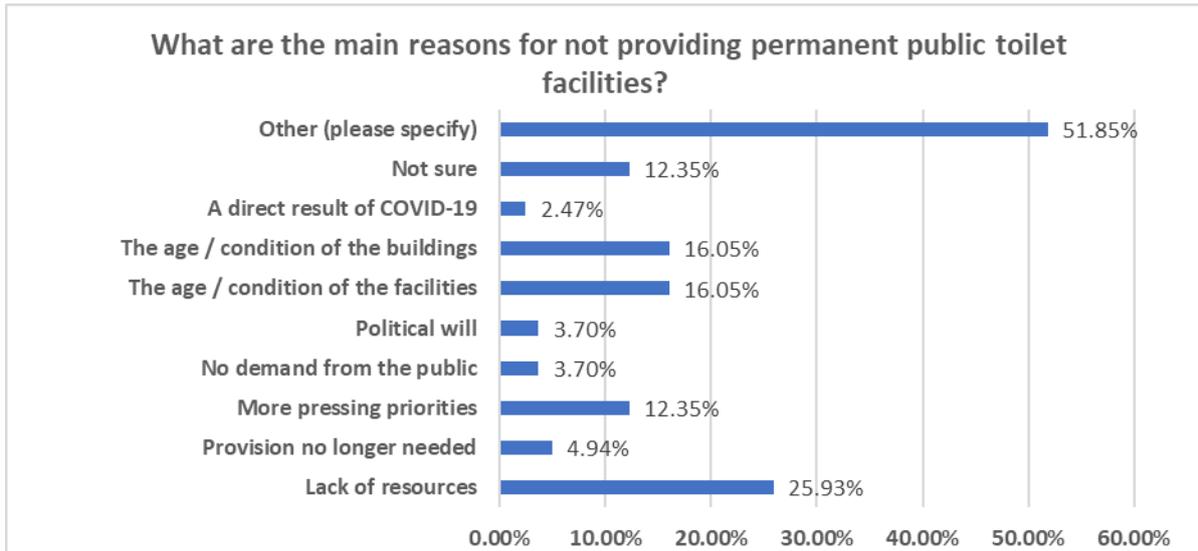
With over 50% of respondents reporting that the provision has decreased in the last ten years, the survey sought to establish when local authorities had ceased to provide public toilets. The graph below outlines the responses received.



The largest number of respondents, 47.06% report that they had ceased providing the provision more than 3 Years ago with a further 29.41% advising that it was more than two years ago.

What are the main reasons for not providing permanent public toilet facilities?

The survey looked at why councils had decided not to provide permanent public toilet facilities. There was a variety of reasons reported and the graph below details the responses received.



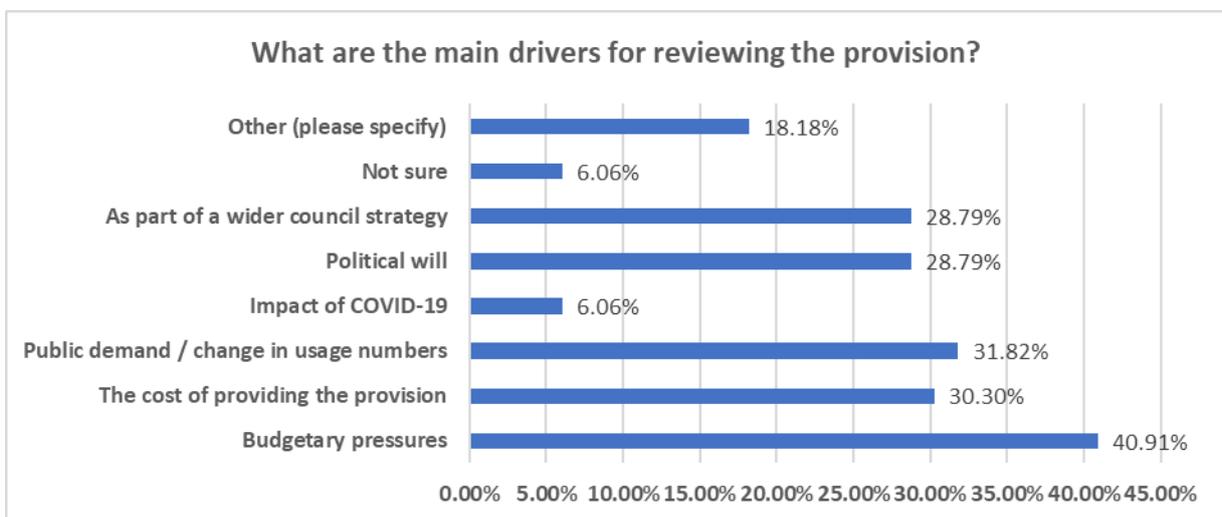
A quarter of respondent's report that lack of resources is one of the main reasons for not providing the facilities. Over half of the respondents stated that there was an alternative reason, and these were specified as being that the facilities had been transferred as a community asset or there was an alternative provision in the location.

