

London Loos in-focus: Local authorities. Community Toilet Schemes



About this information sheet

This information sheet has been produced by Age UK London as part of the [London Loos](#) campaign for better public toilet provision in London. Along with other information sheets produced by Age UK London it has been written for anyone interested in actions London's local authorities can take to improve the provision of public toilets in their borough. It is recommended in particular for council officers and council directors, as well as councillors.

Community Toilet Schemes

Community Toilet Schemes (CTS) enable members of the public to use toilet facilities in a range of approved local businesses and other organisations during their opening hours. Effective Community Toilet Schemes can play an important part of public toilet provision when implemented alongside other projects aimed at improving provision.

In [research by Age UK London](#) (2022) with nearly 600 older Londoners, four in five survey respondents said that they would not be confident going into a shop or café and asking to use the toilet if the business was not part of a Community Toilet Scheme. In contrast three in four survey respondents said that they would be confident asking to use the toilet in a business that they knew was part of a Community Toilet Scheme.

In 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a [step-by-step guide](#) to setting up and operating a CTS. It was based on practice in the Royal Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

13 active Community Toilet Schemes in London (September 2022)

Research for Age UK London (2022) found evidence of at least 13 active CTSs in London with a further four boroughs in the process of setting up a scheme (information up to date as of September 2022). The size of the schemes ranged from six to 70 local businesses participating.

Characteristics of a successful Community Toilet Scheme

Public Toilets UK have [outlined](#) the following characteristics of successful Community Toilet Schemes.

- Active management by the local authority with careful selection and monitoring of the selected sites.
- The CTS receives full support from the local authority from inception and on a long-term basis.
- The CTS has an agreed budget.
- The local authority maintains a high level of public toilet provision in addition to that offered by the scheme. This allows for closures, holidays and the night time economy.

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- The local authority proactively raises awareness of the scheme through community toilet maps (offline and online), other online information, signage, community noticeboards, newsletters and information in public buildings such as libraries and community centres
- The local authority provides additional toilet provision when there are major events that might cause problems with increased demand provided.

Management

[Research](#) on Community Toilet Schemes in London (2022) has found that in the majority of boroughs with schemes businesses are invited to apply. Some boroughs undertake an annual inspection of participating venues and some proactively gather service-user feedback for example by using ‘mystery shoppers’.

Payments to participating businesses

Research on Community Toilet Schemes in London (2022) found that across all the schemes participating businesses were paid between £500 and £1,200 per year in order to make their toilets available to the public. Most boroughs had a sliding scale of fees according to the facilities on offer with venues that could offer baby-changing facilities or an accessible toilet being paid the highest rate. Some boroughs pay according to the number of days the facility is open.

Monitoring

As part of a scheme operating in one outer London borough participants must pass an annual inspection. The following check-list for participants is used to ascertain that the premises meet satisfactory standards.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | The Community Toilet Scheme sticker should be visible from the street and therefore displayed in a front window |
| 2 | Users should be free to use your toilets without being asked to make a purchase |
| 3 | Access to and from your toilets should be free of obstructions or risks from slips, trips or falls |
| 4 | Toilets should be clean, well maintained, and in good working order |
| 5 | The wash area should be clean and tidy |
| 6 | There should be a suitable supply of soap and hygienic hand drying facilities provided |
| 7 | The wash hand basins should be provided with constant cold and warm water |
| 8 | Where disabled toilets are provided, the handrails should be in good working order |
| 9 | If disabled toilets provided, an emergency pull cord is installed and is in working order |
| 10 | Where baby changing facilities are provided, the drop-down trays should be clean and in good working order |
| 11 | Where there is a fire escape, this should be clearly marked and free from obstruction |

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|----|--|
| 12 | There should be suitable natural / artificial lighting and ventilation in toilet compartments |
| 13 | There should be no obvious health and safety concerns e.g. loose electrical fittings, exposed connections, broken plugs etc. |

Accessibility

Both in terms of having regard to the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) and ensuring value for money, it is important that ‘accessible’ means genuinely wheel-chair accessible. The toilet cubicle may in itself comply with regulations but every wheel-chair user will testify that this does not guarantee that they can actually use it. There have been reports of accessible toilets not having enough space for a wheel-chair because they are being used as a store-room for floor buckets. The corridor leading to the toilet may be obstructed by the recent deliveries of goods or freezers.

The only way to ascertain whether an accessible toilet lives up to the standard in reality is to have a wheel-chair user testing it out. It is suggested that members of local disability and older people’s organisations are recruited to carry out ‘mystery shopping’ and report back. It is important to note that some people that need to use accessible toilets will have non-visible disabilities. It is important that staff are aware of this.

Information for the public about Community Toilet Schemes

A Community Toilet Scheme can only be of benefit if the public are aware that it exists and that they can use these facilities without feeling obliged to make a purchase.

Many London boroughs provide information about their Community Toilet Schemes on their website either as a list or a map. Many require community toilet providers to put a sticker in their windows. Some boroughs have street signs with directions to a nearby toilet.

It is important that information about Community Toilet Schemes is available to members of the public who do not use or have access to the internet.

Local toilet maps in both online and hard-copy format are particularly useful. A good example of an online map is [The Great British Public Toilet Map](#) which is well established and widely used. Members of the public can add a toilet or edit an existing entry. There is a filter function to make it easier to find particular facilities such as an accessible toilet. Camden, Lambeth and Merton are among those that provide links on their websites to The Great British Public Toilet Map.

List: Community Toilet Schemes in London

Across London 13 local authorities have Community Toilet Schemes (as of September 2022). It is understood that at least four boroughs plan to introduce or reintroduce Community Toilet Schemes.

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| Borough with a Community Toilet Scheme | Number local businesses participating in the scheme | Online information |
|--|---|--|
| Barnet | 12 | Barnet community toilets Barnet Council |
| Bromley | 40 | Community toilet scheme Community and public toilets London Borough of Bromley |
| Camden | 7 | Public toilets - Camden Council |
| City of London | 65 | Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) - City of London |
| Ealing | 6 | Community toilet scheme Public toilets Ealing Council |
| Enfield | 19 | Community toilet scheme · Enfield Council |
| Lambeth | Unknown | Community toilet scheme - Find a public toilet Lambeth Council |
| Lewisham | 51 | Lewisham Community Toilets |
| Merton | 6 | Community Toilet Scheme (merton.gov.uk) |
| Newham | 14 | Public toilets in Newham – Newham Council |
| Richmond | 70 | Community Toilet Scheme - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames |
| Southwark | Unknown | Southwark Public Toilets |
| Waltham Forest | 38 | Waltham Forest Public Toilets |

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Useful information

- Public toilets: Recommendations for local authorities by Age UK London and public toilets survey results. [Read here.](#)
- In-focus information sheets on Planning, development and public information and toilet strategies for local authorities can be found at <https://bit.ly/LondonLoosCampaign>.
- The Toilet Paper by the London Assembly Health Committee. [Read here.](#)
- The Toilet Manifesto for London. [Read here.](#)
- Taking the P***: the decline of the great British public toilets by the Royal Society for Public Health. [Read here.](#)

Acknowledgements

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