



association for public service excellence

Local authority public conveniences provision 2026



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Local authority public conveniences provision 2026

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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.

Results at a glance		
Indicator	2026	Change from 2025
Authorities providing permanent public conveniences	95.9%	+4.2 %
Authorities maintaining 30 or more facilities	24.5%	+3.7 %
Cleaning and maintenance delivered wholly in-house	57.1%	–12.5 %
Provision decreased over the last five years	34.7%	–7.0 %
Currently reviewing provision	38.8%	–4.7 %
Vandalism and anti-social behaviour cited as a challenge	83.7%	+9.8 %
Authorities that do not charge	67.4%	+8.3 %
Authorities providing Changing Places toilets	64.6%	+2.7 %
Authorities with a formally agreed strategy	25.6%	+0.6 %

2 Local Authority Public Conveniences Survey

APSE conducted an online survey between July and October 2026. Of the responses received, 38.78% were from local authorities in England, 6.12% from Northern Ireland, 34.69% from Scotland and 4.08% from Wales, providing a current UK-wide snapshot of public convenience provision.

The survey covered the scale and type of provision, operating models, charging, accessibility, strategic planning, vandalism, alternative provision and environmental measures.

Where questions and response options are comparable, the report shows movement against the 2025 survey and retains 2024 context where it remains available. Percentages are based on responses to each question; some questions allowed multiple selections.

3 Type of provision

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

Permanent provision remains widespread: 95.9% of respondents provide and maintain permanent public conveniences, up from 91.7% in 2025. Nearly one quarter (24.5%) maintain 30 or more facilities, compared with 20.8% in 2025.

The distribution remains varied. The share maintaining 30 or more facilities increased by 3.7%, while the 15–20 and 25–30 bands both reduced. This reflects different settlement patterns, visitor demand and delivery arrangements across authorities.

Two respondents were unsure of the number maintained and one selected another response, indicating that asset data is not complete in every authority.

3.2 What type of permanent provision does your authority provide?

Separate male and female provision remains the most common format, reported by 91.8% of authorities, up 4.9% from 2025. Unisex or gender-neutral provision was reported by 40.8%, down 7.0%. Baby-changing facilities were most often available in female provision (51.0%), followed by male provision (32.7%) and separate facilities (22.4%).

Respondents also commented that local authorities provided separate accessible toilets and Changing Places facilities.

3.3 Do you provide temporary toilets?

Temporary toilets are used by 20.4% of respondents and a further 26.5% provide them occasionally. Use is concentrated around events, seasonal visitor demand and temporary closure or refurbishment of permanent facilities.

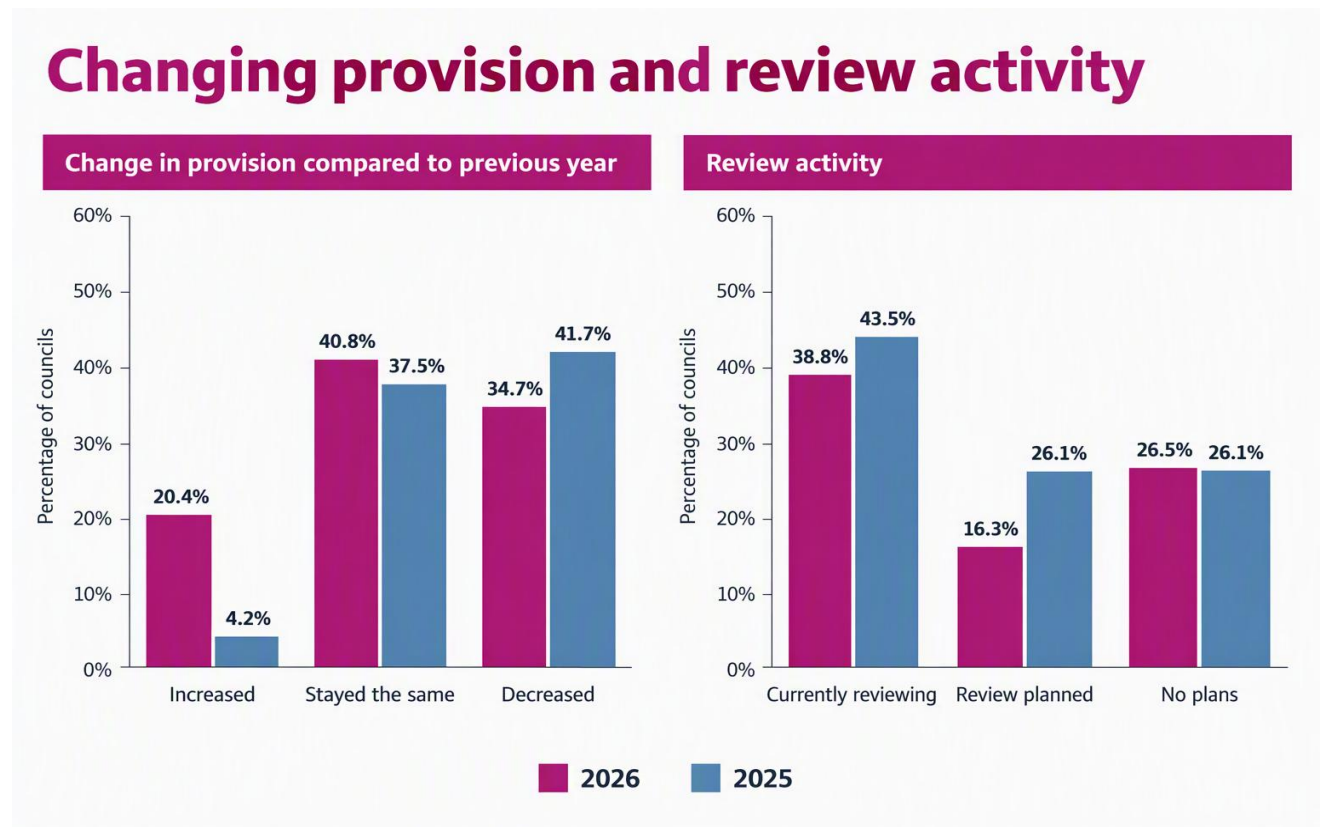
3.4 How is the provision maintained and cleaned?