Is your authority reviewing or planning to review the provision provided?

When asking authorities if there is a review of the provision currently being undertaken or if there are plans to in the next 12-24 months, 35.80% report that there is a review currently being undertaken, 30.86% have no plans in place to review and 20.99% are looking to commence a review in the next couple of years.

What are the main drivers for reviewing the provision?

To establish the reasons why councils would choose to review the provision, the survey asked what the main drivers were for conducting a review. The graph below provides an overview of the responses received.



Budgetary pressures were stated as being a driver by the greatest number of respondents with 40.91% reporting this to be the case and 31.82% are reviewing the provision in response to public demand. 30.30% cite the cost of providing the provision as a driver to undertake a review. Whereas only 6% of respondents stated that there were reviewing the provision as a result of the pandemic.

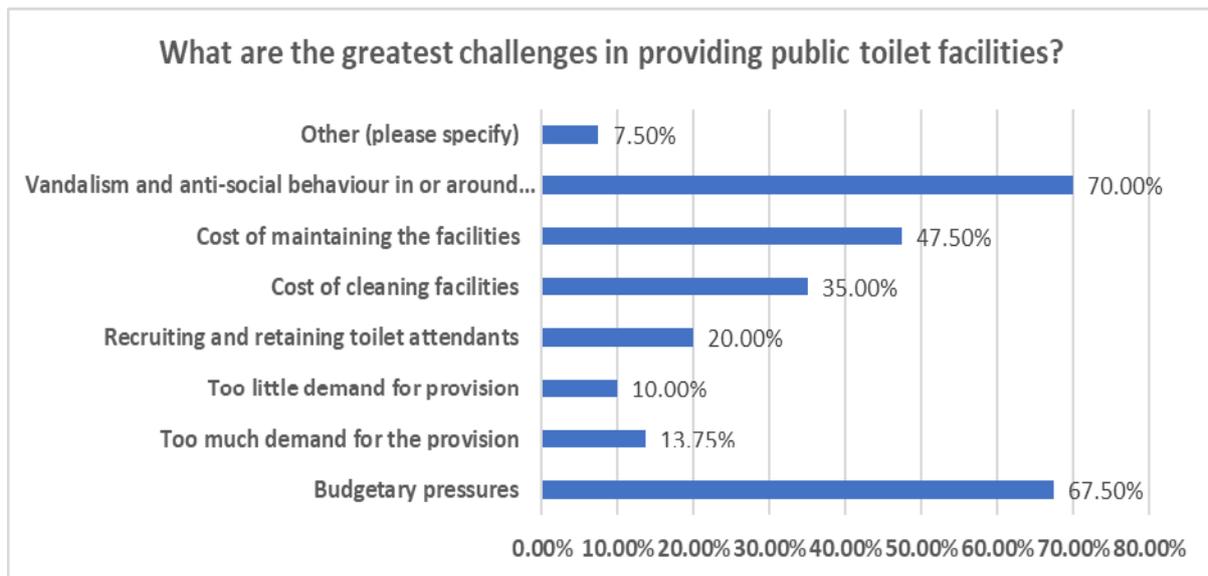
What measures have been introduced as a result of COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted public convenience provision and the table below provides an outline of the measures that were introduced as a temporary measure and as a permanent measure. It is clear from the table below that with exception of changing the cleaning specification and reducing opening hours the measures implemented during the pandemic were only introduced on a temporary basis.

