



association for public service excellence

# Local Authority public conveniences provision 2023



Briefing 23/27  
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## **Local authority public conveniences provision 2023**

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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 2023, which was sent out to local authority contacts throughout the UK and 87 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.

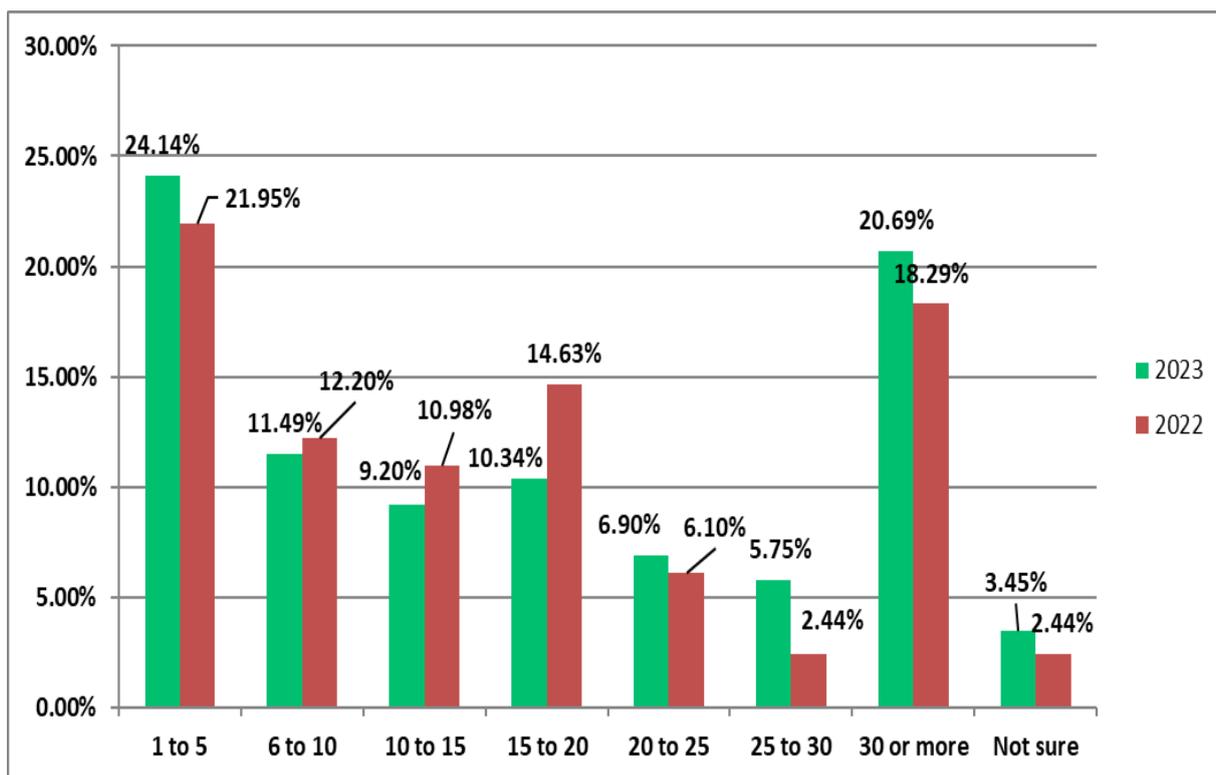
## **2 Results**

Respondents were UK wide with 50.57% from England, 6.90% from Northern Ireland, 27.59% from Scotland and 10.34% 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, 95.45%, 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, and they are consistent with the number of permanent facilities provided in 2022. The greatest percentage of respondents report that there are one to five facilities with 24.14% of respondents advising this to be the case. The second highest percentage of respondents, 20.69%, 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 (93.02%) reported that they provided separate male and female provision and 39.53% advised that they provided unisex / gender-neutral facilities. When it came to baby changing facilities, 51.16% have a separate facility, 39.53% report having this provision in the female toilets and 29.07% 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?

