

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Local Toilet Strategy May 2019



Introduction

Provision of, and access to toilets is an issue that affects public health. Accessible, clean toilets that are well located in places such as town centres, parks, cycle trails and walking routes can help encourage people to socialise, take exercise and stay more physically active. This has clear health and economic benefits. Conversely, a lack of adequate toilet facilities can impact on a person's physical and mental health, as well as affecting the wider environmental health of the population.

The provision of toilets has implications for public and individual health, transportation, crime prevention, urban design, economic and cultural development and social equity and accessibility. It is an important factor in delivering a 'people friendly' environment for everyone who goes to shopping centres, leisure and entertainment venues, sports facilities, parks and green spaces, everyone who moves about on foot, or bicycle, private or public transport, whether for work or pleasure.

Toilets for public use matter to everybody who goes "away from home" for some reason and remain a high-profile issue. They are, however, even more important to certain groups within society, including older people, people with disabilities, people with particular needs (including certain medical problems), women, children and young people and their families. These groups can be disproportionately affected by poor provision; for example, poor provision is understood to have particular negative impacts on older people, as some may be less likely to leave their homes without having confidence that adequate facilities will be available to them. This can contribute to increased social isolation and inactivity, as well as affecting people's ability to maintain independence and dignity in later life.

Definition of key terms

In this strategy the following terms are used for different types of toilet facility:

Toilet(s): this means a toilet facility that the general public can use that may be in public or private ownership, within a variety of premises and which does not require the user to be a customer or make a purchase.

Traditional public toilet(s): this means a purpose-built toilet facility in local authority ownership or control provided for use by the public. Some quotes in the text from legislation etc. use the term 'public toilet', and in these cases the word 'traditional' has not been included.

Gender neutral toilet(s): this expression means a toilet that is not designated for exclusively male or female use, but can be used by anyone. This type of toilet may previously have been termed 'unisex'.

Changing Place(s): these are fully accessible toilets with a height adjustable changing bench, a hoisting system, a peninsular toilet, and enough space for a person with a disability, his/her wheelchair and two carers.

Standard accessible toilet(s): these are specially designed cubicles in separate-sex toilets or a self-contained gender neutral toilet. These may also be known as 'disabled toilets'.

Why do we need a strategy?

Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017: Provision of Toilets came into force on 31 May 2018 and places a duty on each local authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area. The Act provides that a strategy must include an assessment of the community's need for toilets, including changing facilities for babies and changing places facilities for people with disabilities. The strategy must also provide details of how the LA proposes to meet the identified need.

It is important to note that the duty to prepare a local toilets strategy does not require local authorities to provide and maintain public toilets directly.

Local authorities in Wales have the responsibility to:

- assess the need for toilet provision for their communities;
- plan steps to be taken to meet that needs;
- prepare and publish a strategy; and
- review the strategy and publish interim progress statements.

Local authorities are required to take a strategic view across the area on how facilities can be provided and accessed by the community. We will need to consider a full range of options for making facilities available to the public and consider different ways of meeting an identified need.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act) aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It makes public bodies think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

The WFG Act puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells public bodies how to go about meeting their duty under that Act. The principle is made up of five ways of working that public bodies should follow when carrying out sustainable development. These are:

- looking to the **long term** so we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs;
- taking an **integrated** approach;
- working with others in a **collaborative** way to find shared sustainable solutions;

- **involving** a diversity of the population in the decisions affecting them; and
- acting to **prevent** problems from occurring or getting worse.

Due regard has been made to the above five ways of working when preparing, reviewing, consulting on and publishing this strategy.

The key prevention aims of a local toilets strategy are to:

- identify key toilet facilities in a location;
- identify facilities at risk of being lost to a location, and ways to preserve their use;
- identify alternative provisions if facilities must close;
- identify additional facilities that can be brought into wider use to supplement existing facilities or as a replacement for those that have been lost; and
- identify opportunities for creating new facilities to modern, inclusive specification.

