

## Public Conveniences Survey

**To:** All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

### Key Points

This is the second annual report by APSE on council public toilet provision ([2017 report](#)). This briefing provides an overview of the current position in relation to the facilities that local authorities provide.

The survey focused on four key areas:

1. Current provision
2. Income generation
3. Temporary and alternative provision
4. Strategy for provision

### 1. Overview

APSE has conducted a Public Conveniences survey to gain a clearer understanding of the current position and the approaches to provision that local authorities are undertaking. APSE created a short survey that was circulated to members UK wide and a total of 232 responses were received.

### 2. Provision of public conveniences

Local authorities in England and Wales have a power to provide toilets for use by the public under the [Public Health Act 1936](#), as well as powers to “make byelaws as to the conduct of persons using or entering them”, and to “charge such fees for the use of any such conveniences as they see fit”. APSE wanted to know if local authorities provide public conveniences and asked **‘Does the council provide and maintain permanent public conveniences?’** 86.2% of respondents advised that they provided this provision.

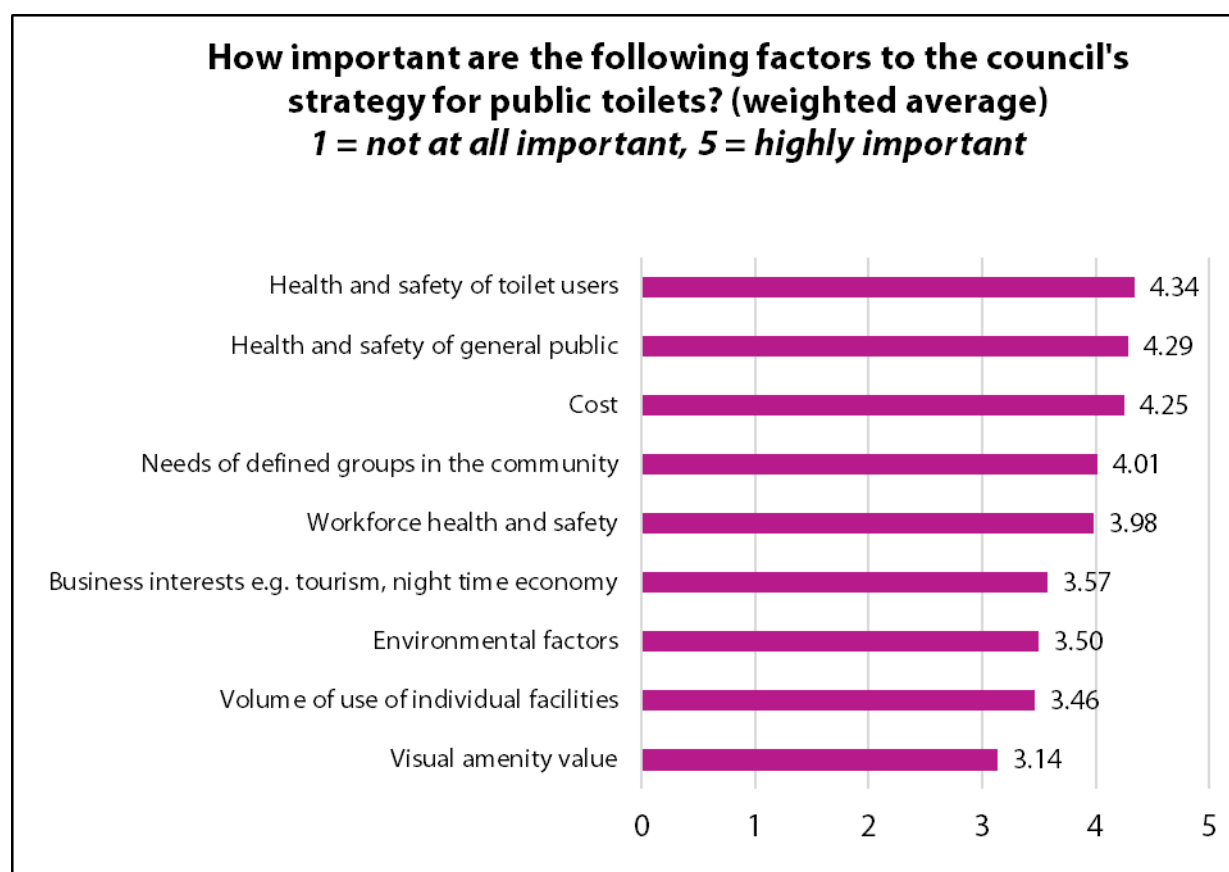
APSE was keen to establish the number of facilities each council maintained and Question two asked **‘How many permanent facilities does your council provide and maintain?’** The majority of respondents (55.42%) provide and maintain more than 10 facilities, 16.87% have between 6 and 10 facilities and 27.71% have between 1 and 5 facilities.

