

Public Toilet Provision Consultation

RESPONDING AS...

Q1. Are you responding to this survey as:

Community Group or Organisation/Community Council

GROUP, BUSINESS OR ORGANISATION NAME

Q2. Please leave the name of your group, business or organisation in the text box provided below.

For Women Scotland

USE OF PUBLIC TOILETS IN GLASGOW

Q5. How often do you use public toilets in Glasgow?

Most days

LOCATIONS

Q7. Where do you typically use a public toilet in Glasgow? (Select ALL that apply)

City centre public toilets

Community buildings (e.g. libraries, museums etc.)

Shopping centres

Local Businesses

Public transportation stations (e.g. bus/train)

Leisure centres

Public parks

Supermarkets

FINDING A PUBLIC TOILET

Q8. Do you feel there are enough public toilets in the city centre?

There are few public toilets

LOCATING THE NEAREST PUBLIC TOILET

Q10. Have you ever had difficulty locating where your nearest public toilet is?

Yes, occasionally

SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC TOILETS IN GLASGOW

Q13. How would you rate the following in the city centre? (Tick ONE BOX PER ROW)

	Very good	Fairly good	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know
The number/provision of public toilets available during the day				X		
The number/provision of public toilets available in the evening/night					X	
The number of public toilets available during the weekend					X	
The cleanliness of public toilets			X			
The times that public toilets are open				X		

SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC TOILETS IN GLASGOW

Q16. Have you experienced any of the following issues in public toilets in Glasgow recently?

Lack of public toilet locations

Lack of baby changing stations

Lack of supplies (e.g. toilet roll, soap etc.)

Broken or blocked toilets

Privacy concerns (e.g. gaps in stall doors, poor design etc.)

SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC TOILETS IN GLASGOW

Q17. How often do you experience these issues in Glasgow?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely
Lack of public toilet locations		X	
Lack of baby changing stations		X	
Lack of family rooms			
Lack of changing places for disabled people (for more info click here)			
Toilet being 'out of service'			
Inadequate cleaning			
Lack of supplies (e.g. toilet roll, soap etc.)		X	
Lack of access to period or other health related products			
Bad odours (e.g. due to poor ventilation and irregular cleaning)			
Overflowing bins			
Broken fixtures			
Vandalism			
Broken or blocked toilets		X	
Poor lighting			
Security issues (e.g. drug-use, anti-social behaviour etc.)			
Privacy concerns (e.g. gaps in stall doors, poor design etc.)		X	
None of the above			
[Insert text from Other]			

SAFETY USING PUBLIC TOILETS IN GLASGOW

Q18. How safe or unsafe do you feel when using public toilets in Glasgow? (Tick ONE BOX PER ROW)

	Very safe	Fairly safe	Somewhat unsafe	Very unsafe	No opinion/I don't use it at this time
During the day on weekdays (Monday to Friday)		X			
At night on weekdays (Monday to Thursday)			X		
During the day on weekends (Saturday and Sunday)		X			
At night on weekends (Friday, Saturday and Sunday)				X	

Q19. If you feel unsafe using a public toilet in Glasgow at any point during the day or night, please provide more information about why you feel unsafe.

See text box at end of survey.

ACCESSIBILITY

Q20. Have you had any difficulties in accessing public toilets recently due to any of the following? (Tick all that apply)

Age

Gender

Disability (e.g. mobility issues, sensory disability etc)

Physical condition (e.g. diabetes, urinary tract infection, bladder or kidney condition, prostate issues etc)

Pregnancy

Caring for small children (e.g. who need a toilet urgently)

Caring for an infant (e.g. I need baby-changing facilities)

Being on certain medication (e.g. diuretics etc)

Other (please specify):

Sex

INCREASING PROVISION

Q22. Please indicate which of the following locations, if any, you would be happy to visit to access a public toilet. (Tick ALL that apply)

All of the below

MOST RECENT USE

Q23. Have you used a public toilet in the past 2 years anywhere in the UK?

Yes

MOST RECENT USE OF A PUBLIC TOILET

Q24. Please describe what you liked best about the public toilet facility.

Clean, spacious, not isolated. Not a mixed-sex toilet

Q25. Was there a charge for using the toilet?

No

AFFORDABILITY

Q29. Would you be willing to pay a reasonable charge to use a clean and safe public toilet?