	As a temporary measure	As a permanent measure
Closed sinks / cubicles and urinals to comply with social distancing	100.00%	0.00%
Changed the cleaning specification	87.10%	12.90%
Put in place an attendant	100.00%	0.00%
Removed the charging mechanism	100.00%	0.00%
Reduced opening hours	95.83%	4.17%

What are the greatest challenges in providing public toilet facilities?

To gain an understanding of the challenges local authorities are facing in providing public toilet facilities, the survey asked respondents what the greatest challenges were. The graph below provides an overview of the responses received.



It is clear from the responses that the greatest challenges relate to vandalism and anti-social behaviour with 70% of respondents reporting this is the case. Costs and budget pressures also feature highly with budgetary pressures in the responses.

3. Charging for provision

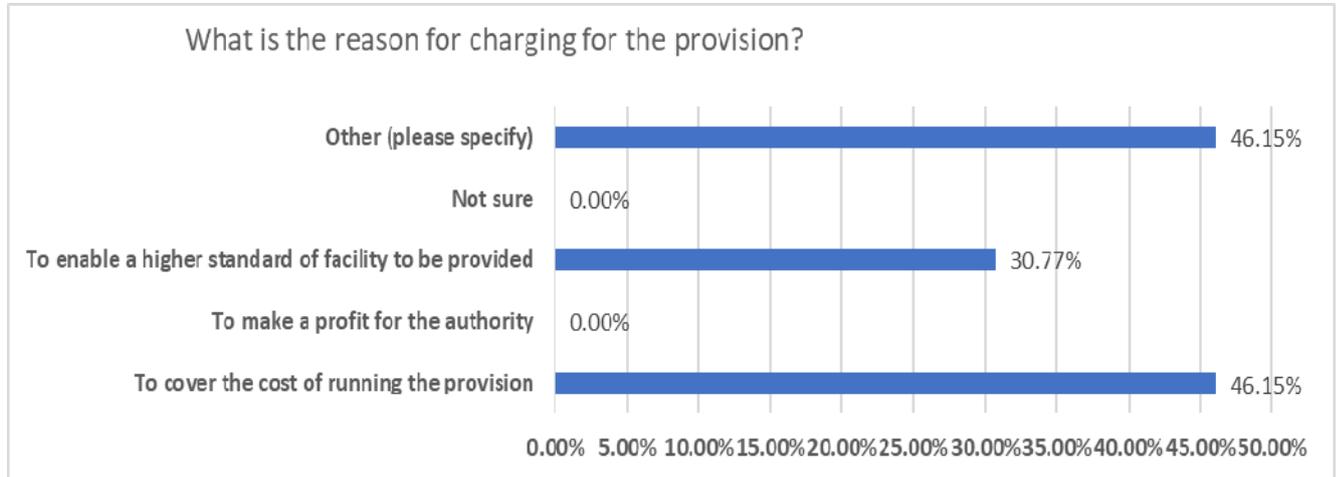
The survey asked if councils charged for their facilities and 59.46% reported that they did not charge, 31.08% charge for some of the provision and only 9.46% advise that a charge is made for all or the majority of their toilets.

How much do you charge? - if a variable amount please provide an average

The amount charged by authorities ranged from 10p or less up to £1, the most common amount respondents stated that they charged for the provision was 20p with 34.21% reporting this was the case.

What is the reason for charging for the provision?

To gain an understanding of the reason that councils had decided to charge is outlined in the graph below.



Just under half of the respondents (46.15%) report that the charge is levied to cover the cost of running the provision. In the comments associated with the question, respondents advised that they did not charge or they made a charge to deter vandalism and antisocial behaviour.

