



association for public service excellence

# Local Authority public conveniences provision 2024



Briefing  
24/22

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## **Local authority public conveniences provision 2024**

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### **About APSE**

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matters.

# **1 Local Authority Public Conveniences Survey**

APSE conducted an online survey in March and April 2024, which was sent out to local authority contacts throughout the UK and 41 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.

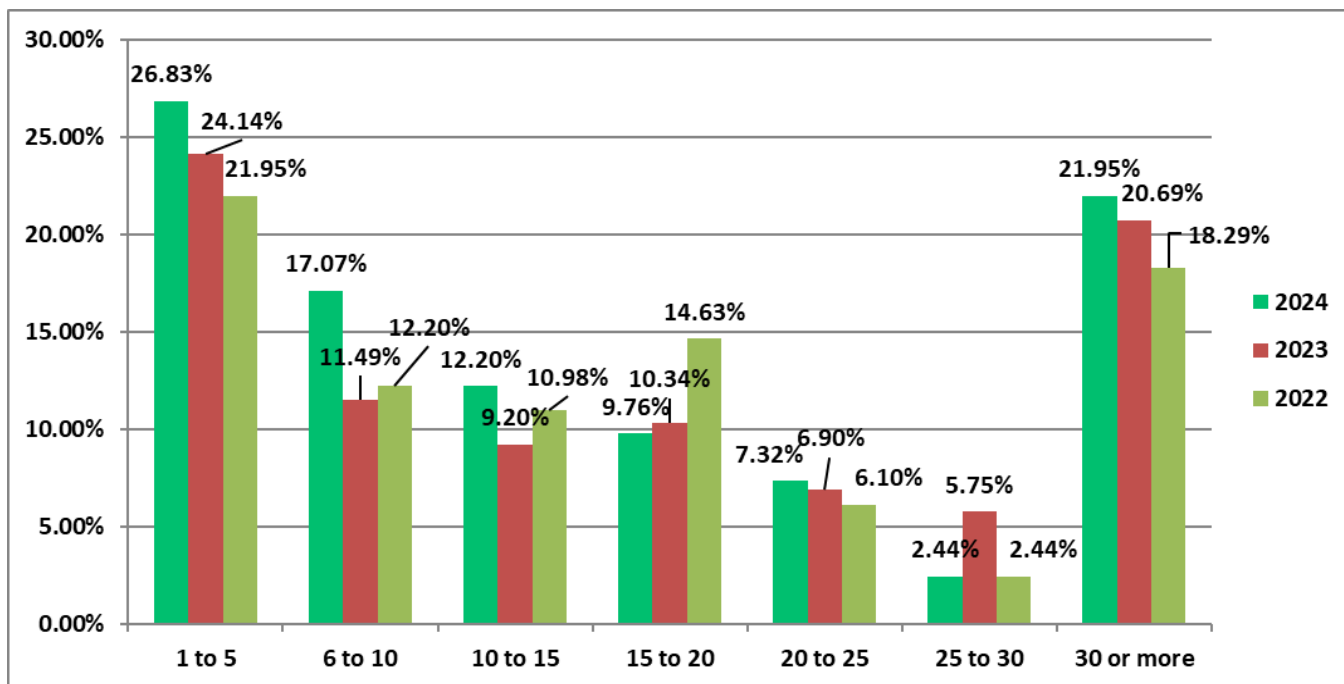
## **2 Results**

Respondents were UK wide with 51.22% from England, 7.32% from Northern Ireland, 29.27% from Scotland and 12.20% from Wales. The survey therefore reflects APSE's UK-wide membership and provides a UK-wide picture.

## **3 Type of provision**

### **3.1 How many permanent facilities does your council provide and maintain?**

The vast majority of respondents, 100%, reported that they provided permanent facilities which is an increase from 95.45% that was reported in 2023. The graph below provides an overview of the number of permanent facilities that the council provided and outlines a comparison of the last two years.



The responses provided demonstrate the range in the number of permanent facilities provided. The greatest percentage of respondents report that there are one to five facilities with 26.83% of respondents advising this to be the case. The second highest percentage of respondents, 21.95%, report that the council has 30 or more facilities.