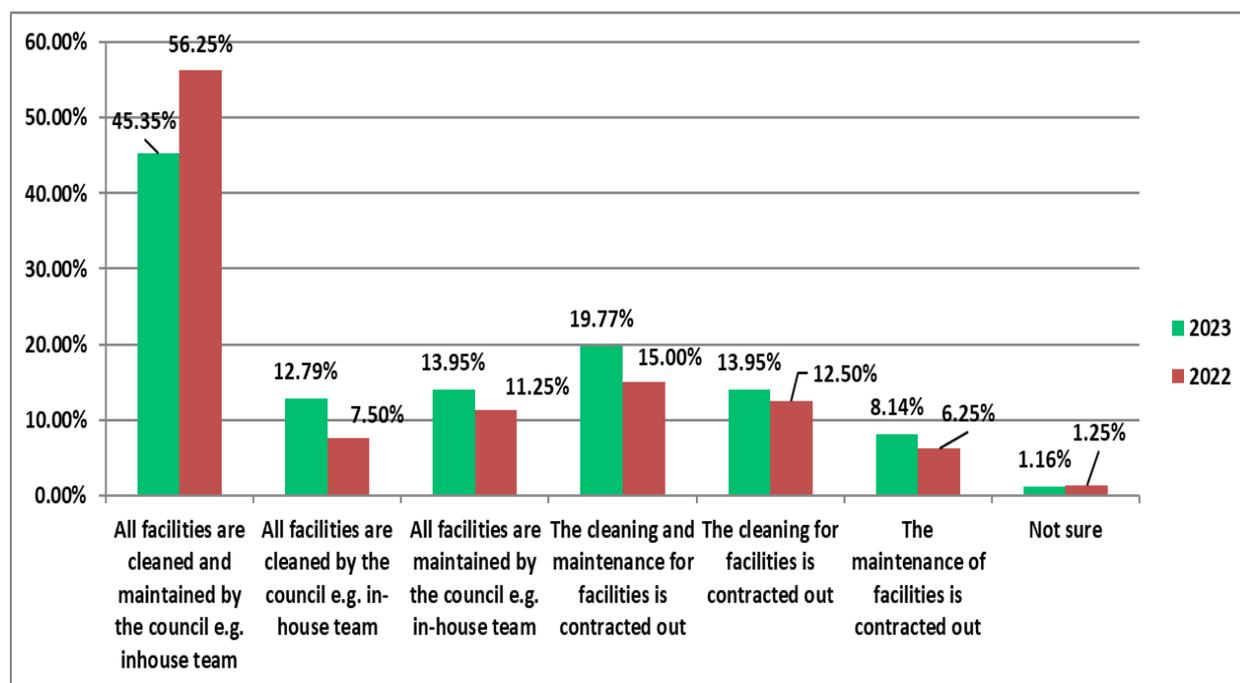
It was stated by 22.35% of respondents that they did not provide temporary provision, 48.24% reported that the council does provide temporary provision and 29.41% make temporary provision available on an occasional basis.

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 is maintained and cleaned to gain an understanding of the model that local authorities have adopted. The graph below outlines the responses received for the 2023 and the 2022 survey.



Just under half of the respondents, 45.35%, report that the facilities are maintained and cleaned by an in-house team, which is a 10.90% decrease from the 2022 survey. 19.77% state that the cleaning and maintenance is contracted out, which is an increase from the 15.00% reported in 2022 and 13.95% 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.

