

It's time for relief – let's do something about London's public toilet crisis!

We all use toilets several times a day. Young children, pregnant women and people with bladder or bowel problems need them more frequently. One in five of the population experience the 'loo leash'¹ – we don't leave the house as often as we would like to. More than half of us reduce our fluid intake when we go out, risking dehydration. If you are unable to walk far or fast, the need for easy access becomes ever more acute. This requirement increases with age. More than half of the people who experience urinary incontinence in the UK are over 65.

Yet public toilets have been closing at an alarming rate¹ – one in five across the UK since 2010. Three-quarters of the population say there are not enough toilets in their area. The lack of toilets has a serious impact on the behaviour of older people. It impedes our ability to go about our daily business. We believe adequate public toilet provision is an essential feature of an age-friendly city.

THE FIVE POINT TOILET MANIFESTO FOR LONDON

In the London Plan (in accordance with World Health Organisation age-friendly principles²) the Greater London Authority (GLA) should make explicit the need to provide and maintain free accessible public and community toilet facilities and support the obligations specified below:

- 1 **Community toilet provision is a public health responsibility** which all London councils must acknowledge, and engage with, those protected under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).
- 2 **Boroughs should produce an annual toilet strategy** to cover all community-based provision and identify a named lead officer to develop and monitor all aspects of provision.
- 3 **There should be coordinated provision of information** about toilets in digital, hard copy and accessible formats – the GLA should research how the older public use such information, paying particular attention to minority views and experience.
- 4 **The GLA should make the provision of community toilets** a planning condition for all new developments of more than five hundred dwellings and audit the provision of public and community toilets in all London town centres.
- 5 **London's older citizens and campaigners should monitor** and scrutinise toilet provision where they live and identify neighbourhoods in need of investment and improvement.

Why something must be done

This is a matter that needs addressing now – and for the future as London's older population grows. The number of Londoners over 85 – those of us most affected by barriers to participation – is projected to increase by nearly 40 percent³ during the period from 2018 until 2024.

So as London prepares to become an age-friendly city and reorganises itself in response to the COVID-19 pandemic it's time for something to be done. Poor toilet provision is affecting our health and morale and limiting many people's lives.

How the law can help

Toilets are not a statutory requirement – local authorities don't have to provide them. But nor are they just optional. Under the Equality Act (2010) older people, people with disabilities such as bladder and bowel problems, and pregnant women are recognised as *protected groups*. Public bodies, like the local council, must have due regard for their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED – Section 149 of the Equality Act).⁴ In this case the PSED obliges public organisations to:

- **Remove or minimise disadvantages** suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- **Take steps to meet the needs** of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- **Encourage people from protected groups** to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Who we are

Positive Ageing in London (PAiL) and Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE) are working together to demand change. We've been inspired by Dr Jane Hopkins whose innovative research⁵ in the Royal Borough of Greenwich gets to grips with the problem and points the way forward for older people to take decisive action. We're launching the Toilet Manifesto for London today on World Toilet Day.

The Toilet Manifesto for London Group



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