No, public toilets should be free to use

OTHER COMMENTS

Q30. Do you have any other suggestions for improving public toilet provision in Glasgow?

In adopting a 'feminist town planning' strategy it should necessarily follow that language in Council documents, including this survey, should refrain from using terms such as "all genders" and "pregnant people". Women are one of the two sex classes and are protected as such under the Equality Act 2010. It is pregnant women, not 'people', who are afforded rights and protections in the same Act. If Glasgow City Council is to uphold its responsibilities under the Act and discharge its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty this must be clear from the outset, particularly when discussing public toilets where there are marked differences in women's needs and requirements, distinct from men.

The importance of separate sex provision:

Communal toilets shared by both sexes have become more commonplace in recent years, despite the fact that most people dislike them. A YouGov poll on 31 January 2024 [1] showed that 90% of people wanted separate toilets for men and women:

- 56% of people wanted separate toilets for men and women
- 34% of people wanted separate toilets for men and women and a unisex toilet as well
- only 5% wanted to just have mixed-sex or "gender neutral" toilets.

40% of people say they feel uncomfortable using a mixed-sex "gender-neutral" toilet in a public place. [2]

This is unsurprising since separate sex toilet provision has always been important in providing dignity and privacy where women and girls are vulnerable and in a state of undress. It is also a successful preventative measure for the safety of women and girls. Research shows that even though mixed-sex cubicle changing rooms make up less than half the total changing facilities in sports centres they are the source of 90% of complaints from women of voyeurism, harassment and assault. [3]

Serious incidents already reported from mixed-sex toilets in schools include a girl who was taken to hospital after being injured when a boy 'donkey kicked' the cubicle door open to take photographs of her, [4] and a teenage boy arrested over four allegations of 'serious sexual assault' in shared toilets at a school in Essex. [5] If Glasgow City Council thinks this is unlikely or won't happen in any mixed-sex toilet provision then it is, quite simply, not taking its safeguarding duties seriously.

Shopping centres, restaurants and public toilet providers in England and Wales are required to provide separate single-sex toilets [6] and there is no good reason why the public in Scotland should be provided with a poorer service, particularly when Building Standards has no provision for mixed-sex toilets. The "Building standards technical handbook 2024: non-domestic" states that separate male and female sanitary accommodation is usually provided with the only alternative being unisex toilets (individual lockable rooms with a toilet and wash hand basin, for use by only one person at a time). [7]

A recent study on bacteria in various hospital toilets in Lanarkshire found that mixed-sex toilets carried the most germs, with a far higher microbial burden – including drug resistant superbugs – than either of the single-sex male or female toilets. The researchers said "the findings were a warning against replacing single-sex lavatories with unisex [mixed-sex] models". Lavatories for women were found to carry far fewer microbes than those for men which, although common knowledge for most people, indicates the benefit to women's health of maintaining separate sex toilets. [8]

Legal considerations:

Separate and single-sex toilets are an everyday norm. They are specified in building standards and provision is made for them in the Equality Act to meet legitimate aims such as privacy and decency, and to resolve reasonable objections that a person may have to the presence of someone of the opposite sex. A recent ruling by the Court of Session Inner House clarified that where the single-sex exceptions in the Equality Act are used to make provision for women then, by definition, this excludes all biological males. [9]

Glasgow City Council also has a positive duty under non-harassment obligations in the Equality Act to prevent or prohibit violating a woman's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment on the basis of her sex. Breach of this by providing mixed-sex toilets or by allowing men who claim to be women access to women's facilities exposes the Council and other providers to extensive and expensive legal consequences.

These duties still apply, regardless of any further obligations to people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Additional single-user unisex toilets can easily be provided in most cases to accommodate those who do not feel comfortable using the toilets designated for their sex. There is no need to encroach on women's separate single-sex provision.