It is clear that the charges are not levied to make a profit for the council with none of the respondents reporting this to be the case, it was also commented by a minority of the respondents that the provision was run at a loss.

The vast majority of respondents (91.89%) advised they did not earn sponsorship or advertising income from the public conveniences, 4.05% did utilise sponsorship and advertising. It was reported that the main form of advertising was done by the way of posters for local events.

Disabled toilet facilities and Changing places

Do you operate a key / access system for disabled toilet facilities?

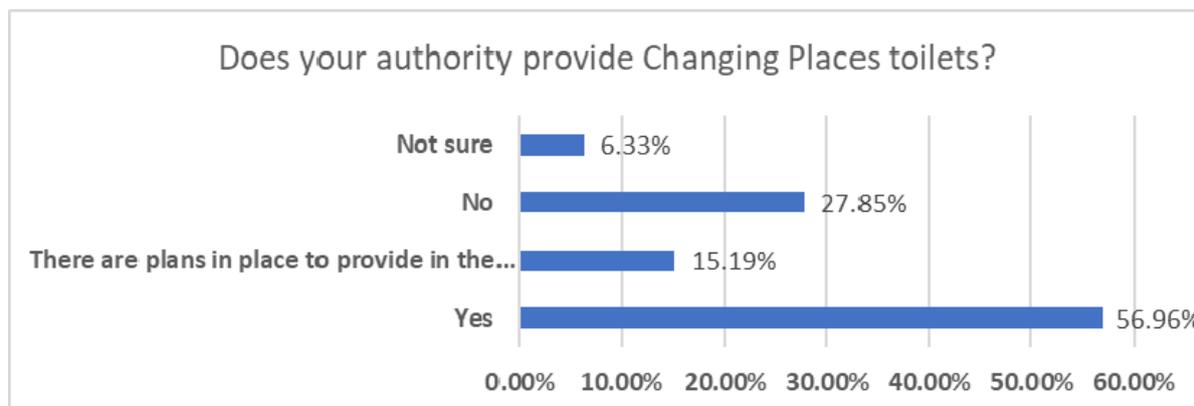
There are 80% of respondents operating a key / access system for the disabled toilet facilities, and 16.25% reported that they do not have this type of system in place.

Does your authority provide Changing Places toilets?

Changing Places toilets are larger accessible toilets for severely disabled people, with equipment such as hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers.

In 2021 there was a major change to building rules in England requiring thousands of large (12m²) and well-equipped accessible toilet facilities to be designed and built into new public buildings.

The graph below provides an overview of the changing places provision provided by councils.



Over half of respondents have changing places facilities in place with a further 15.19% reporting that they had plans in place. The new regulations relate to England, therefore the majority of respondents that report they do not have the provision in place are from authorities outside of England.

There was funding made available in the Spring Statement 2022 to assist in providing the provision and just over 25% of respondents reported that the authority had accessed this funding, however, just under 40% of respondents advised that they were not sure if this was the case.

Public conveniences strategy.

APSE was keen to understand to what extent the council had a strategy in place for their public conveniences provision and what factors the strategy included.

There were 25% of respondents confirming that there was a strategy in place, a further 17.11% did not have an agreed strategy in place yet, 30.26% had not got a strategy, just under 20% were not sure if there was one in place, and 11.84% responded other. Those that advised other reported in the comments that a strategy was currently been progressed but had not been formally adopted.

How important are the following factors to the council's strategy for public toilets various factors are to the councils' strategy?

The table below details the responses received and how important they are in the strategy.