Links with other Council strategies and plans

In order to succeed our local toilet strategy needs to integrate with other existing strategies and plans such as The Blaenau Gwent We Want, Local Well-being Plan 2018–2023, the Local Development Plan 2006-2021, the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan 2016–2019, the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Blaenau Gwent Enterprise Strategy and Blaenau Gwent Town Centre Strategy.

The Blaenau Gwent We Want, Local Well-being Plan 2018–2023 acts as an overarching document that sets the strategic direction at a local level. The objectives of the plan are, Blaenau Gwent wants:

- everyone to have the best start in life;
- safe and friendly communities;
- to look after and protect its natural environments;

- to forge new pathways to prosperity; and
- to encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play.

The City Deal will provide local partners with the powers and resources to unlock significant economic growth across the Cardiff Capital Region. It also provides an opportunity to continue tackling the area's barriers to economic growth by: improving transport connectivity; increasing skills; supporting people into work; and giving businesses the support they need to innovate and grow.

The Destination Management Plan is the strategic document that sets out our vision for a visitor-focussed way forward for tourism development in the area. Its main output is a Destination Action Plan which sets out practical steps that if taken forward jointly by all stakeholders, can make a positive difference; improving the quality of the visitor experience and growing the visitor economy in Blaenau Gwent.

The Council's Well-being Objectives 2017 identifies seven overarching well-being objectives. The local toilets strategy supports the following objectives:

- Create a better, enhanced environment and infrastructure that will benefit our communities, businesses and visitors;
- We will be a modern, smart Authority, providing leadership to enable people and communities to thrive;
- Take a preventative and early intervention approach to support the most vulnerable ensuring, where appropriate, they are protected and supported to achieve personal outcomes and well-being;
- Enabling older people to feel valued and empowered to maximise their independence and lead healthy and engaged lives; and
- Support citizens to take an active and empowered role in their communities to provide resilience.

Aims of the strategy

The aims of this strategy is to review the quality and quantity of local toilets throughout the county borough and to facilitate the provision of clean, safe, accessible and sustainable toilets for residents and visitors to the borough at locations where the need for such facilities has been identified.

To achieve this we will:

- Identify the current level of provision of public toilets;
- Analyse the findings of the assessment of need;
- Consider the requirements of the general population;
- Identify the needs for particular user groups;
- Survey the condition of public toilets facilities which are not currently in use;
- Identify any gaps in current provision; and
- Provide a statement setting out the steps which the Local Authority proposes to take to meet this need.

Reviewing the strategy

Blaenau Gwent CBC will prepare an interim progress report setting out the steps taken in line with their strategy every two years commencing from the date of the last published strategy. The interim progress report will be published within six months of the end date of the two year period. Therefore, following publication in May 2019, the review will take place before the end of May 2021 and be published before the end of November 2021.

Blaenau Gwent CBC will also review the local toilet strategy within a year of each ordinary election for its area. The next election date in Wales is Thursday 5 May 2022 so the latest date for review is 4 May 2023. If no changes are made to the strategy following the post-election review then Blaenau Gwent CBC will publish an interim progress statement covering a two year period commencing from the date of the last election.

Blaenau Gwent CBC may review its strategy at any time following which it must publish a statement of the steps which it has taken in

accordance with the strategy. If following a review, Blaenau Gwent CBC decides to revise the strategy it will publish the revised strategy and then prepare an interim progress report covering the two year period commencing from the date of publication.

Historic provision of public toilet facilities

Historically Blaenau Gwent CBC faced challenges to maintain standards of toilet provision, maintenance and cleaning due to limited funding and pressure on resources, especially since the provision of local toilets for public use is not a statutory function of local authorities in Wales. Therefore, the local authority agreed to the closure of all five public toilet facilities in 2014 to facilitate savings of £36,000. As a result the public toilets in the five towns of Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Abertillery, Brynmawr and Blaina were affected.