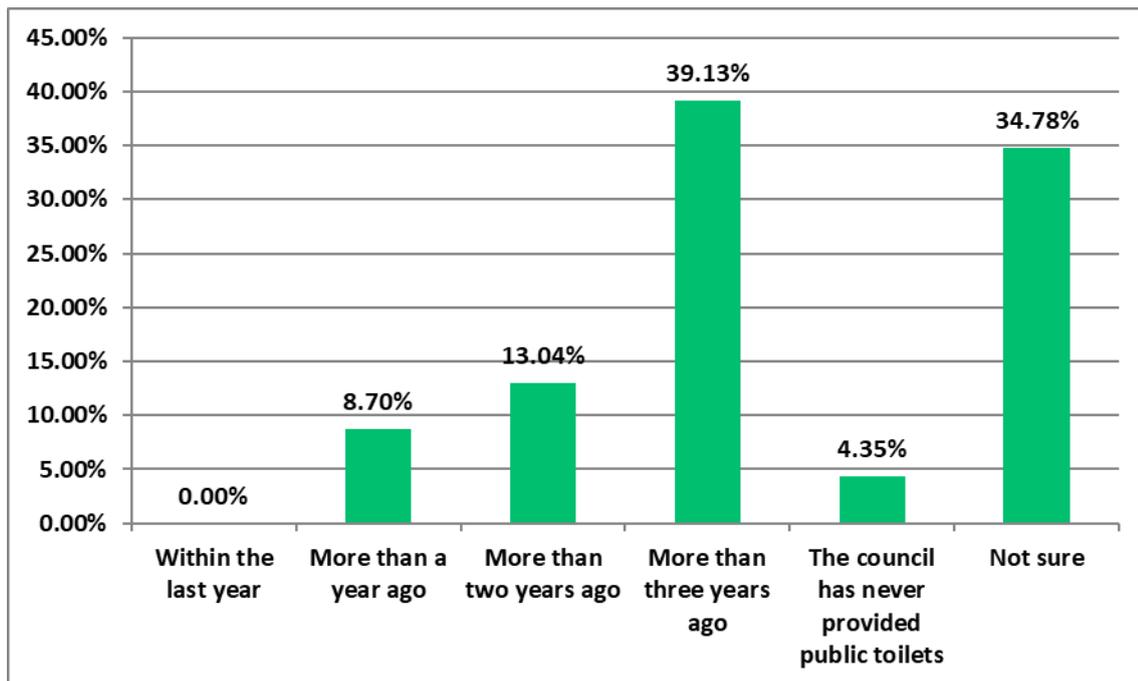
### 3.5 How has the overall level of provision provided by the council changed since 2012?

APSE was keen to understand how provision had changed over the last decade. The responses from the survey show that over half of the respondents (54.02%) report that the provision provided by the council has decreased or significantly decreased since 2012. By

comparison, only 18.39% report that the provision has increased or significantly increased in 2023. It was stated by 25.29% of respondents that the facilities provided have remained the same.

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

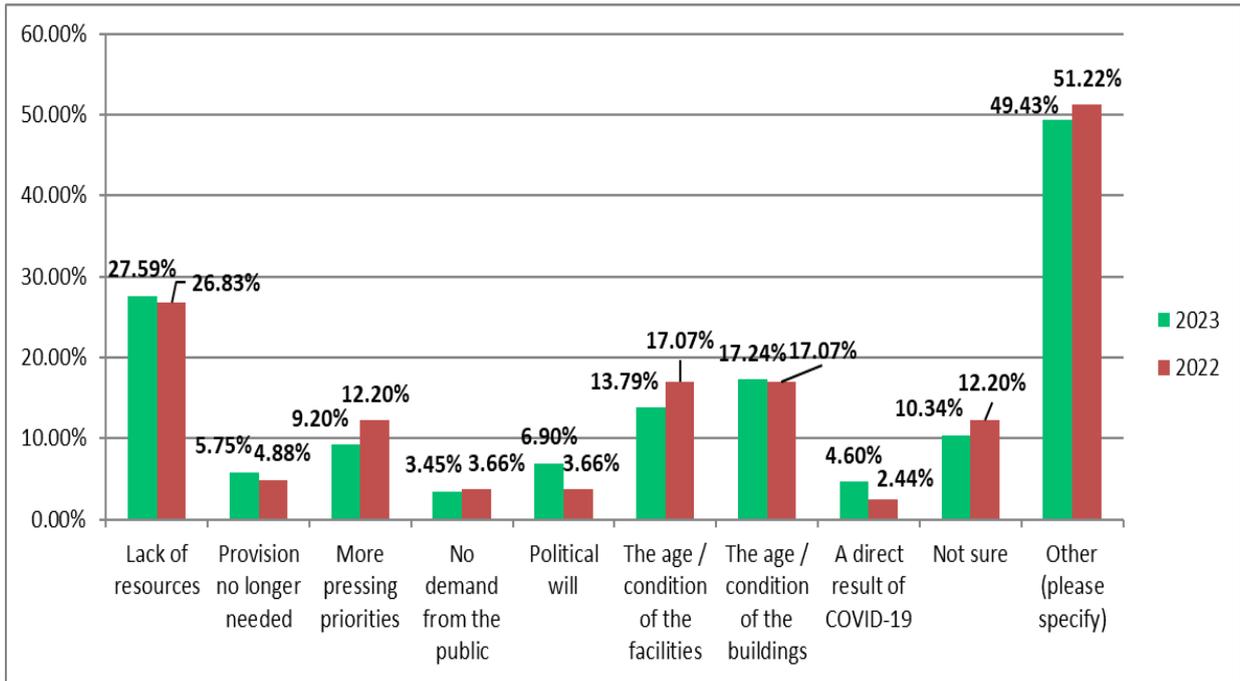
With over 50% of respondents reporting that the provision has decreased in the last ten years, the survey sought to establish when local authorities had ceased to provide public toilets. The graph below outlines the responses received.



