

Improving **Access to Toilets** in Northumberland

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BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

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NOT EVERY DISABILITY IS **VISIBLE**

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'I mean, if there's one thing you have to do in life, it's go to the loo, right!?'

Who is this Guide For ?

This guide is for anyone who provides, or may be planning to provide, toilets for public use. It includes information that individuals can use to raise awareness and suggest changes locally. Organisations such as libraries, leisure facilities, cafes and museums etc., can use it to improve their facilities, making them more accessible to the public. Town and Parish Councils can use it to help with effective planning, availability and accessibility of toilets in their locality.

Why is it Needed ?

Toilets are not a luxury – they are a basic right. Being able to use good quality, clean, accessible toilets when and where we need them, not only improves local facilities, but maintains people's health and well-being. Some people, particularly those who are older or who have specific illnesses or disabilities, can suffer discomfort and distress if they struggle to find suitable toilets – and this can stop them from going out. Enjoying everyday activities like shopping or eating out helps to keep us connected to our local communities, and prevents loneliness and isolation.

Here in Northumberland, there are a number of reasons why access to toilets is particularly important.

- Northumberland has an ageing population, with many older people living with chronic health conditions. Continence issues can often be a contributory factor in a person's move from home to residential care.
- Northumberland is a beautiful county, which makes it a tourist hotspot. Making sure there is a good range of quality toilet provision is great for local people, but it is also great for visitors, who have the potential to boost the local economy.

As not every disability is visible, this guide aims to raise awareness of the difficulties experienced by people with a range of additional needs, and to show that small and often inexpensive changes can make a real difference.

What You Will Find in the Guide.

This guide aims to:

- Help you identify changes which can make a difference
- Give you real life examples of good practice
- Show you where to find information and links to a wide range of online resources
- Explain what a Changing Places Toilet is, and the difference it can make to disabled people's lives
- Give you some top tips that you can put into practice today!

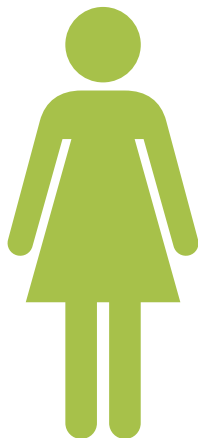
Why Access to Toilets is Important

Nearly 1 in 5 people in England and Wales have some form of disability. When we think of disability, we often think about people who are wheelchair users – after all, it is used universally as the symbol of disability provision. But there are also many people with ‘hidden disabilities’ who, like wheelchair users, can benefit from using accessible toilets. For example, people with inflammatory bowel conditions (such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis), urinary incontinence, prostate difficulties, learning difficulties or dementia. It is also not just disabled people who are affected. Family or informal carers face difficulties too when they are supporting the person they care for to use toilet facilities. Local carer support organisation, Carers Northumberland, estimates there are 35,500 carers in Northumberland. This guide is not able to provide information on every disability or illness, but further guidance on where to find more specialist advice is found in the Useful Weblinks at the end.

It is important to hear the voices of people who could benefit from better toilet provision, so here are 3 short case studies that tell you about the difficulties experienced by some disabled people, and what you could do to make a difference. Most of the changes are small, low cost and easy to make.

Karen’s story

Karen has early onset dementia. She likes to be active, enjoys coastal walks and a pub lunch. Her sister Maggie goes out with her as Karen gets easily confused. Last time they were out Maggie lost Karen for 20 minutes – this was very stressful for both sisters. Karen had used a toilet in a café but had got lost coming out and had wandered through a back door to the carpark. Simple, clear signage not only showing the way to the toilet but also out would have made a real difference. Maggie says she has been in other toilets where there are bright yellow laminated signs.



Javeria’s story

Javeria became partially sighted after having a stroke two years ago. Javeria lost confidence as a result and rarely went out. She became increasingly isolated and depressed. With the help of a support worker, Javeria gradually began to regain her confidence and started taking small trips out to the shops. To begin with, this was very difficult, and Javeria felt too nervous to use public toilets on her own. But one local café has big clear signs, and good lighting inside, and on the way to the toilet. This really helped Javeria and she is now able to make her way there and back on her own.



Sarah and Dan’s story

Sarah looks after her son Dan who has autism. He is 20 and likes to be independent, but going to the toilet when they are away from home can cause problems for both Dan and Sarah. Dan is disturbed by the noise of automated hand driers. Having an alternative to a hand drier such as paper towels makes a real difference to him. Dan does not like to use accessible toilets with a sign depicting a wheelchair as he does not use one – alternative or additional signage would be useful, such as a “not all disabilities are visible” sign. Sarah has to wait outside while Dan uses the toilet as she worries he is vulnerable. A large accessible or family toilet cubicle works best, because Dan can have privacy but she can still be around to offer support.