When asked if they were planning on reducing, increasing or maintaining the current level of provision in the next few years, the majority of respondents said maintaining (47.75%) with 26.97% planning to reduce their provision and only 4.49% planning to increase it.

### 3. Council strategy

In seeking to gain an understanding of what factors were important to the council's strategy for public toilets. The survey asked '**Does the council have a formally agreed strategy for public conveniences?**' with 27.56% answering 'Yes', 33.97% answering 'No' and 26.28% answering 'Not yet'.

Respondents were asked to state whether a particular factor was: not at all important (1), a little important (2), quite important (3), important (4) or highly important (5). There were 130 responses received and an average rating was calculated, the table below outlines the average rating for each of the factors.



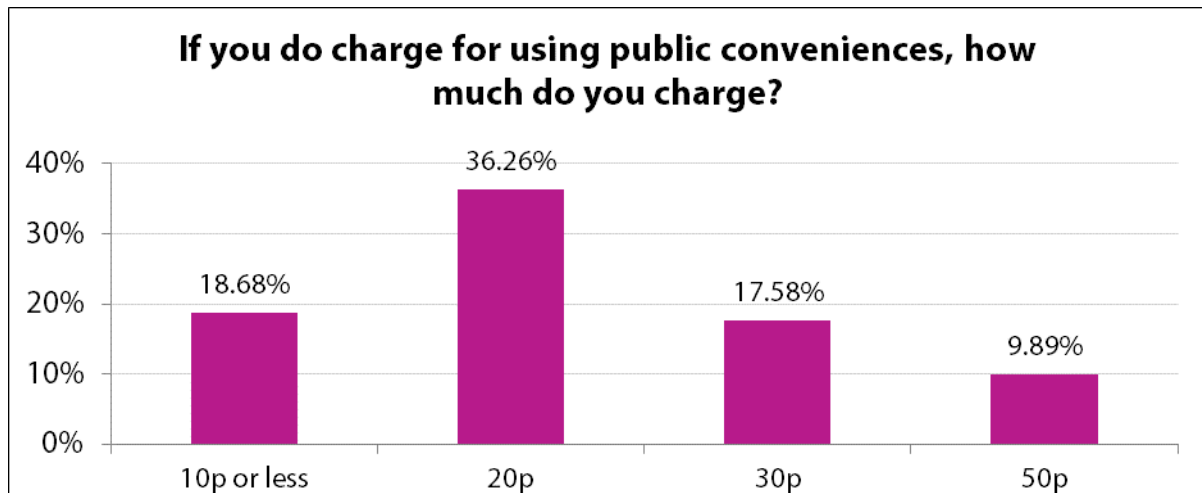
The most important factors were noted as being the health and safety of toilet users (4.34) and the health and safety of the general public (4.29), with the least important factors being the volume of use of individual facilities (3.46) and visual amenity value (3.14).