A wholly in-house cleaning and maintenance model remains the single most common arrangement, reported by 57.1% of respondents. This is lower than 69.6% in 2025 and 61.0% in 2024 but still remains around 60%. Responses also show mixed models involving council teams, contractors, parish councils and community organisations.

The 2026 results do not indicate a simple move towards either insourcing or outsourcing. Fourteen per cent contract out both cleaning and maintenance, while separate contracting arrangements and hybrid local models remain in use.

3.5 How has the overall level of provision provided by the council changed in the last five years?

Over the last five years, 40.8% of respondents said provision had stayed the same, 20.4% reported an increase and 34.7% reported a decrease. Compared with 2025, the share reporting an increase rose by 16.2%, while the share reporting a decrease fell by 7.0%.



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

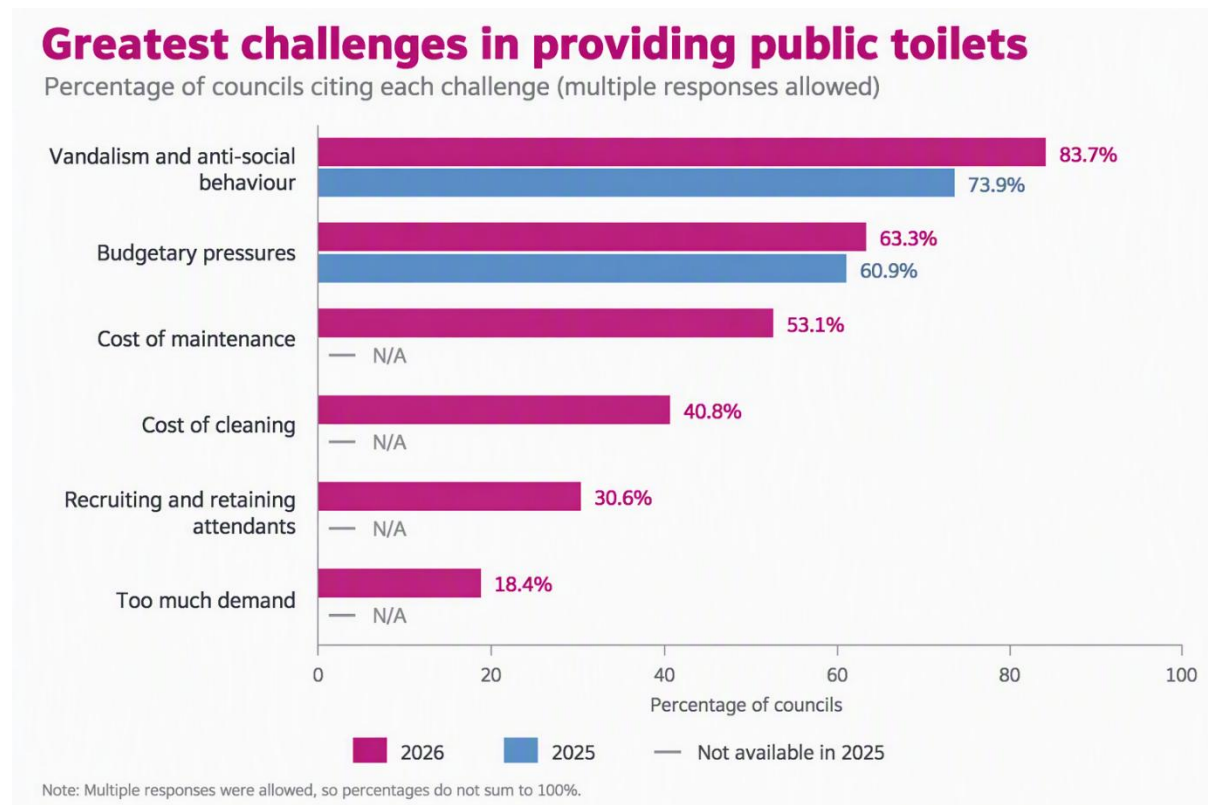
The majority of respondents stated that they still provided permanent facilities. For the few that did not provide permanent provision, among the stated barriers, lack of resources was selected by 26.5%, vandalism and anti-social behaviour by 18.4%, and more pressing priorities by 12.2%.