In order to encourage local businesses to open up their toilets and increase the number of toilets available for public use Welsh Government (WG) offered a Community Toilet Scheme Grant that was administered by local government. Businesses were offered an annual recompense payment of up to £500. In 2014/15 this funding was transferred to WG Revenue Support Grant.

At the time of the closure of the public toilets, there were 36 Community Toilets operating across the Borough so it was felt there were adequate alternative provisions for the public to access. However, over the last five years the number of community toilets in the area has diminished and the number of local authority supported community toilets is now zero. The main reasons the local authority has been provided with as to why local businesses and partners do not wish to continue to support the initiative is because of issues with anti-social behaviour, vandalism and cleanliness and the associated costs to deal with these issues.

Current Provision

Town Centres are a popular destination for residents across the borough. Following the closure of the five public toilets a number of local community groups and businesses have actively taken on the operation of the toilets in Tredegar, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale. Appendix 1 details the opening hours and facilities available in each of these areas.

Currently the toilet blocks in Blaina and Abertillery remain closed and given the lack of community toilets in operation across the Borough, provision in both these town centre areas would be considered inadequate. Condition surveys have been undertaken which estimates the total capital expenditure needed are in the region of £79,000 and this figure does not include the on-going revenue budget required for operation, cleaning and maintenance. Given the current financial position there is little prospect of the Council being able to allocate any capital or revenue funding to this service so alternative delivery methods will need to continue to be explored.

Today the current provision of public toilets in Blaenau Gwent focuses on leisure facilities and retailers.

Many private retailers and leisure facilities provide public conveniences as part of their developments, for example, Festival Park Outlet Shopping Centre, Leisure Centres, Bryn Bach Park, and provide separate toilet facilities, incorporating WC's, baby changing facilities and accessible toileting available during their opening hours, which are designed to satisfy their footfall. Whilst these are not public toilets, they are facilities which may be used by the public when visiting a particular area, shopping centre or leisure facility and means that there is less of an imperative for the provision of traditional Council run facilities in these areas.

Tourism continues to be an important part of the regional and local economy, as identified in the Destination Management Plan. The latest plan has reported a growth in visitors to the local area which

reinforces the value of tourism to the area and highlights why it is important to continue to grow and improve the local offer. Therefore, the availability of clean, accessible toilets available to the public is increasingly important to the local economy.

Public Consultation

A public consultation exercise was undertaken throughout November and December 2018 to assess the needs of residents, and people visiting or working within the county borough with a view to identifying gaps in provision and how these might be addressed. The public consultation was publicised via the Council's online consultation system. Partner organisations were notified of the consultation exercise with a view to advocating the completion of the survey and during December the public were engaged with at a number of local libraries and Town Centres. However, a low number of consultation responses were received and therefore any results must be considered with caution. A summary of the needs assessment consultation can be found at Appendix 2.

The majority of respondents to the needs assessment, 92%, were residents of the borough and 88% of these responses were in relation to the facilities provided in town centres, highlighting the importance of facilities in town centres for residents. The two most popular areas chosen by the respondent to comment on were Ebbw Vale and Abertillery.

In response to the statement 'There are enough toilet facilities in the area', two thirds of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Of those residents who disagreed or strongly disagreed, they had chosen to comment on the toilet facilities in the town centre areas where there is currently a lack of provision.

A high number of respondents indicated there was insufficient information on where the toilet facilities available actually are but generally felt safe using them and that they were clean and tidy

although some commented that the facilities needed upgrading to modern day standards and would benefit from being decorated.

Respondents were generally willing to pay to use the toilets, however, given the low number of responses to the needs assessment, if the local authority chooses to pursue this as an option, further community engagement would be required to understand if this would be a sustainable option.

Where there is a lack of provision in the town centres, respondents felt that they would use toilets in shops and restaurants if they did not have to buy anything and many commented that they did not think it was right that a purchase had to be made in order to utilise the toilet facilities in pubs and cafes.