### 3.2 What type of permanent provision does your authority provide?

The vast majority of respondents (90.24%) reported that they provided separate male and female provision and 31.71% advised that they provided unisex / gender-neutral facilities. When it came to baby changing facilities, 31.71% have a separate facility, 41.46% report having this provision in the female toilets and 14.63% have the provision in male toilets.

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

### 3.3 Do you provide temporary toilets?

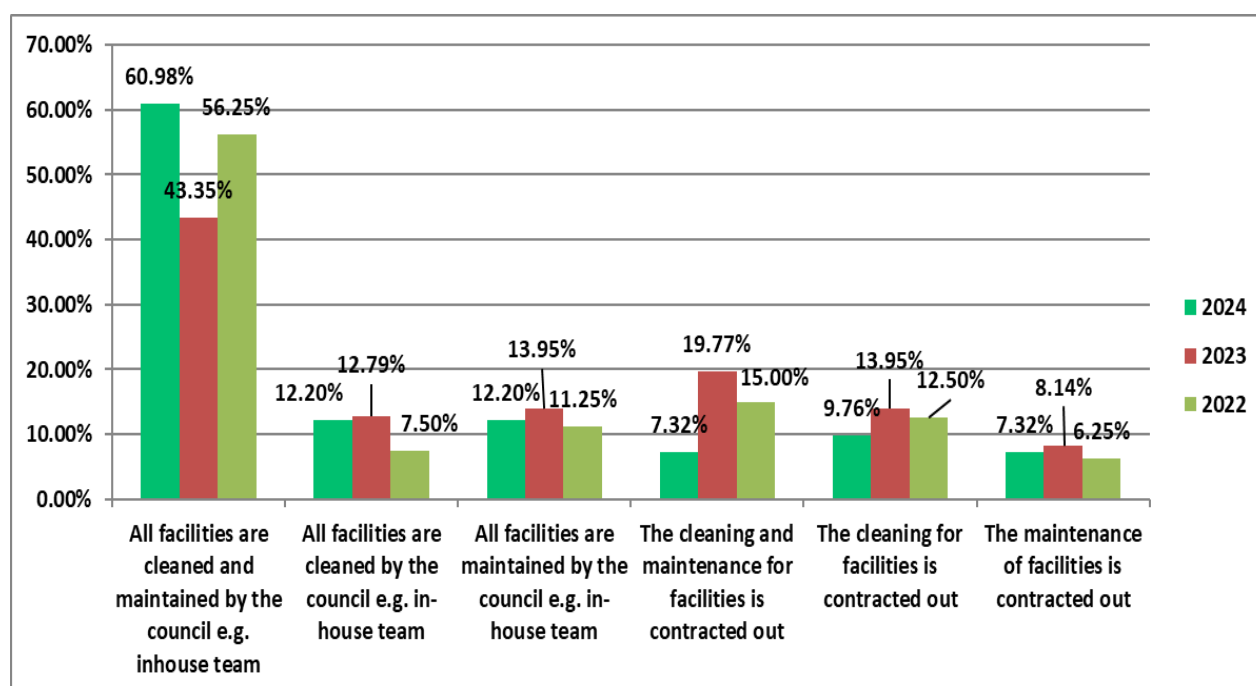
It was stated by 42.50% of respondents that they did not provide temporary provision, 25.00% reported that the council does provide temporary provision and 32.50% make temporary provision available on an occasional basis.

The main reasons given for providing temporary provision were reported as being for

events, to support the night-time economy, to support tourism and while the permanent provision was being refurbished or is unavailable.

### 3.4 How is the provision maintained and cleaned?

The survey asked how the provision was maintained and cleaned to gain an understanding of the model that local authorities have adopted. The graph below outlines the responses received for the 2024, 2023 and the 2022 survey.



There has been an increase from 45.35% of respondents that reported the facilities were maintained and cleaned by an in-house team in 2023 to 60.98% of respondents stating this was the case in 2024.