The largest number of respondents, 39.13%, report that they had ceased providing the provision more than 3 years ago with a further 34.78% advising that they were not sure when the provision ceased. This lack of data is most likely due to staff changes within the local authority.

### 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.



The responses when compared with the previous year are consistent. With 27.59% of respondents to the 2023 survey reporting that lack of resources was the reason.

The age and condition of the facilities has seen the largest decrease in responses from 17.07% in 2022 to 13.79% in 2023.

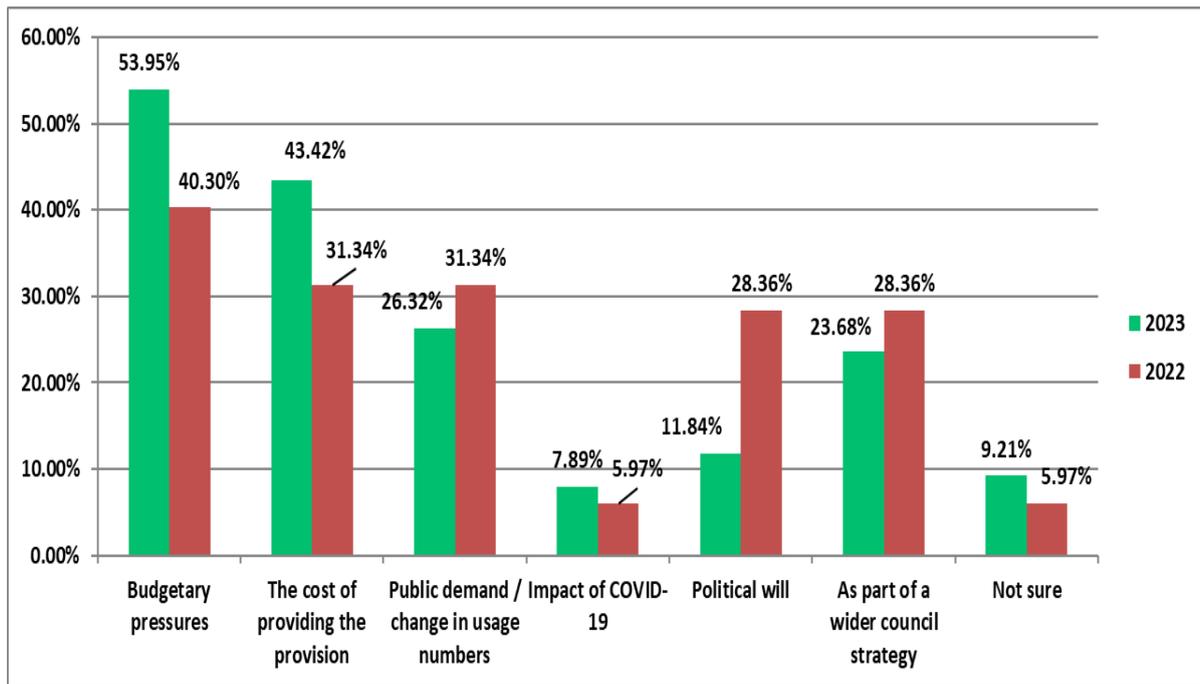
Over half of the respondents stated that there was an alternative reason, and these were specified as being that the facilities had been transferred as a community asset, the provision was no longer being used and the fact that there was not a statutory requirement to provide the provision. This further 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, 36.05% report that there is a review currently being undertaken, 36.05% have no plans in place to review and 15.12% are looking to commence a review in the next couple of years.