	Not at all important	A little important	Quite important	Important	Highly important
	0.00%	0.00%	15.00%	46.67%	38.33%

Cost					
Health and safety of toilet users	0.00%	1.59%	6.35%	39.68%	52.38%
Health and safety of general public	0.00%	1.59%	7.94%	49.21%	41.27%
Needs of defined groups in the community	0.00%	6.35%	15.87%	46.03%	31.75%
Environmental factors	0.00%	6.35%	34.92%	44.44%	14.29%
Business interests e.g., tourism, night time economy	1.59%	11.11%	23.81%	42.86%	20.63%
Workforce health and safety	0.00%	4.76%	14.29%	36.51%	44.44%
Visual amenity value	1.59%	23.81%	36.51%	31.75%	6.35%
Volume of use of individual facilities	0.00%	11.11%	30.16%	49.21%	9.52%

It is clear from the responses that the health and safety of users of the facilities, the general public and the workforce are of high importance, with cost and volume of use of the facility also being important.

What measures are being introduced in response to climate change?

A large number of councils have declared a climate emergency and to achieve the targets of net zero are taking measures to make council assets sustainable which includes the public conveniences. Therefore, APSE sought to gain an understanding of what local authorities were doing with the public convenience provision.

The table below provides an overview of the responses received.

	Implemented	Plan to implement
Installed commercial washroom products (e.g., toilets / urinals) that require less water consumption	35.48%	64.52%
Amended cleaning regime to include more sustainable cleaning products / methodology	50.00%	50.00%
Installed low energy usage technology (e.g. LED Lights, reduced energy hand dryers)	62.50%	37.50%
Installed green technologies (e.g. solar panels)	14.29%	85.71%

Switched to more environmentally friendly consumables (e.g. soap, toilet paper)	35.71%	64.29%
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The responses show that councils have taken steps and implemented measures to improve sustainability with 62.50% of respondents reported they had installed low energy usage technology and half of respondents reporting they have implemented sustainable cleaning products / methodology.

In addition, the vast majority of respondents (85.71%) are planning to install green technologies in their public conveniences.

APSE COMMENT

The survey highlights that due to the pressure on local authority budgets there has been a decline in the provision provided by councils over the last ten years. However, there is a strong case to be made for retaining public conveniences, whilst respondents in the service report that they do not make a profit from their public toilets, the additional income to local economies, of “good toilet provision has been shown to increase retail turnover, tourist numbers and economic growth” according to Professor Clara Greed of University of the West of England.

The provision of safe, clean and accessible facilities ensures that people with disabilities, pregnant women and older people who need regular access to toilets can have the confidence to visit the town centre, park or tourist attraction and for others in the community it can encourage them to stay longer in the area.

Councils reported that they had worked hard during the pandemic with the changing guidance to keep public toilets open for key workers and also as restrictions were lifted and people were utilising local parks, beaches and tourist attractions to ensure there was provision available and meet the COVID-19 guidance.

There has been much publicity around male, female and unisex toilets, in recent months and 34.18% of respondents to the survey report that they have unisex / gender neutral provision. Following a government consultation ([Toilet provision for men and women: call for evidence](#)) which applies to England, undertaken by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities it was announced on 4 July 2022, that all new public buildings should have separate male and female toilets. It is commented in the announcement that the approach will mean women, who may need to use facilities more often for example because of sanitary needs and pregnancy, will have the appropriate facilities. In addition, it is stated that separate unisex toilets should be provided if there is space, but not at the expense of female toilets. The government report that a consultation will be launched in the autumn that will consider the design of unisex self-contained cubicles to maximise privacy and whether improvements to disabled persons toilets should be made.

APSE would recommend that councils develop a clear strategy for their public conveniences, taking into consideration the local need, the future sustainability of the facilities and also explore methods of financing public conveniences such as charging or introducing complementary services such as café facilities, particularly with the roll-out of electric charging points in remote areas, which require users to spend time in a location. Other options such as asset transfers to communities or town / village councils, comfort schemes that pay local businesses or providing facilities in existing council buildings for use by the public (e.g., libraries, sports centres) could also be considered.

Vickie Hacking,
APSE Principal Advisor

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a wide range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include: -

- Building Cleaning
- Catering
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Climate Change and Renewable Energy Network
- Environmental Health Advisory Group
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authorities Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

If you require any further information on the findings of this State of the Market survey 2022, please contact Vickie Hacking at vhacking@apse.org.uk or by phone at 0161 772 1810.