In comparison there has been a decrease of 12.45% in the respondents that advise that the cleaning and maintenance is contracted out which could indicate that councils are opting to insource the cleaning and maintenance of the public convenience provision.

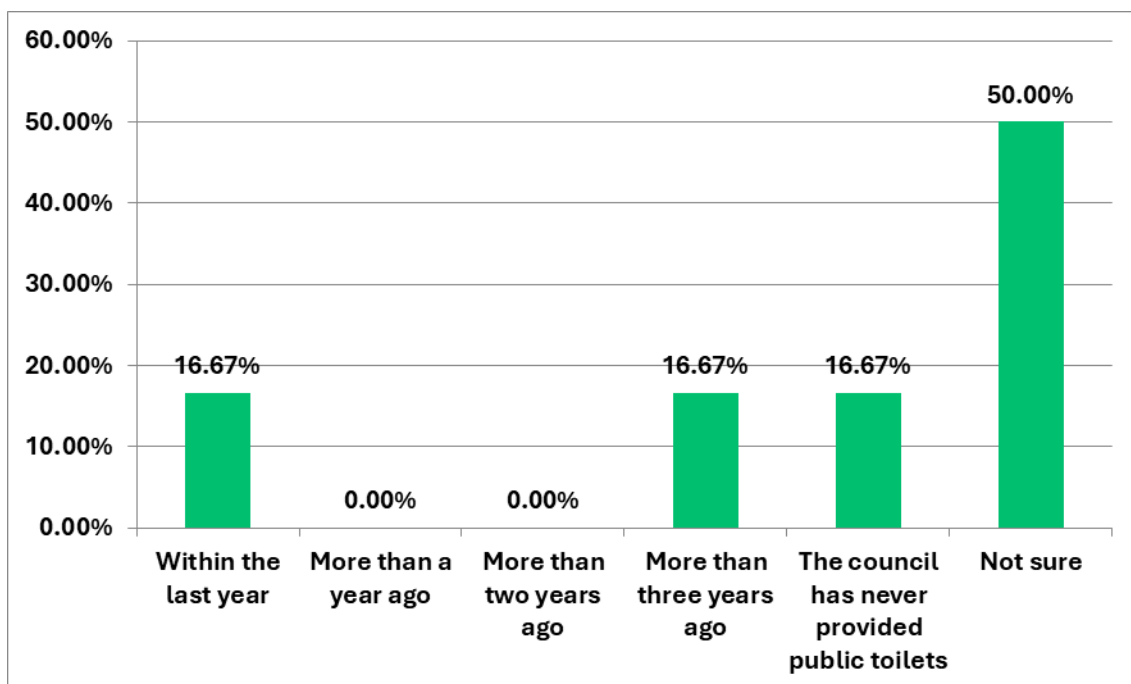
In response to the question, it was also reported that some authorities have a mixture of in-house and contracted out cleaning. The reason given for a mixture was due to either the location of the facilities or to assist with the maintenance and cleaning in periods of high demand, for example in popular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

### 3.5 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 34.15% report that the provision provided by the council has decreased or significantly decreased since 2012. By comparison, only 14.64% report that the provision has increased or significantly increased in 2024. The greatest proportion of respondents (41.46%) report that the facilities provided have remained the same.