When asked for ideas about how improvements could be made to the facilities the majority of respondents stated that the public toilets should be reopened, particularly in the areas where there was a lack of provision. It was also suggested that the Council offer a financial incentive to cafes and shops that agreed to open their toilets for the public to access and provided a cleaner for the facilities.

Many respondents acknowledged the volunteers who had taken on the operation of the toilets as doing a good job and that provision had improved when the toilet facilities had been reopened but that these groups needed help to decorate and upgrade the facilities although they did not specify who would provide this help.

Signposting and mapping publicly available toilets

This is an important part of our strategy so that people who need to visit a toilet can easily access information about the location, opening times, accessibility and type of facilities available.

The Council will periodically review and update the Welsh Government “Lle” data repository to allow access to accurate information by guide and map publishers, residents and visitors.

Lle is a geo-portal that serves as a hub for data and information covering a wide spectrum of topics, but primarily around the environment. Lle will generate all-Wales maps based on the datasets provided by local authorities that can be configured to focus on either the national picture, or on more local areas. The data included in the Lle map will be available as an open data service accessible to everyone. The link to the Lle portal is below.

<http://lle.gov.wales/home>

The dataset will be available in Welsh and English. The public will be able to see and search the data as it appears on the Lle website, to see the whole of Wales or to look at particular areas.

The Welsh Government has not developed an app, as many people are unable to use a smartphone for a number of reasons. It is more appropriate to focus on ensuring the information is available online through a wide range of websites and via traditional offline methods.

Participating premises will also display a sticker in a prominent place, indicating that toilets are available for the public. The sticker will display the logo stipulated by Welsh Government. The British Toilet Association (BTA) also recommends signs be fitted on the outside with information like opening hours, contact information for reporting problems and the specific facilities provided inside, such as if there is a baby-changing room.

Full details of location, opening times and facilities available will be included on the Lle website and updated at regular intervals.

Improving access to toilet facilities

This strategy sets out options to be considered over the next two years in order to increase the provision of local toilets. The main aim will be to make best use of existing provision in Council and partner buildings. To do so Blaenau Gwent will:

Explore all options available to determine whether toilets in Council buildings are to be made available for public use, especially in areas and places where they are most needed;

Continue to work with local partners, local businesses, national retailers, voluntary sector, private sector, Town and Community Councils to explore all options to make more local toilets available where and when they are needed;

Work with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and health care providers to explore all options available to determine whether to allow their toilet facilities available to the public;

Work with Aneurin Leisure to explore all options available to determine whether to allow their toilet facilities available to the public when and where they are most needed;

Aim to ensure that the facilities made available for public use are appropriate and accessible to all sections of the community;

Ensure that the toilet logo sticker is displayed at entrances to all appropriate buildings and businesses;

Improve awareness and information available on toilet provision by updating information on the Blaenau Gwent website and through the Lle website;

Explore options in relation to cleansing operations to ensure standards and provision is maintained efficiently and effectively within the resources available;

Continue to work with the police, residents, local partners and community groups to ensure that public facilities are as safe as possible; and

Continue to ensure that local events continue to provide adequate temporary toilet facilities at organised events.

Conclusions

The success of any strategy is about working in partnership to get the most from scarce resources. This will include establishing relationships between the public, private and voluntary sectors to drive forward sustainable public toilet provision.

We know from our needs assessment consultation exercise that there is a gap between what is needed and what is currently on offer, particularly Blaina and Abertillery town centres. We recognise that as a local authority we cannot afford to plug this gap by working in isolation.

In order to achieve this aim we propose a series of actions that we can take over the next 2 years at the end of which the strategy will be subject to review.

We will seek to explore ways we can work in collaboration with private sector/voluntary sectors to improve provision at all locations where a need has been identified.

All of the publicly available toilet facilities will be signposted and mapped, so that residents and visitors will know where to find them, when they are open and what facilities are available.

