

Local authorities expected to improve access to public toilets

The move comes following concerns that local authorities have been closing public toilets, and that better use could be made of toilets within public buildings, such as libraries and sport centres.

A lack of accessible local toilets can limit people's lives by stopping them going out, which can lead to isolation, anxiety and other health conditions. Certain groups of people are more likely to be impacted than others, with the elderly, people with certain health conditions and disabilities, carers and parents of young children most affected.

Under the Welsh Government's Public Health (Wales) Act, local authorities now have one year to assess the needs of its community, including changing facilities for babies and Changing Places facilities for disabled persons, and put a strategy in place to ensure the public will have greater access to these facilities.

The expectation is that the strategy will go beyond the provision of traditional stand-alone public toilets, and look at new and creative solutions, including bringing toilets in public buildings into wider use and working with private businesses to make their facilities available to the public.

The Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"While we would all benefit from greater public access to toilet facilities, there are certain groups for whom a lack of public toilets can cause distress, eventually discouraging them from visiting parts of the community.

"I understand the pressures on local authority services, but as well as isolating members of the community, poor provision can impact on tourism, the economy and use of public amenities. Through long-term planning and creative thinking we can improve people's experiences when they are out and about in their communities."

Mr Gething added:

"I expect local authorities to talk to the public and representative groups about the challenges they face in accessing local toilets, listen to their concerns and get them involved in improving access in their community."

Statutory guidance on how local authorities prepare, consult on and publish

their local toilets strategies will be issued in the coming weeks.

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales reappointment of two existing members to the Panel

Alun Davies said:

“I am pleased to announce the re-appointment of Gregory Owens and Stephen Mulholland.

“These re-appointments will ensure there are the necessary skills and expertise on the Panel as it continues to deliver a fair and affordable remuneration framework for local authorities in Wales.

“Mr Owens and Mr Mulholland have both served as councillors and will continue to bring valuable experience to the roles.”

The re-appointments have been made in accordance with the Governance Code for Public Appointments and will commence on 1 January 2019 for a two year term.

As member Mr Mulholland is paid a daily fee of £198 with a time commitment of at least one day a month.

As vice chair Mr Owens is paid a daily fee of £226 with a time commitment of at least one day per month.

Mr Owens has declared political activity.

Service helping to keep families together goes Wales-wide

The Reflect programme was initially developed by Newport City Council, with the assistance of Barnardo's Cymru, to support mothers following the compulsory, permanent removal of one or more children due to child protection concerns.

In every year since 2010, Newport has seen between 11 and 16 babies removed

at birth and placed for adoption when the child's mother has previously had a child removed. In one family, nine children had been removed at birth. Heads of Children's Services across Wales have established this pattern is common across the country.

Last year, the Welsh Government announced an additional £8m investment to provide further support for looked after children. £850,000 a year has been allocated to support the roll-out of the Reflect programme across Wales.

Reflect delivers intensive, one-to-one support to at-risk women in the hope that they can improve their lives, by reducing the emotional, social and financial costs of children being taken into care in the future. Those involved are offered emotional support alongside practical help including contraceptive advice and access to housing, education and employment services.

Services have already supported nearly 100 women across the country.

The Reflect programme is a key preventative work strand within the Welsh Government's programme of work to improve outcomes for looked after children.

Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"The Reflect project aims to break the cycle of children being taken into the care system and to give women the opportunity to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future for themselves, their child and wider family.

"Recurrent care proceedings have a significant human cost on the mothers involved, their children and their families. That is why I'm pleased the Welsh Government has been able to fund the Reflect programme, allowing it to be rolled out across Wales, helping to ensure even more families receive the help and support they need to stay together."

£3.2m EU-backed investment to pioneer cutting edge technology

The scheme, which is led by Swansea University's Centre for Nano Health and Welsh Centre for Printing and Coating and Cardiff University's Institute for Compound Semiconductors, will offer expertise and state-of-the-art facilities to companies developing new or existing technologies, products and processes.

Backed by £1.8m of EU funding, it will provide technical and specialist support to put companies at the forefront of innovation in sectors such as healthcare, semiconductors, packaging and functional printed materials. It will also help up to 20 collaborations get underway to develop new products

ready for market.

Announcing the funding, Professor Drakeford said:

“Ensuring Welsh businesses have access to the knowledge and expertise within our highly-acclaimed universities is essential to drive innovation and position Wales on a global platform for success.

“This is another positive example of how the Welsh Government is investing EU funds to boost prosperity and jobs.

“It also highlights the importance of securing replacement funding for these EU funds following Brexit so we can continue to deliver schemes like this, which benefit people and the economy.”

Swansea University’s lead for the project’s semiconductor theme, Dr Matt Elwin, said:

“This project will provide the region’s industry with access to 3 state-of-the-art research facilities, which form a unique expert offering that can deliver novel technologies and accelerate new product development.

“We’re very excited to work with industry in this field and look forward to growing long-lasting collaborations in the development of relevant technology for next generation products well into the future.”

[New Planning Applications Wales website goes live](#)

A new ‘Planning Applications Wales’ website goes live today and will be the portal for submitting planning applications or associated consents to Local Planning Authorities, replacing the Planning Portal.

The website has been designed to make it quicker and easier for anyone to make a planning application and forms have been simplified. It is designed to meet the needs of users of the Welsh planning system.

To make a planning application, please visit the Welsh Government website [planning pages](#).

Guidance on what types of development can be pursued without the need to apply for planning permission along with further information on permitted development, the planning service and building regulations is available on the [Welsh Government website](#).

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths:

“Our new Planning Applications Wales website will be the place people will need to go to submit their planning applications from today.

“In designing the new website, we’ve made sure the service meets the needs of Welsh users. The new website will also make it quicker and simpler for anyone wanting to submit a planning application.”