Improving the Accessibility of Different Types of Toilet Provision

There are many different kinds of toilets – for example standard, accessible, ambulatory, Changing Places, Radar key operated. Sometimes the term ‘disabled toilet’ is used, at other times ‘accessible toilet’. Accessible toilets are designed to meet the needs of people with a range of physical disabilities, both wheelchair users and those who require extra space for themselves and/or for a carer. Accessible toilets require more space than standard and have additional features such as grab rails, emergency cords and accessible sinks and taps. Some toilets might be called ‘single occupancy’, unisex, family or gender neutral.

Toilet terminology can be confusing. To keep this guide simple, we have focussed on simple and low cost ways that you can make standard or accessible toilets better for people with additional needs and for their carers – in fact better for everyone.

We have also provided some information about specialised Changing Places toilets and why these are considered the gold standard in toilet provision, being accessible to everyone. If you might be considering installing new toilet facilities, at the end of the guide, we have provided Useful Weblinks to a wide range of websites where you can find out more about different kinds of toilets, toilet schemes like the Radar one, legal requirements, building and planning regulations and toilet designs.

“It would make me more confident if there were more toilets available.”

“There’s too much stigma, we need to educate people.”

“Signs for a toilet in a shop or pub would make us feel welcome.”

David's story

David has a stoma and a colostomy bag following cancer. He enjoys an active lifestyle, playing golf and swimming but finds public toilets a real challenge when he’s out and about. The things that make a difference to David are having a shelf in the toilet cubicle so he can put his changing equipment on it, as well as a hook on the back of the door, a bit of room to manoeuvre and a clean dry floor. David has perfected the art of kneeling in front of the toilet so he can empty his bag – this works well but cleanliness is vital. David finds his waste can be quite pungent so good ventilation is a bonus – he is at ease with his disability but finds because it is hidden people can be very judgemental. David reckons a shelf is most important of all but finds a huge number of toilets do not have one – it’s a small thing, but would make a big difference both to his ability to get out and to his dignity.



Key Ways to Improve a Standard Toilet

CUBICLE FACILITIES

To be Avoided	Minimum	Good to Have
Heavy doors-difficult to lock/unlock	Light, easy doors	Light easy doors (sliding if possible) with easily manoeuvrable locks
Really cramped space and an inward opening door	As much space as possible	Space for someone and their carer and an outward opening door
No signs at all	Clear signs to the toilet	Also signs within the toilets showing way out with pictures
No bins	Bins outside of cubicles	Bins within cubicles (but not at cost of too much space)
Poor lighting	Bright lighting	Bright lighting on a long timer or easy to find/use switch
No hooks on doors or shelves	Hook on door in cubicle	Hook and shelf within cubicle with round edges (folding one can help with space issues)
Dirty facilities	Clean facilities	Regular cleaning/attendant
Facilities used for storage/cluttered	Clutter free	Design and layout welcoming to people
No means of hand drying	Electric hand dryer	An alternative to an electric dryer
Steps in/out of toilet	Clear signage of any steps	No steps or access by lift
Uneven flooring. Reflective/slippy flooring. Flooring same colour as toilets	Even flooring, contrast between floor and toilet	Even non-slip flooring. Clear different colour for floor, door frames, toilets

Shirley's story

Shirley runs an organisation to support family carers. She often hears from carers about the difficulties they experience trying to help their family member when they need to use the toilet. Many toilets are not big enough to accommodate two people. This can often be a reason for people and their carers to stop going out. This can lead to carers and the person they care for leading increasingly restricted lives and becoming isolated from their local communities. Shirley would like to see more organisations letting members of the public use their toilets. She believes that a well-advertised and supported community toilet scheme would not just benefit many carers, but also many other local people and the businesses themselves.



Jasmine's story

Jasmine is a young woman with learning difficulties. She sometimes has a support worker with her when she is out and about, but at other times she might be on her own. She finds the lack of signs for toilets frustrating. If she is in a big shop, signs indicating where the toilets are sometimes don't have pictures, are too small or are unclear. She thinks it would help lots of people if all signs had a picture of a toilet as well as the word toilet. Jasmine also thinks that it would help if a sign described where the toilet could be found. For example – 'the toilet is at the back of the shop on the right hand side'.