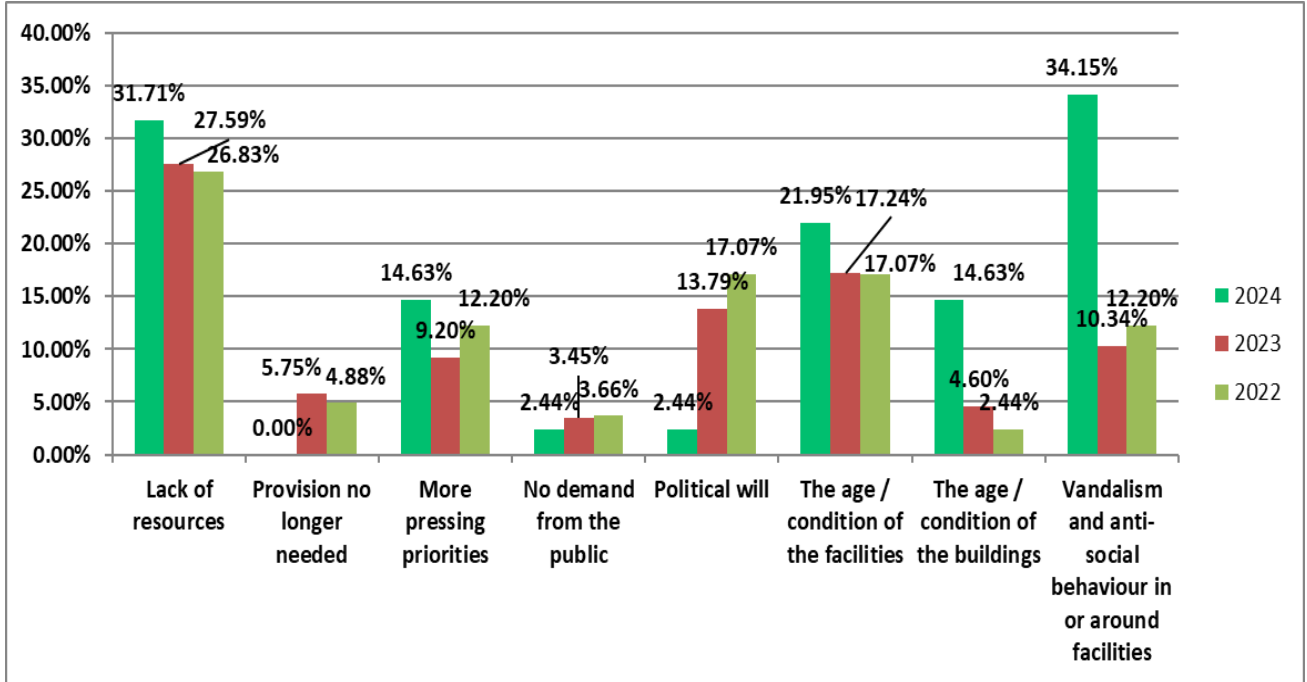
### 3.6 If the council had ceased providing public toilets, when did this occur?

Over 50% of respondents reporting that they were not sure when provision was ceased, which could be attributed to the changes in the workforce within the service. It is clear from the responses that councils did not cease any provision during the COVID pandemic. The graph below outlines the responses received.



### 3.7 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 were a variety of reasons reported and the graph below details the responses received.



For the first time in three years the greatest number of respondents (34.15%) report that vandalism and anti-social behavior was a major factor in not providing public conveniences, with a further 31.71% reporting that lack of resources was the main reason.

The provision being no longer needed, no demand for from the public and political will were not seen as reasons to cease the provision, demonstrating that the public conveniences are required and used by the community.