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

Review activity remains significant: 38.8% are currently reviewing provision and 16.3% plan to review it within 12–24 months. The proportion currently reviewing is 4.7% lower than in 2025, while 26.5% report no plans to review.

3.8 What are the greatest challenges in providing public toilet facilities?

Vandalism and anti-social behaviour are the leading challenges, cited by 83.7% of respondents. Budgetary pressures followed at 63.3%, with the cost of maintenance cited by 53.1% and the cost of cleaning by 40.8%.



The proportion citing vandalism and anti-social behaviour increased by 9.8% from 2025, while budgetary pressure increased by 2.4%. This combination presents both an operational and financial risk, particularly where repeated damage affects availability.

Comments on this question identified the following additional challenges:

- Facilities are not 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.

3.9 What measures has the council put in place to mitigate the impact of vandalism and anti-social behaviour?

With vandalism and anti-social behaviour cited as a principal reason for ceasing provision and as one of the greatest operational challenges, APSE sought to establish the measures councils had introduced to mitigate their impact.

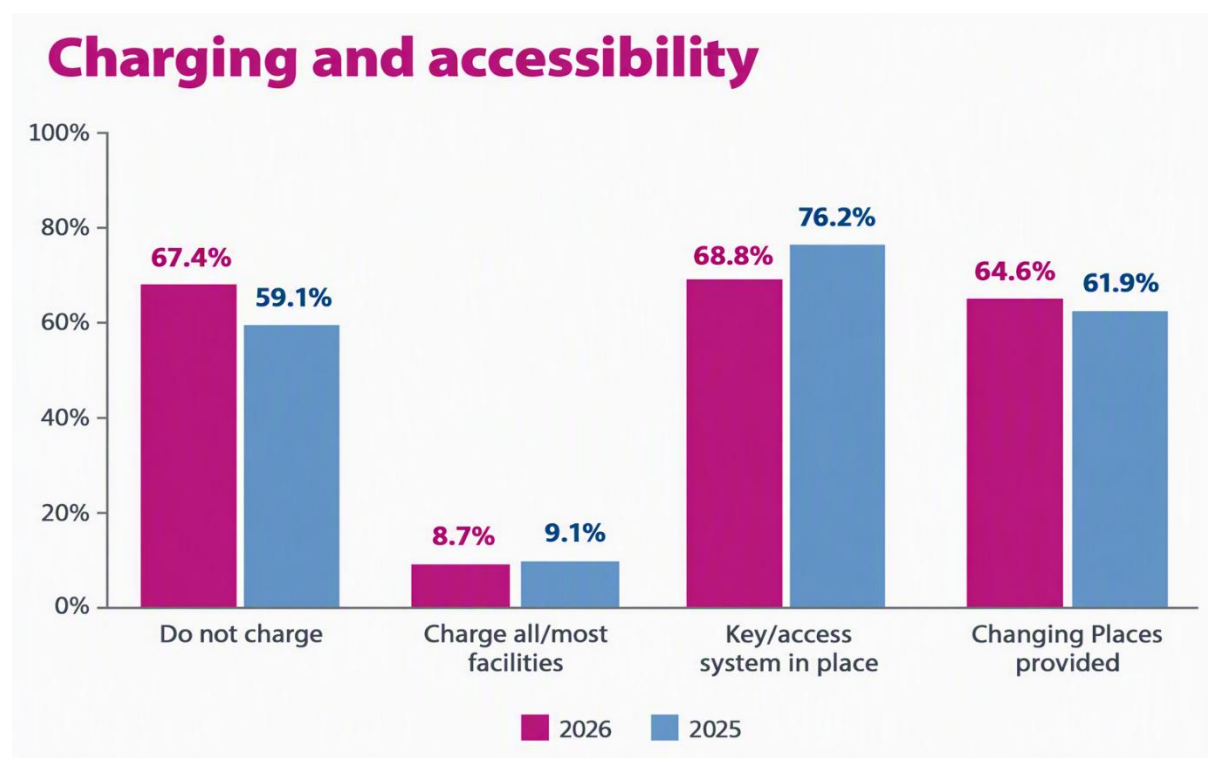
The most common response is to close facilities during higher-risk periods (65.9%). Half of respondents work with the police and 29.5% use CCTV or other security measures. Some authorities also work with anti-social behaviour teams, youth services, schools and community groups.