Improvement of single-sex facilities:

Women fought long and hard for the right for women's toilets and now we have established the need to maintain this provision, we have several suggestions of improvements that could be made to women's toilets:

1. Larger facilities with more cubicles

It will have escaped few people's notice that there are frequently queues snaking out of women's toilets, while men can seemingly breeze into their own toilets with ease. In fact only 11% of men report having to

Q30. Do you have any other suggestions for improving public toilet provision in Glasgow?

queue for public toilets on a regular basis, compared to 59% of women. [10]

The Guardian cites studies that show that women take twice as long to use a toilet as men: about 90 seconds for women and 40 seconds for men [11], which is understandable as urinals are a great time-saver for men, whereas women usually have more clothes that have to be removed, more bags, and sometimes (more often than men) small children to deal with. Women also use toilets more frequently due to smaller bladders and the need to change sanitary products.

If women's toilets were to be able to operate at the same levels of efficiency as men's toilets they would have to be bigger and accommodate more people at once, with some estimating a third more cubicles for women is needed above the standard provision.

2. Larger cubicles

The ability to enter and exit the cubicle without hugging the toilet bowl to open the door is a frequently cited problem, along with the sanitary bin squashed next to the toilet which often leads to the unhygienic result of half sitting on it, or clothes draped across the top. Reliable provision of coat hooks on the cubicle door would help with this, as well as allowing for bags to be kept off the floor.

Almost every mother talks about the difficulties and acrobatics necessary to access public toilets with a pram or buggy. It is not unknown to resort to using the toilet with the cubicle door half open to try to keep an eye on the baby at the same time. A range of different sized cubicles would ensure that a suitable facility will be available and not necessitate using the disabled/accessible cubicle (if one is provided).

3. Gaps at the top and bottom of toilet cubicles.

Fully enclosed cubicles present a safety risk for all users. It is not possible to check whether someone is inside, how many people are inside, nor to be sure if the person inside can hear or is able to respond to a knock on the door. Opportunities are greatly increased for drug and alcohol use, sexual activities and pushing others into cubicles and locking the door behind them. It is harder for calls for help to be heard. Importantly, people often retreat to the toilets when feeling unwell which means, statistically, toilets are places of high risk for emergencies. Yet without safety gaps around cubicles a person who has collapsed and in need of medical attention can go unnoticed for a considerable period of time.

4. Facilities that are regularly cleaned and checked at intervals for ample supply of toilet paper, sanitary products and soap. Many women worry about the increased prevalence of hidden cameras and it would be reassuring if staff checks routinely included a sweep for cameras.

5. Clear signage

Numerous activist groups have wrongly advised their members and organisations, including local authorities, that men who self-identify as women are permitted to use women-only toilets. As a result, women increasingly encounter men in the toilets and some have self-excluded or changed their practices in using public toilets. This particularly impacts on women of certain religions who cannot share facilities with men. Clear signage asking the public not to attempt to use toilets for the opposite sex, and indicating the provision of alternative unisex or "gender neutral" toilets would be helpful. Training for staff on the correct legal position and a sign with information on how to report any men using the women-only facility would go a long way to restoring public confidence.

References:

[1] <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/trackers/support-for-separate-toilets-for-men-and-women-and-gender-neutral-toilets-in-public-spaces>

[2] <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/trackers/how-comfortable-brits-feel-using-gender-neutral-toilets-in-public-spaces>

[3] <https://www.thetimes.com/life-style/sex-relationships/article/unisex-changing-rooms-put-women-in-danger-8lwbp8kgk>
(<https://archive.ph/1t5AY>)

[4] <https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/coventry-schoolgirl-taken-hospital-after-26418069>
(<https://archive.ph/xycB9>)

[5] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/28/essex-schoolgirls-sexually-assaulted-gender-neutral-toilets/>
(<https://archive.ph/N4PfO>)

[6] <https://www.thenational.scot/news/national/24300811.single-sex-toilets-required-new-restaurants-offices/>
(<https://archive.ph/ap9Jz>)

[7] p282, section 3.12.1, <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice->

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[8] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/30/gender-neutral-lavatories-more-germs-than-single-sex-ones/>
(<https://archive.ph/N0j3Z>)

[9] Para 36, <https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/media/0a1plqgo/court-of-session-judgement-reclaiming-motion-by-for-women-scotland-limited-against-the-lord-advocate-and-others-18-february-2022.pdf>

[10] <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2018/03/20/potty-parity-would-it-be-fairer-make-womens-toilet/>

[11] <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2018/mar/21/why-women-face-longer-toilet-queues-and-how-we-can-achieve-potty-parity>
(<https://archive.ph/lz2qX>)