### 3.9 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 in 2023 and 2022.



Budgetary pressures were stated as being a driver by the greatest number of respondents with 53.95% of respondents reporting this to be the case in 2023, which is an increase from 40.30% in 2022 and 43.42% cite the cost of providing the provision was the driver to undertake a review, which is an increase from 31.34% in 2022.

It is clear from the responses to this question that budgetary pressures and the cost of providing the provision have become the main reason for reviewing the provision. Which is a slight change from 2022, where public demand was stated as a reason for reviewing. This could be in part attributed to the COVID-19 restrictions which reduced overseas travel and more people taking their holidays within the UK, therefore, increasing the demand for public conveniences facilities, especially in tourist hotspots.

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

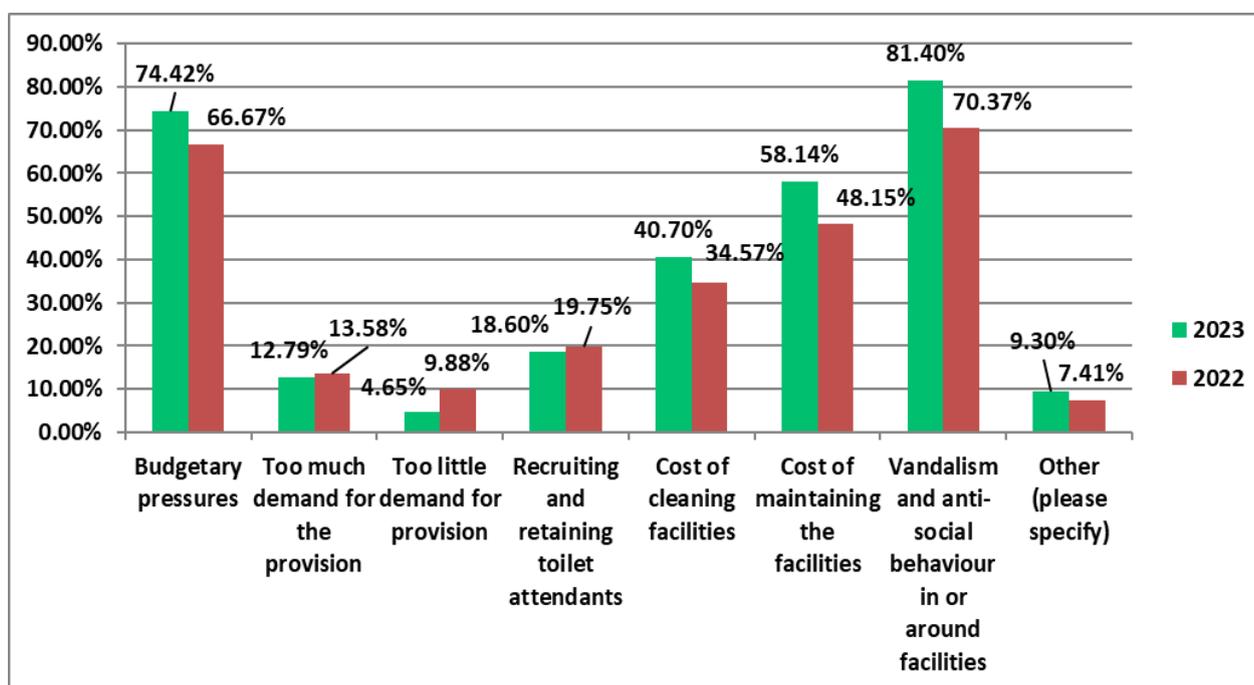
The COVID-19 pandemic impacted public convenience provision and the table below provides an outline of the measures that were introduced as a temporary measure and as a permanent measure. It is clear from the table below that the pandemic has only resulted in permanent changes to the cleaning specifications and the removal of charging mechanisms.