3.10 Has the council developed alternative arrangements for public toilet provision?

Alternative provision is commonly delivered through town or parish councils and local food or retail outlets, each reported by 34.4% of respondents to this question. Other arrangements include asset transfers, community toilet schemes, grants to businesses and signposting to council buildings.

4 Charging for provision

The survey asked if councils charged for their facilities and the graph below provides a comparison of the responses from the last two years.



Most authorities continue to provide free access: 67.4% do not charge, compared with 59.1% in 2025 and 51.2% in 2024. A further 23.9% charge at some facilities, while 8.7% charge at all or most facilities.

4.1 How much do you charge and, where charges vary, what is the average amount?

Where charges apply, stated amounts range from 10p or less to more than 50p, with several authorities reporting variable charges of 20p to £1 depending on location and subsidy.

4.2 What is the reason for charging for the provision?

Covering operating costs is the main stated reason for charging, selected by 40.6% of respondents to this question, up 2.2% from 2025. No authority reported charging to make a profit. Comments also refer to controlled entry as a means of discouraging misuse.

Advertising and sponsorship do not currently provide a material income stream: 97.8% reported no income from these sources and none reported receiving it.

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

A key or access system is used by 68.8% of respondents, down from 76.2% in 2025. A further 10.4% use a system but do not consider it fit for purpose; comments most frequently refer to Radar key systems operating at selected sites.

4.4 Do your public conveniences include any of the following provisions?

Sanitary bins are widely available in female toilets, with 72.9% providing them in all facilities. Provision in male toilets is less consistent: 51.3% reported no sanitary bins. Around half reported no shelves for colostomy bags (54.8%) and no safe needle disposal repository (65.1%).

4.5 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 (12m²) and well-equipped accessible toilet facilities to be designed and built into new public buildings.

Changing Places provision continues to expand. Almost two thirds of respondents (64.6%) provide at least one facility, up from 61.9% in 2025 and 51.2% in 2024. Reported numbers range from one to ten, with some authorities adding further facilities.

4.6 What measures are you taking in relation to the provision of gender-neutral toilets?

The survey asked how authorities are responding to requirements and local policy considerations for gender-neutral and single-sex provision.

Approaches to gender-neutral provision remain mixed. 43.8% are taking no measures, 22.9% are reviewing current provision and 20.8% are unsure. A small number are developing fully self-contained gender-neutral cubicles or updating signage.

5 Public conveniences strategy

5.1 Does the council have a formally agreed strategy for public conveniences?

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. APSE therefore sought to understand the extent to which councils had a formally agreed strategy for public convenience provision and the factors included within it.

A formally agreed strategy is in place in 25.6% of responding authorities, broadly unchanged from 25.0% in 2025. A further 16.3% answered "not yet", while 44.2% do not have a strategy.

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

APSE sought to gain an understanding of what factors were important to local authorities when developing a strategy for their public conveniences.