### 4. Charges and Income

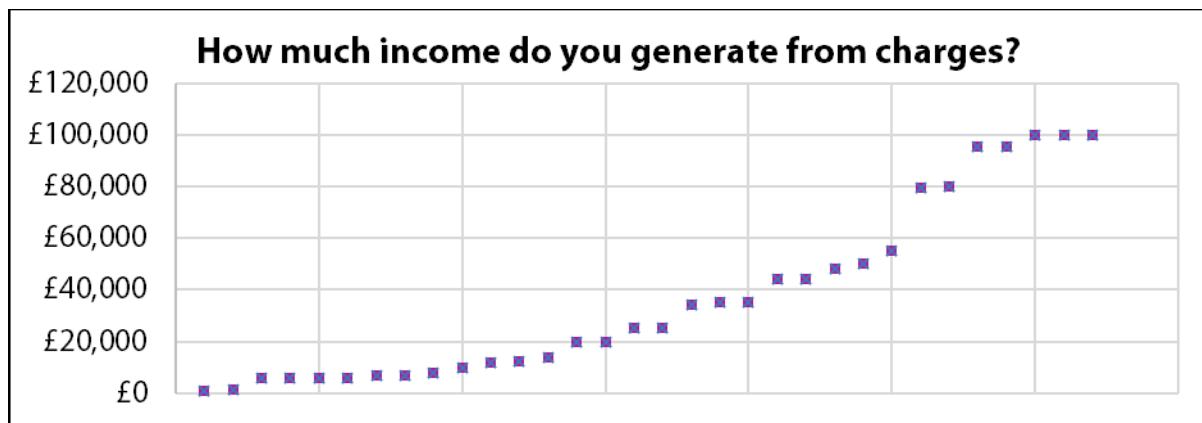
The next series of questions focused on how public conveniences can generate an income for local authorities. The survey asked '**Do you earn advertising or sponsorship income**

**from public conveniences?’** A significant majority of respondents did not raise income this way (92.17%). Only five respondents reported that they did earn an income from advertising or sponsorship.

We also asked: **‘Do you charge the public for using public conveniences?’** Most respondents (55.42%) did not charge. Among those that levy a do charge, 33.73% said that they did charge for some of their facilities and 10.84% said that they charge for all or most of their facilities.



For those that did charge for the use of public conveniences, the most popular charge was 20p, with 36.26% of respondents using this amount.

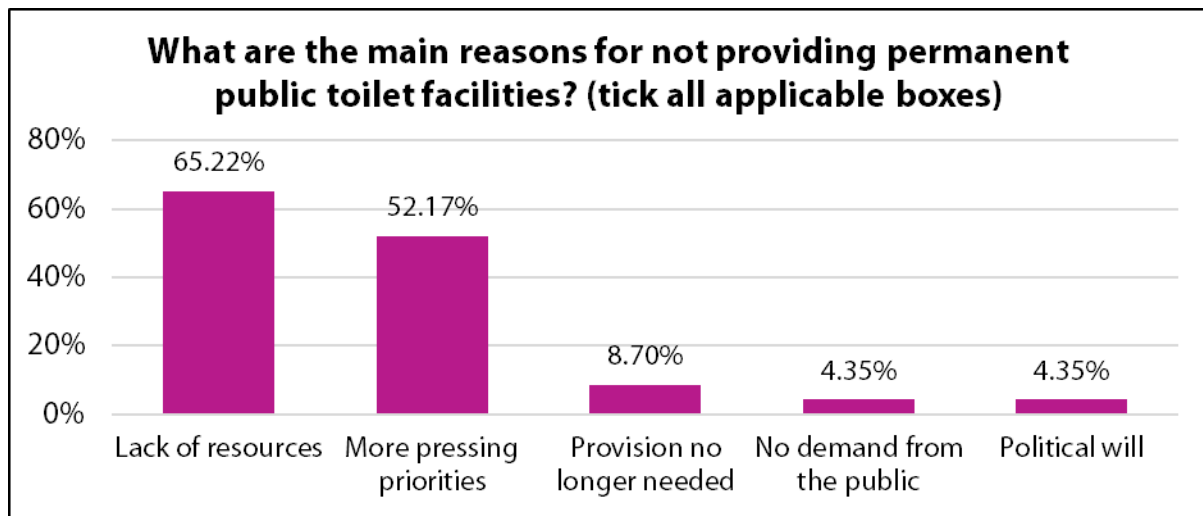


The amount of income generated by local authorities varied considerably with a low of £1,000 per annum to a high of £100,000 per annum. This is most likely influenced greatly by factors such as the type, location of provision, the cost charged per visit and the amount of facilities provided by the local authority. The amount raised per annum is by the 32 respondents to this question is shown in the table above.