**SMALL CHANGES
CAN MAKE A BIG
DIFFERENCE TO
DISABLED PEOPLE
& THEIR CARERS**



**ACCESSIBLE
TOILETS ARE
NOT ADDITIONAL
STORAGE SPACES**



**PEOPLE NARROW
THEIR LIVES
BECAUSE OF A
LACK OF TOILETS**



Key Ways to Improve an Accessible Toilet

CUBICLE FACILITIES

To be Avoided	Minimum	Good to Have
Cramped space	Enough room for someone in a wheelchair to access the toilet easily	Enough room for someone and their carer with a lobby area for privacy
No emergency cord	Emergency cord provided	Emergency cord with sign explaining its use and why it should not be tied up
No signage	Clear signage to toilet with pictures and words	A “not all disabilities are visible” sign and signs showing the way out of the toilet
No shelves/hooks on door. No bin within cubicle	A hook on the door at wheelchair level, a shelf and a bin within the cubicle	Shelf to have rounded edges
Needing a key to access (although this might sometimes be necessary)	If key is needed then train staff in how to help someone who requests a key appropriately	Train staff via a local disability group and make them aware of Emergency Use cards
Toilet used as storage area/unclean	Clean and clutter free	Regular recorded cleaning and attendant
No sink in the cubicle	Sink in cubicle at appropriate height and easily manipulated taps	Shower facility within the toilet
Poor lighting	Lighting on a timer	Lighting on a long timer
No grab rails or grab rails in the wrong place or at the wrong height	Grab rails around toilet at the recommended height	Signs indicating left or right hand transfer (and information on website)
Baby changing facilities within accessible toilet	If baby facilities are included, make the space larger to accommodate both.	Separate area for baby changing facilities
Reflective flooring, no contrast between flooring and toilet	Matt, non slip flooring with colour contrast	Even non-slip flooring. Clear different colour for floor, door frames, toilets

Changing Places Toilet – Accessible for all

If you are planning a new building development or a refurbishment then why not consider a Changing Places Toilet? And if you are in a position to, why not build the requirement for a Changing Places Toilet into Planning permission or Commissioning Guidance? Or you could raise money as a community group to provide such a facility locally.

What are Changing Places Toilets?

Standard accessible toilets cannot meet the needs of everyone with a disability. People with multiple or profound physical and/or learning disabilities, or those with spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy or muscular sclerosis for example, often need extra equipment and space in order to be able to use a toilet safely and comfortably. The availability of Changing Places Toilets can make a huge difference to people with a range of disabilities and their carers, helping them to access their communities. Unfortunately, however, there are very few of these toilets in Northumberland.

Changing Places toilets are able to meet these needs by providing a height adjustable adult size changing bench, a hoist system and sufficient space for two carers. Information on the following page explains the requirements to reach a Changing Places standard. The Changing Places website provides further information about how to build these facilities in order to meet regulated specifications, guidance on dimensions, fundraising and a map showing the location of Changing Places Toilets up and down the country. All the information about them can be found here: <http://www.changing-places.org/>

If you do build one don't forget to let people know – advertise it with pride on your and other people's websites. And make sure you know where your nearest Changing Places toilet is – and tell other people!

“I've had to change my son on a dirty toilet floor with his head next to the loo, where's the dignity in that?”



Requirements of a Changing Places Toilet as in the British Standards: BS8300:2009

A privacy screen
or curtain

A paper roll

An emergency
alarm

An adult sized, height
adjustable changing
bench, wall mounted or
free standing

A peninsular toilet
(centrally placed)



What Else Can You do to Help?

COMMUNITY TOILET SCHEMES

- **Do you already let people use your loo?**
Could your toilet become part of a community toilet scheme?

Community toilet schemes run in many parts of the country. Organisations of any size, whether public, community or commercial, agree to make their toilets available by allowing members of the public to use their toilet facilities without obligation to purchase products or services.

- **Local Councils are usually responsible for providing information about who is participating in the scheme and organisations who are part of the scheme are given signs to display in a place where people can easily see it – usually on a door or window.**

Councils can also arrange to display signs at key points locally – such as at car parks, tourist information, and signposting in local guides and ensure information is kept up to date and includes details of the type of facility provided by different organisations.

- **Community toilet schemes can be a great way of increasing the number of toilets available locally.**

It can be especially helpful for visitors who can plan trips ahead, by checking a local council's website before they go. For those people who need to use the toilet more often, or more urgently, knowing they can use a toilet without having to ask, can make a real difference, by reducing anxiety.

- **Northumberland County Council runs a Community Toilet Scheme called “*You’re Welcome*”.**

‘I haven’t heard of a community toilet scheme, but it sounds like a good idea. Somewhere to ring up about where toilets are would be great if I was planning a trip.’

What Else Can You do to Help?