Appendix 1

Area	Address	Postcode	Type of toilet (WC, Baby Changing, Accessible, Changing Places)	Level access	Attended - Yes or No	RADAR Key required	Baby Changing Available	Free to use	Opening hours
Ebbw Vale	Market Street	NP23 6HL	WC - Male and Female	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	8.00am - 3.00pm
Brynmawr	Market Square	NP23 4AL	WC - Male and Female	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	8.00am - 5.00pm
Tredegar	Gwent Shopping Centre	NP22 3EJ	WC - Male and Female	Yes	No	Only for separate disabled cubicle	Yes	Yes	8.00am to 5.00pm

Summary of responses to needs assessment consultation

Consultation took place throughout November and December 2018. The survey was available online via the Council's online consultation system and people were signposted to the survey via the corporate website. Partner organisations were e-mailed copies of the links to the survey. During December the public were engaged with at a number of local libraries and Town Centres to complete the survey online via iPad or paper copy.

During the consultation and engagement period only 49 surveys were completed.

Key findings:

- 92% of respondents were residents of Blaenau Gwent;
- 88% of responses were in relation to the facilities provided in town centres;
- 66% of respondents disagreed that there were enough toilet facilities in the area;
- 46% of respondents agreed that the facilities were in good locations;
- 58% of respondents felt safe using the facilities provided;
- 79% of respondents felt there was not enough information on where facilities are located;
- 50% of respondents felt the facilities were open at the times they needed them;
- 57% of respondents felt the facilities were clean and tidy;
- 65% of respondents stated they would be willing to pay to use the toilets; and

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- 73% of respondents would use toilets in shops and restaurants if they didn't have to buy anything.

Demographic:

- 65% of respondents were female;
- 93% of respondents were aged between 35 – 74; and
- 10% of respondents had a disability.

Overview of the local area

Blaenau Gwent is relatively small geographically, being at most 15 miles north to south, and 8 miles east to west. Blaenau Gwent is defined physically by high hillsides dividing the three main valleys. These valleys are home to towns and villages and each community proudly maintains its own character and traditions. Although the towns give the county borough an urban feel, Blaenau Gwent is actually a largely rural area.

In the last 20 years the people of Blaenau Gwent have faced many challenges, with the closure of all the coal mines in the late 1980s, and the Ebbw Vale Steelworks in 2002 leading to many job losses.

In an attempt to reduce the effect of this, significant effort has been put into changing the focus of the local economy towards the manufacturing and services industry. However, over the period there has been an overall loss of jobs and many young people and families have had to move away in search of further education and employment. This is highlighted by a 5% reduction in the population between 1991 and 2011. This is in contrast to Wales overall where there has been a 4% increase. Currently, 49% of Blaenau Gwent working residents have to commute outside the borough to work and commuting distance has increased by more than any local authority in Wales.

Population data

Blaenau Gwent, like the majority of places in the UK, has an overall population which is ageing. Generally, this is because less people are being born than before, and those people that are alive are living longer. The information below shows key trends in population by three distinct age groups (0-15, 16 to 64 and 65 and over):

- 17.5% of the population of Blaenau Gwent were aged 0 - 15 years in 2015, a slightly lower proportion than the 17.9% seen for Wales;

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- The proportion of the people aged 0-15 is decreasing (2011, 17.9%);
- 63.1% of the population were aged 16 - 64 years in Blaenau Gwent in 2015, which was the highest proportion of all the local authority areas in the Gwent region and above the Wales rate which was 61.9%;
- The proportion of the people aged 16-64 is decreasing (2011, 64.2%);
- 19.5% of the population were aged 65 years or over in the (Blaenau Gwent) Gwent region on 30 June 2015. This compares with 20.2% for Wales; and
- The proportion of the people aged 65 and over is increasing (2011, 17.9%).

The 2011 Census showed that 28% of all people who live within Blaenau Gwent stated they had a limiting long-term health problem or illnesses, where day-to-day activities were limited. This was higher than Wales overall (23%), and was the 2nd highest level in Wales (behind Neath Port Talbot with 28%).