Health and safety remains the strongest strategic consideration: 72.7% rate user safety and 65.6% rate public safety as highly important. Cost is rated highly important by 56.3%, while workforce health and safety is rated highly important by 53.1%.

5.3 Has your authority done any of the following?

Evidence remains limited. Twenty per cent have assessed the wider economic benefit, 7.7% have devised a visitor-to-toilet formula and 12.8% have been consulted through a town-centre regeneration scheme. Almost half would find evidence on wider economic benefits helpful, and 35.9% would value a demand formula.

5.4 What measures are being introduced in response to climate change?

Authorities are introducing practical measures to reduce water, energy and consumable use across public convenience assets.

The most established measures are sustainable cleaning products or methods (implemented by 65.4%), water-saving washroom products (62.5%), low-energy technology (62.1%) and environmentally preferable consumables (56.5%). Green technologies remain less mature: 20.0% have implemented them and 80.0% of respondents to this item plan to do so.

6 APSE COMMENT

The 2026 survey shows a service that remains widely provided but under sustained operational pressure. Permanent provision has increased modestly and fewer authorities report a five-year decline than in 2025. However, vandalism, anti-social behaviour and cost pressures are becoming more prominent and continue to place availability, standards and public confidence at risk.

For councils, the priority is reliable, safe and accessible provision aligned with local need. This requires an up-to-date asset register, clear service standards, evidence on usage and condition, and a planned response to recurring damage and higher-risk periods.

The results support a stronger strategic approach. Only one quarter of respondents have a formally agreed strategy, yet more than half are reviewing or plan to review provision. Reviews should consider direct provision alongside town and parish council delivery, community toilet schemes, public access to council buildings and proportionate charging.

Public conveniences are essential town-centre infrastructure. Their availability affects whether residents and visitors can stay longer, use local shops and services, attend events and travel with confidence. Clean, safe and inclusive facilities should therefore be planned as part of town-centre regeneration, place-making and visitor-economy strategies, rather than treated as a stand-alone operational issue.

The UK Government's [Pride in Place Programme](#) provides selected neighbourhoods across the UK with up to £20 million of funding and support over ten years. Its indicative interventions expressly include the provision of public toilets within town-centre, neighbourhood and high-street improvements. Councils in eligible places should work with Neighbourhood Boards and communities to build improvements, refurbishment, accessibility and sustainable operating arrangements into their Pride in Place Plans. The programme applies in selected areas across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition, Scotland has a £10 million Changing Places Toilets Fund for 2025–26 and 2026–27, while councils in Wales can explore the Transforming Towns programme for eligible regeneration schemes. In Northern Ireland, the 2026–27 Local Growth Fund includes capital support for community infrastructure and the regeneration of vacant and underused assets; councils should

confirm scheme eligibility and delivery routes with the relevant funding body before committing expenditure.

Investment decisions should give equal weight to accessibility, whole-life cost and resilience. The expansion of Changing Places facilities is positive, but gaps remain in inclusive equipment and reliable access systems. Environmental measures should be tested against operational performance, particularly where reduced water use can affect reliability in high-use facilities.

Vandalism also has a direct impact on councils' ability to improve the quality and environmental performance of facilities. Repeated replacement of damaged fixtures, controls and equipment diverts scarce capital and revenue from planned refurbishment and retrofit budgets. It can also weaken the case for investing in water-saving, low-energy and other sustainable technologies where there is a high risk that new equipment will be damaged before the investment delivers its intended benefits. Councils should therefore treat vandalism prevention, resilient specification and rapid repair arrangements as integral to improvement programmes, so that recurring damage does not create a cycle in which essential upgrades are continually deferred.

A robust evidence base will help councils make informed decisions about the future of provision and ensure that local needs are met.

[APSE Solutions](#) can support councils with service reviews, options appraisals, demand analysis, asset and condition reviews, benchmarking, service standards, procurement and contract management, and the development of deliverable public convenience strategies. APSE can also provide a critical-friend challenge, facilitate member and officer workshops, and help councils test operating models against affordability, accessibility and local priorities. Through [APSE Performance Networks](#), training, networks, briefings and peer learning, councils can compare performance, share good practice and strengthen the business case for investment. To discuss support, contact Matt Miller at mmiller@apse.org.uk, Emma Taylor at etaylor@apse.org.uk or Vickie Hacking at vhacking@apse.org.uk.

Vickie Hacking,

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