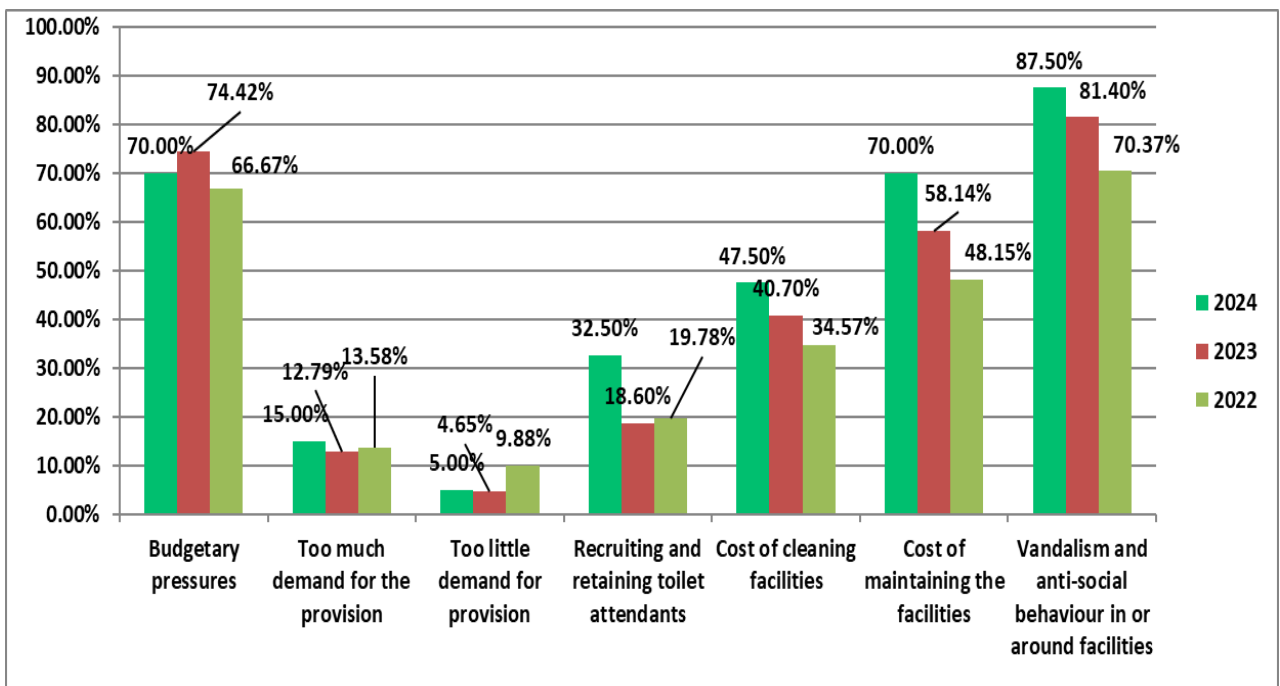
In addition to the reasons stated in the survey, it was also commented that facilities had been transferred as a community asset, the provision was no longer being used and the fact that there was not a statutory requirement to provide the provision. This further highlights the impact that budgetary pressures are having on the facilities that are available.

### 3.8 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 do so in the next 12-24 months, 26.83% report that there is a review currently being undertaken, 31.71% have no plans in place to review and 24.39% are looking to commence a review in the next couple of years.

### 3.9 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 for the 2024, 2023 and 2022 surveys.



The responses have been consistent over the last three years. However, the results highlight that the greatest challenges relate to vandalism and anti-social behaviour and the number of respondents reporting that this is a challenge has increased by 6.10% from 2023 to 87.50%. Budget pressures have also been cited as a challenge with 66.67% reporting this as a challenge in 2022 to just under 75.00% in 2023 and 70.00% in the latest survey.

From the comments associated with this question the other challenges were reported as being:

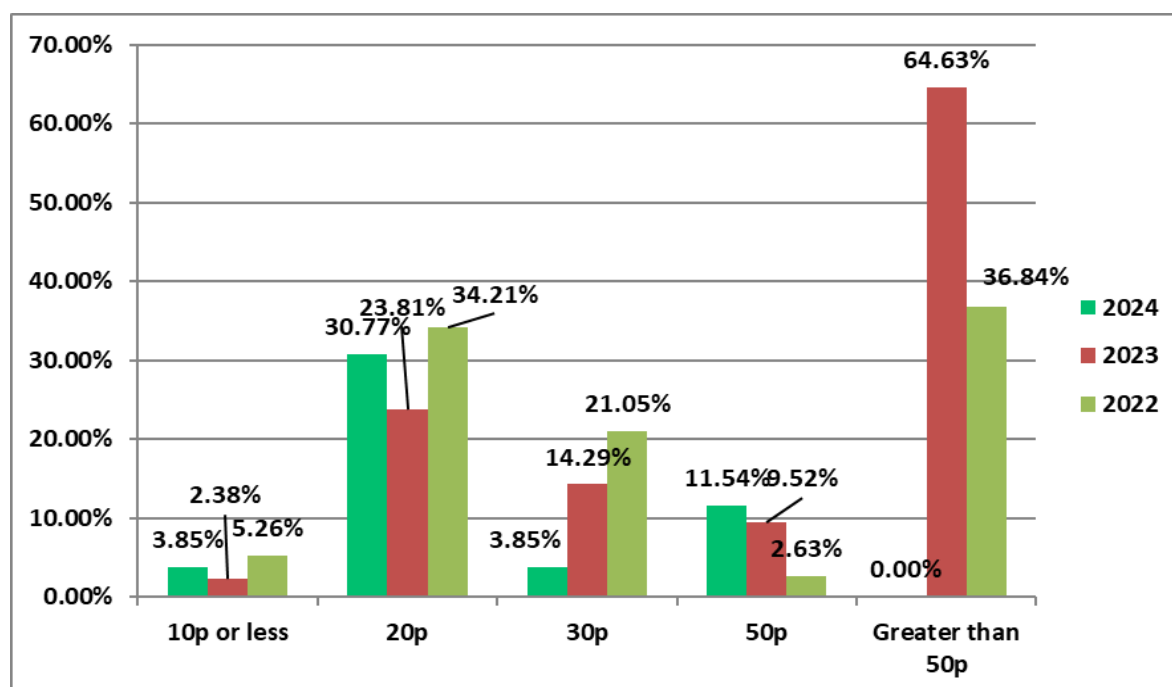
- Facilities not being in the right place, due to the demand for provision moving to an alternative area.
- Rural facilities in tourist areas are in high demand for short periods of time.
- Expectations of the levels of cleanliness.

## 4 Charging for provision

The survey asked if councils charged for their facilities and 51.22% reported that they did not charge, 36.59% charged for some of the facilities and 12.20% advised that a charge is made for all or most of their toilets.

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

The graph below outlines the charges levied for the facilities for 2024, 2023 and 2022.



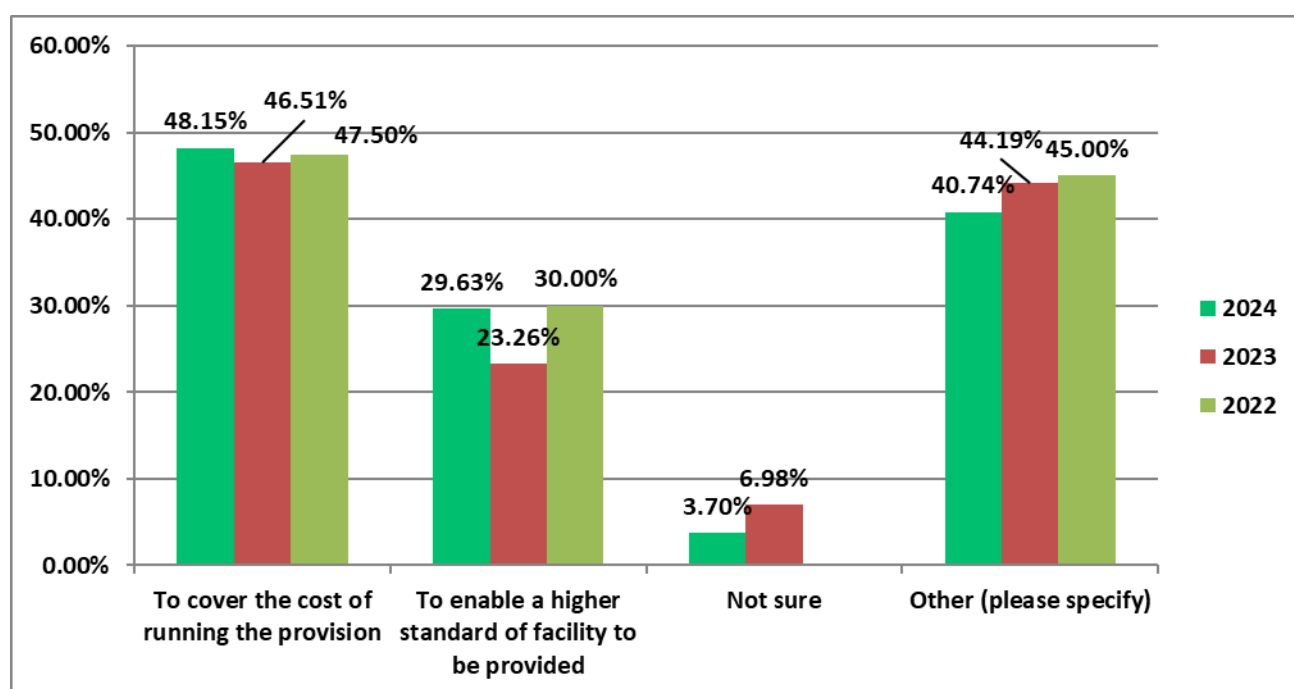
The amount charged ranged from 10p up to £1. The most commonly charged fee is 20p with 30.77% advising that this was the average charge.