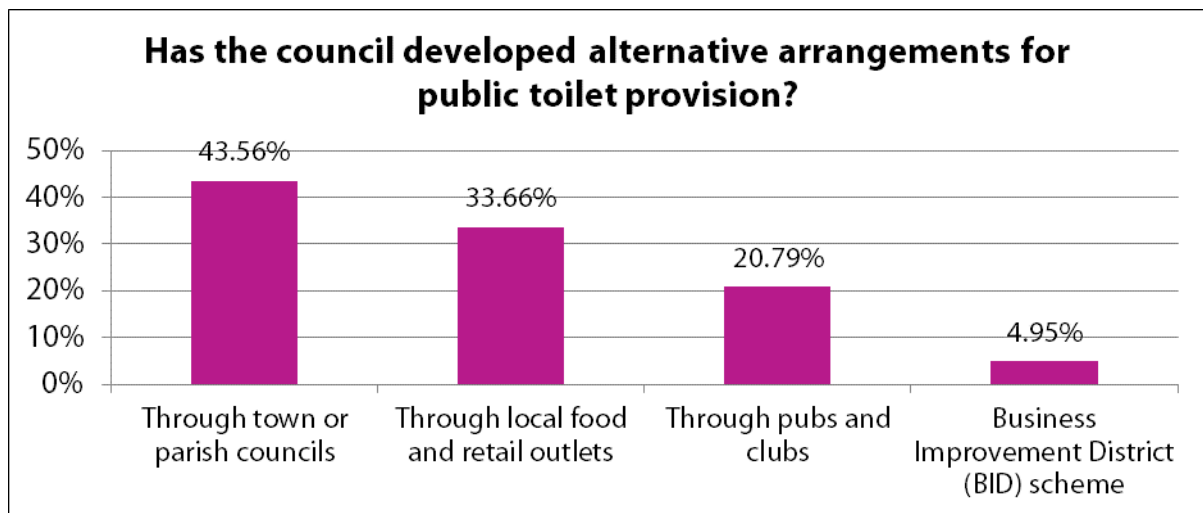
## 5. Reasons for a lack of provision and alternative arrangements

Of the councils that had reported they had **ceased provision of public conveniences**, the majority removed these more than 3 years ago (60.87%), and 4.35% of respondent councils have never provided public toilets.

To gain an understanding of why authorities were removing provision, we asked the question **'what are the main reasons for not providing permanent public toilet facilities?'** The two main reasons reported were a lack of resources and more pressing priorities. The graph below outlines the responses given:



Other responses included anti-social behaviour, vandalism, sexual exploits, privatisation and budget constraints.



The responding councils have several different approaches to alternative arrangements for public toilet provision, with the most popular two being through town and parish councils (43.56%) and through local food and retail outlets (33.66%) via community comfort schemes. Several others also have alternative solutions through things like privately run toilets or use other council owned facilities such as sports centres, libraries and customer centres.

In addition, the survey also asked a range of questions regarding extra provision that was offered, in response: -

- 21.74% of authorities operate a key / access system for disabled toilet facilities.
- 17.39% of respondents provide temporary toilets,

- 13.04% provide toilets on an occasional basis. The main reason given for this was for special events (e.g. temporary street markets, festivals).

## **APSE Comment**

APSE would like to thank our membership for continuing to share information about their services through our surveys.

Compared to last year's report, the provision of public conveniences by local authorities has dropped by 5.1% to 86.2%. With 55.42% of respondents not charging for the use of public conveniences, the continual tightening of local authority budgets and the lack of a statutory requirement to provide provision, the removal of public conveniences may seem like an easy target in the savings process.

However, there is a strong case to be made for retaining public conveniences. From a commercial perspective, several authorities in this survey have reported earning up to £100,000 per annum from charges, which may be used to offset cutbacks in other budgets. This income source doesn't take into consideration the additional income to local economies, as according to Professor Clara Greed of University of the West of England "good toilet provision has been shown to increase retail turnover, tourist numbers and economic growth".

Providing public toilets also supports the elderly and disabled members of our local areas who may depend on their access to maintain their independence in the community.

APSE would recommend considering exploring methods of financing public conveniences such as charging or introducing complimentary 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.

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