	As a temporary	As a permanent
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	measure	measure
Closed sinks / cubicles and urinals to comply with social distancing	100.00%	0.00%
Changed the cleaning specification	76.99%	20.34%
Put in place an attendant	88.89%	11.11%
Removed the charging mechanism	72.73%	27.27%
Reduced opening hours	92.00%	8.00%

### 3.11 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 2023 and 2022 surveys.



The responses 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 11.03% from 2022 to 81.40%. 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 the 2023 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.

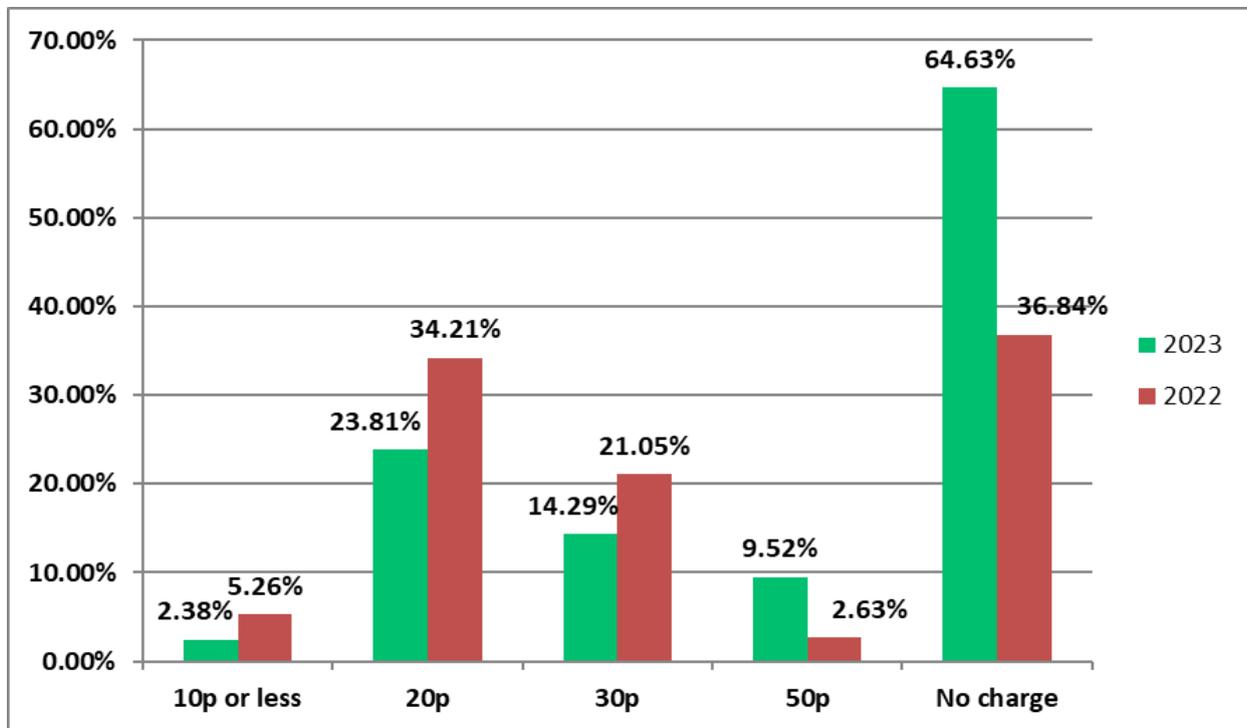
- Rural facilities in tourist areas are in high demand for short periods of time.
- Expectations of the levels of cleanliness.

## 4 Charging for provision

The survey asked if councils charged for their facilities and 64.63% reported that they did not charge, 21.95% charged for some of the facilities and 13.41% 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 2023 and 2022.