There has been a huge decrease in the number of respondents reporting that the charge for the provision was greater than 50p from 64.63% in 2023 to 0% in 2024. There is no evidence provided as to why this is the case, but it could be related to the council recognising that public conveniences are an essential provision for the community. Therefore, there has been a decision made to keep the cost as low as possible in the current economic climate.

The comments associated with this question highlight that the charges levied were dependent on the type and location of provision. For example, the charge was higher where there was an attendant at the facility or where there was a high demand for the provision reflecting the need to recoup higher running costs for this type of provision.

#### 4.2 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 (48.15%) 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 (90.24%) said they did not earn sponsorship or advertising income from the public conveniences, 2.44% did utilise sponsorship and advertising. It was reported that the main form of advertising was done by way of posters for local events.

## **5 Disabled toilet facilities and Changing Places.**

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

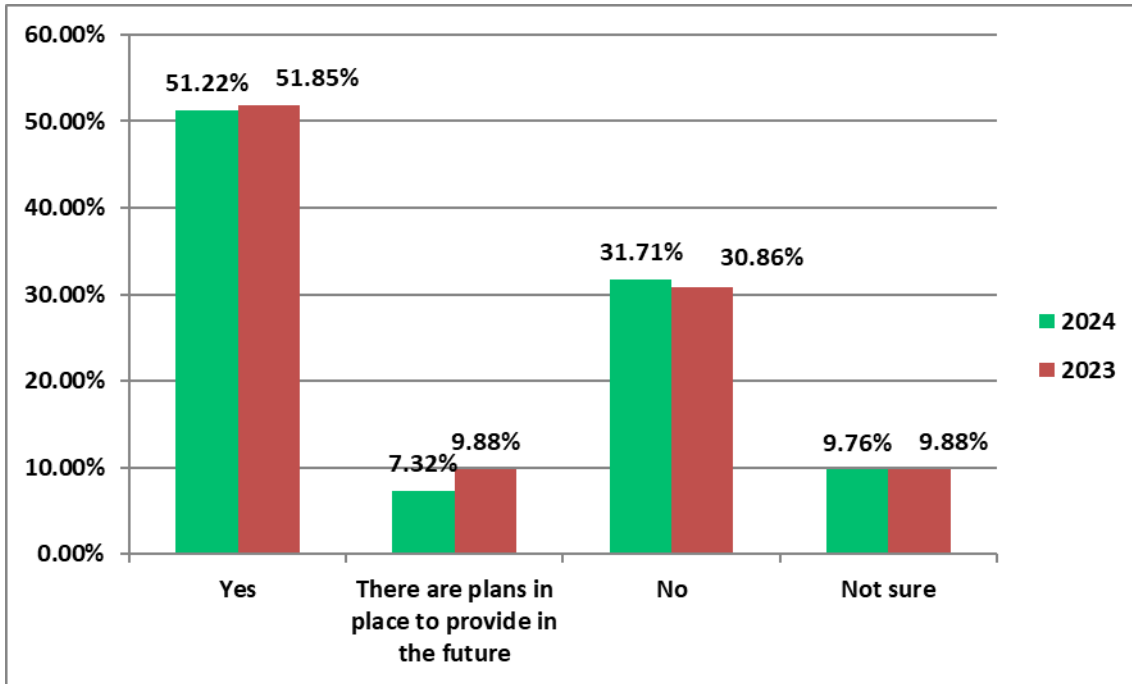
82.50% of respondents operated a key / access system for the disabled toilet facilities, and 12.50% reported that they do not have this type of system in place and a further 7.50% answered with other. In the comments it is commented that council staff provide a key when the facilities are required.