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

- **Nominate someone in your organisation to be an accessibility champion.**
They could keep a list of local toilets, including the nearest Changing Places, Radar and public toilets.
- **Ask your customers for feedback on your facilities, and see if you can make some changes as a result.**
If you are not able to join a local community toilet scheme, you can still let people with 'urgent needs' cards use your facilities.
- **Contact local organisations which represent people who have specific disabilities or illnesses and ask their advice.**
For example, the Alzheimer's Society run a dementia friends scheme – they can come and visit your facilities and suggest some simple changes you can make which will make a difference to people with dementia and their carers.
- **You can also support local campaigns to build Changing Places Toilets.**
We have provided some links to successful campaigns at the end of this guide.

“People might buy something if you let them use your toilet.”



Dementia

The number of people caring for a person with dementia at home is increasing. Projections suggest the current figure of **700,000 in 2014 will increase to 1.3 million by 2025.**

It is predicted that between 2014 and 2020 the overall number of people living with dementia in the North East will increase by **16.9%** to **39,787.**

Incontinence

People of all ages can suffer from urinary incontinence. It is thought to affect many people in the UK. There is still a stigma associated with incontinence and many people are thought to suffer in silence.

Up to 1 in 10 people will experience bowel incontinence at some time in their lives.

Autism

Autism affects more than 1 in 100 people. Over 700,000 people in the UK are autistic, which means that 2.8m people have a relative on the autism spectrum. It affects adults as well as children.

Sight loss

As of 2015, more than two million people in the UK are living with sight loss that is severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives.

Stoma

A stoma is an opening made surgically to the abdomen in order to divert the flow of faeces or urine. **It is estimated that 1 in 500 people in the UK are currently living with a stoma.**

“It gets tiring explaining to people why I need to use the accessible toilet, even though I don’t use a wheelchair. We would love a ‘no need to explain’ campaign.”

Useful Weblinks

More detailed information about disability support organisations, different toilets and best practice can be found at:

AUTISM

- **National Autistic Society** www.autism.org.uk
- **Child Autism UK** www.childautism.org.uk
- **Autism Northumberland** www.autismnorthumberland.co.uk

CARER ORGANISATIONS

- **Carers Northumberland** www.carersnorthumberland.org.uk
- **Carers Trust** www.carers.org
- **Carers UK** www.carersuk.org

DEMENTIA

- **Alzheimers Society** www.alzheimers.org.uk
- **Dementia UK** www.dementiauk.org
- **Dementia Care** www.dementiacare.org.uk

DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS

- **Disability Rights UK** www.disabilityrightsuk.org
- **Disability North** www.disabilitynorth.org.uk
- **Euan's Guide** www.euansguide.com

INCONTINENCE

- **NHS Incontinence Advice** www.nhs.uk/conditions/urinary-incontinence
- **Bladder Health UK** www.bladderhealthuk.org

LEARNING DISABILITY

- **Community Learning Disability Service** www.northumbria.nhs.uk/our-services/mental-health-services/community-learning-disability-service/
- **Mencap** www.mencap.org.uk/about-us

LOCAL AUTHORITY

- **Northumberland County Council** www.northumberland.gov.uk
- **You're Welcome Community Toilet Scheme Northumberland** www.northumberland.gov.uk/ParksandGardens.aspx#useourloo

OLDER PEOPLE

- **Age UK Northumberland** www.ageuk.org.uk/northumberland
- **Northumberland CVA** www.northumberlandcva.org.uk
- **Golden Guide Northumberland** www.goldenguide.org.uk

STOMA SUPPORT

- **Bladder and Bowel Community** www.bladderandbowel.org
- **Colostomy UK** www.colostomyuk.org
- **North East Living with a Stoma** www.living-with-a-stoma.co.uk/events_uk_north_east.html

TOILETS

- **All Around the Toilet**
- **British Toilet Association** www.btaloo.co.uk
- **Centre for Accessible Environments** www.cae.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CAE-Managing-Accessible-Toilets-Factsheet-Jan-2017.pdf
- **Changing Places** www.changing-places.org/find_a_toilet.aspx
 - www.transport.gov.scot/news/changing-places-facilities-coming-to-dundee-station/
 - www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/accessible-toilet-redbridge/
 - www.muscular dystrophyuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CP-campaign-leaflet-2018.pdf
- **Great British Toilet Map** www.toiletmap.org.uk
- **The World of Accessible Toilets** www.accessible-toilet-project.blog
- **Radar Key** www.radarkeys.org

TOURIST INFORMATION

- **Britain Express** www.britainexpress.com/TIC/northumbria.htm
- **Visit Northumberland** www.visitnorthumberland.com/your-visit/loos

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

- **BID Services** www.bid.org.uk/directions/northumberland
- **Scope** www.scope.org.uk/About-Us
- **RNIB** www.rnib.org.uk



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