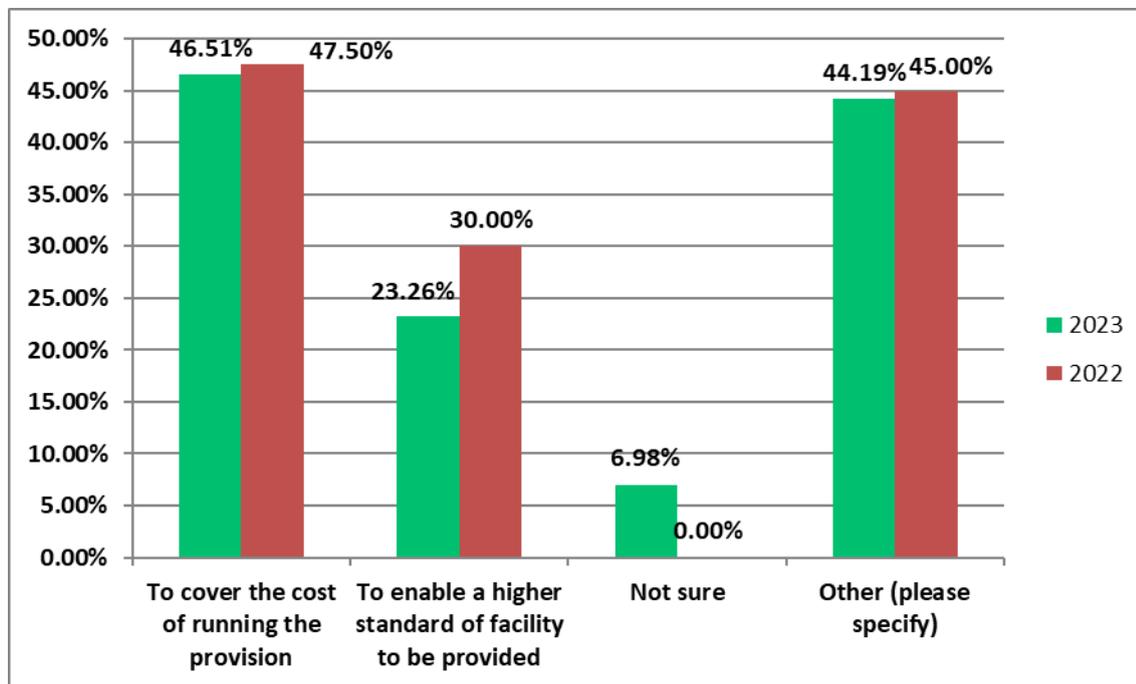


The amount charged ranged from 10p up to £1. The most commonly charged fee is 20p with 34.21% advising that this was the average charge.

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 (46.51%) 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 (95.12%) said they did not earn sponsorship or advertising income from the public conveniences, 3.66% 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?

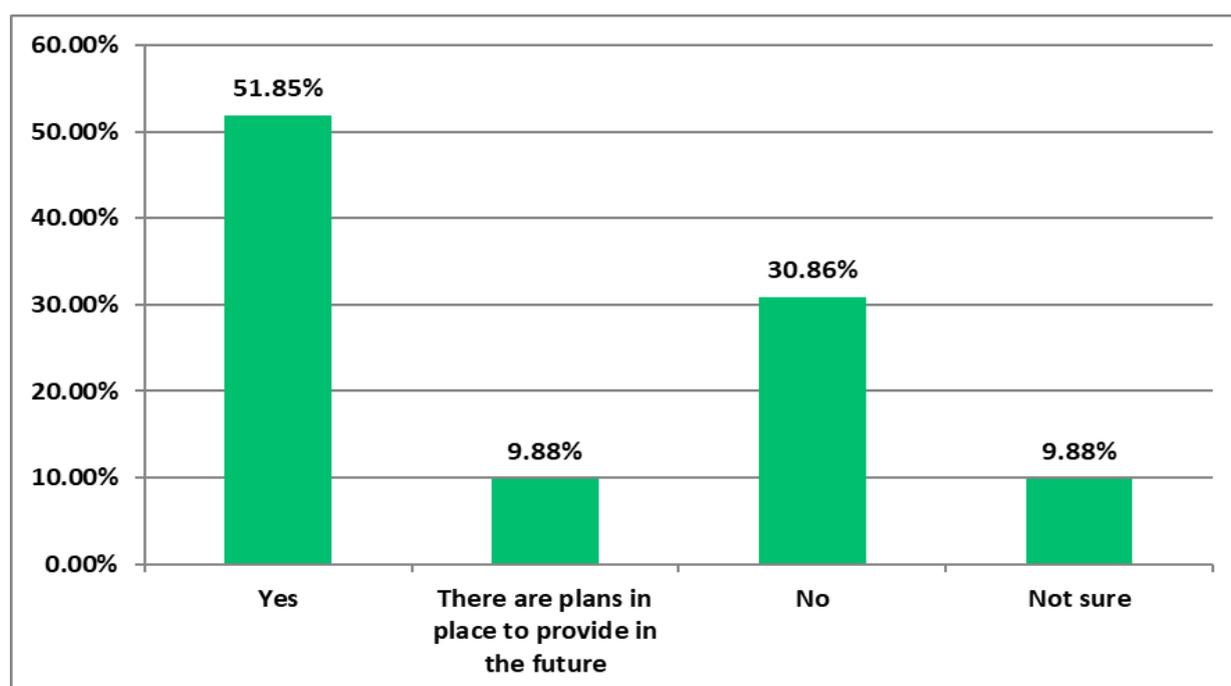
90.24% of respondents operated a key / access system for the disabled toilet facilities, and 4.88% reported that they do not have this type of system in place.