More recent statistics from the Annual Population Survey (June 2016) shows that Blaenau Gwent continues to have significantly above average levels of disability with a total of 31.6% of working age people being defined as disabled (economically active core or work-limiting disabled) compared to 22.8% for Wales.

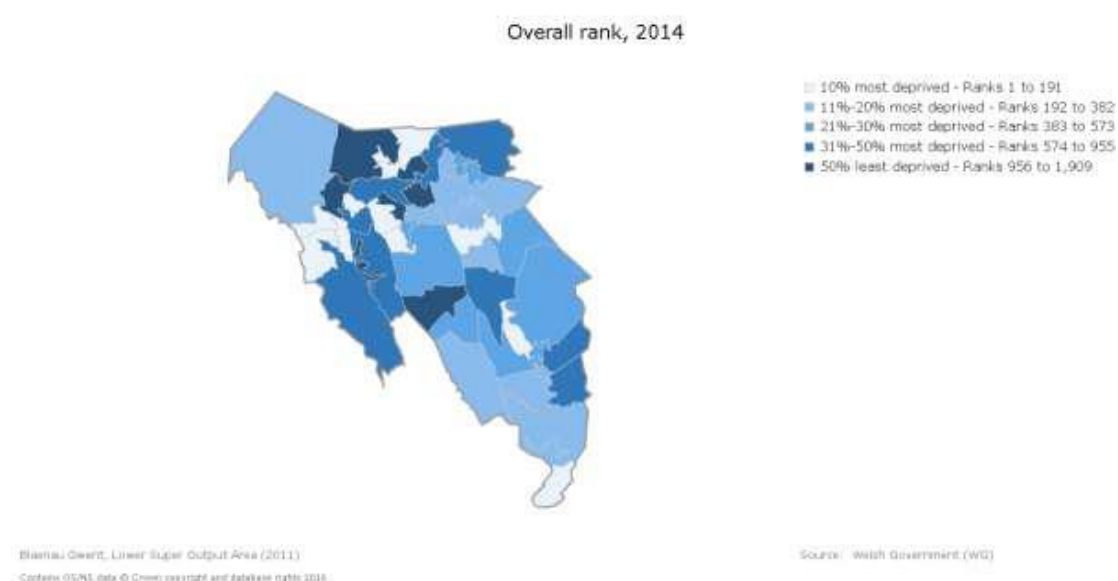
Deprivation in Blaenau Gwent

Figure 1 shows the overall rank of the 2014 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) which captures the extent of deprivation relating to a number of factors and focuses on the proportion of residents in each lower super output area (LSOA) and their level of deprivation.

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The overall index provides a single figure that represents the combination of the eight domains of deprivation within the WIMD. The eight domains are: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographical access to services; housing; physical environment; and community safety. The darker areas of the map represent those areas with a higher percentage of the population in deprivation.

Figure 1: Blaenau Gwent Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014



Blaenau Gwent is the area in Wales with the highest percentage of its LSOAs areas in the most deprived 10% (23.4%).

Deprivation is a key determinant of worse health and specifically life expectancy. Life expectancy has a strong inverse relationship with deprivation; the higher the deprivation of an area the lower the life expectancy. People living in the most deprived neighbourhoods will be significantly more likely to have lower life expectancy and live for fewer years in good health.

On-going spending cuts for public service in Wales

The UK Government began a fiscal policy programme of austerity in response to the recession in 2008 with the intention to reduce budget deficits and public service in Wales continues to be

Appendix 3

affected. There are on-going, long term pressures on public service budgets. Overall, the budget for Wales will be 8% lower in real terms by 2020 than it was ten years earlier in 2010.

Given the budgetary reductions to community and public services, often seen as “lifelines”, older people are at an increased risk of loneliness and isolation. Without the means to leave their homes, or with fewer visits from community workers and service providers, an increasing number of older people will feel lonely and isolated resulting in damaging effects to their mental health.