### **5.2 Does your authority provide Changing Places toilets?**

Changing Places toilets are larger accessible toilets for people with a severe disability, 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 (12m<sup>2</sup>) 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, (51.22%) with a further 7.32% reporting that they had plans in place. The new regulations relate to England, therefore most respondents that report they do not have the provision in place are from authorities outside of England.

## 6 Public conveniences strategy.

The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 places a duty on each Local Authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area but this is not a requirement for all authorities in the UK. Therefore, APSE was keen to understand to what extent councils had a formally agreed strategy in place for their public conveniences provision and what factors the strategy included.

### 6.1 What measures are being introduced in response to climate change?

Many councils have declared a climate emergency and to achieve the targets of net zero, councils are taking measures to make their assets more sustainable which includes 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.

	Quite important			Important			Highly important		
	2024	2023	2022	2024	2023	2022	2024	2023	2022

Cost	17.86%	14.04%	13.85%	32.14%	35.09%	43.08%	50.00%	40.35%	36.92%
Health and safety of toilet users	6.67%	5.26%	6.15%	40.00%	45.61%	38.46%	53.33%	45.61%	52.31%
Health and safety of public	10.00%	7.02%	7.69%	40.00%	45.61%	47.69%	50.00%	43.86%	41.54%
Needs of defined groups in the community	25.00%	17.54%	15.38%	50.00%	42.11%	44.62%	25.00%	29.82%	32.31%
Environmental factors	42.86%	38.60%	33.85%	39.29%	40.35%	43.08%	7.14%	8.77%	13.85%
Business interests e.g., tourism, night-time economy	31.03%	26.32%	23.08%	27.59%	43.86%	41.54%	24.14%	14.04%	20.00%
Workforce health and safety	17.86%	15.79%	13.85%	32.14%	38.60%	35.38%	35.71%	36.84%	43.08%
Visual amenity value	42.86%	28.07%	35.38%	17.86%	38.60%	30.77%	14.29%	7.02%	6.15%
Volume of use of individual facilities	32.14%	28.07%	29.23%	32.14%	49.12%	47.69%	17.86%	10.53%	9.23%

The responses show that councils have taken various steps and implemented measures to improve sustainability with 72.73% of respondents advising that they had installed low energy usage technology. 61.90% of respondents reported that they have amended cleaning regimes to include more sustainable cleaning products / methodology.

## 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 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. As restrictions were lifted and people returned to utilising local parks, beaches, and tourist attractions, the service ensured that provision was available and that they were able to meet any changing guidance.

APSE would recommend that councils develop a clear strategy for their public conveniences, taking into consideration the local need, and the future sustainability of the facilities. They should 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. Some local authorities have resorted to asset transfers to communities or town / village councils, where direct provision is unaffordable or utilised comfort schemes that pay local businesses to provide toilet facilities. Many also provide facilities in existing council buildings for use by the public (e.g., libraries, sports centres), which should be considered as a further possible solution. It is important to ensure that consideration of public conveniences is an integral part of local place-based strategies, including the feasibility of walking and cycling routes, tourism developments and when considering a holistic approach to encourage physical activity in area of green space and public realm. Recent press reports have highlighted the issues of so-called ‘wild toileting and the impact this has on local areas, which suggests that in the absence of public provision anti-social behaviour may become increasingly prevalent. You can read this report in [The Guardian](#) which cites APSE research.

**Vickie Hacking,**

## **APSE Principal Advisor**

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APSE member authorities have access to a 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 and all end with an informal lunch 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](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national advisory groups include:-

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- Cost of Providing/Cost of Living Network
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Recovery and Renewal
- Renewables and Climate Change
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