### 5.2 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 (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, (51.85%) with a further 9.88% 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.

There was funding made available in the Spring Statement 2022 to assist in providing the provision and just over 13.41% of respondents reported that the authority had accessed

this funding. However, just under 40.24% of respondents advised that they had not accessed any funding and a further, 42.68% were not sure if this was the case.

## 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.

21.52% of respondents confirmed that there was a strategy in place, a further 18.99% did not have an agreed strategy in place yet, whilst 39.24% did not have a strategy, 16.46% were unsure if there was one in place, and 11.84% responded with 'other'.

Those that selected 'other' reported in the comments that a strategy was currently been progressed but had not been formally adopted.

### 6.1 How important are the following factors to the council's strategy for public toilets?

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

	Quite important		Important		Highly important	
	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022
Cost	14.04%	13.85%	35.09%	43.08%	40.35%	36.92%
Health and safety of toilet users	5.26%	6.15%	45.61%	38.46%	45.61%	<b>52.31%</b>
Health and safety of public	7.02%	7.69%	45.61%	47.69%	<b>43.86%</b>	<b>41.54%</b>
Needs of defined groups in the community	17.54%	15.38%	42.11%	44.62%	29.82%	32.31%
Environmental factors	38.60%	33.85%	40.35%	43.08%	8.77%	13.85%
Business interests e.g., tourism, night-time economy	26.32%	23.08%	43.86%	41.54%	14.04%	20.00%
Workforce health and safety	15.79%	13.85%	38.60%	35.38%	<b>36.84%</b>	<b>43.08%</b>
Visual amenity value	28.07%	35.38%	38.60%	30.77%	7.02%	6.15%
Volume of use of individual facilities	28.07%	29.23%	<b>49.12%</b>	<b>47.69%</b>	10.53%	9.23%

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

## 6.2 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.

	Implemented	Plan to implement
Installed commercial washroom products (e.g., toilets / urinals) that require less water consumption	55.56%	44.44%
Amended cleaning regime to include more sustainable cleaning products / methodology	60.00%	40.00%
Installed low energy usage technology (e.g., LED Lights, reduced energy hand dryers)	75.51%	24.49%
Installed green technologies (e.g., solar panels)	12.50%	87.50%
Switched to more environmentally friendly consumables (e.g., soap, toilet paper)	54.29%	45.71%

The responses show that councils have taken various steps and implemented measures to improve sustainability with 75.51% of respondents advise that they had installed low energy usage technology. 60.00% of respondents reported that they have amended cleaning regimes to include more sustainable cleaning products / methodology.

In addition, the vast majority of respondents (87.50%) 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 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 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, 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. 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) should also be considered. 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 recent report in [The Guardian which cites APSE research.](#)

**Vickie Hacking,**  
**APSE Principal Advisor**

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