

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 120

Subject: Referred from Full Council – Deputation

Date of meeting: 9 February 2023

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 To receive a deputation presented at Full Council held on the 2 February 2023.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee responds to the deputation either by noting it or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 To receive the following:

(i) Deputation

Public Toilets

Spokesperson – Ann Fletcher

Supported by:

Lucy Grimme

Nicky Way

Ally Jones

Brett Vallier

Penny Parker

Deniston Jack

With regard to the proposed public toilet closures, while many individuals – and in some cases businesses – across the city would be detrimentally affected, we believe that for one particular group these proposals are actually discriminatory and if implemented will be highly prejudicial to their wellbeing. There may be no statutory duty to provide such facilities, as the council repeatedly states, but we argue there is a humanitarian duty to do so.

This deputation speaks on behalf of those people with disabilities, often hidden, that require ready access to toilet facilities. Below are some actual lived experiences of hidden disabilities, representing a tiny fraction of those likely to be impacted within our city.

Lucy has Irritable Bowel Syndrome with chronic diarrhoea. This is what her recent day trip to London from Brighton involved:

- At least 4 weeks before, stopped drinking alcohol so my bowel could calm down.
- No dinner the night before.
- Breakfast on day: ½ slice of toast and 1 inch of tea. Go to loo at friend's, walk to Brighton station, go to loo, panic about train toilets.
- Arrive in London, head to venue, queue for toilet. After the show, go to a restaurant to use their loo.
- Return on 8pm train. EATING AND DRINKING NOTHING ALL DAY except sips from a bottle of water.

Oliver, aged 5, has recently been diagnosed with Coeliac disease, and the tiniest grain of gluten makes him very ill very quickly. In the back of the car, overhearing his mum and nan discussing the proposed toilet closures, he stated indignantly: "No, they can't close them because when my tummy is upset, I really need the toilet because I have issues!"

Nicky says: I have a permanent ileostomy stoma since my colon and rectum were removed due to cancer. I am learning to live with a permanent change to the way my body works and having to use a prosthetic device (a stoma bag). Confidence is something that takes a knock when you have surgery like this. Having access to a public toilet is of utmost importance to anyone with a stoma to be able to live, work and participate in our surroundings. The proposed closures will inhibit my ability to go about a normal life, and I will be unable to enjoy a full integration into the community. I already have anxiety about leaving my home, for fears of my bag leaking in public (which is messy and smelly!).

Nicky's cancer, Crohn's disease, Ulcerative Colitis and other conditions can all lead to an ileostomy, colostomy, or urostomy. My ileostomy resulted from a perforated bowel caused by diverticular disease.

An ileostomy is a stoma that exits from the small bowel and the large bowel is not used at all (unlike a colostomy which exits from your large bowel). Your large bowel reabsorbs water and nutrients from what you eat and drink, and so the output from an ileostomy is not like a normal stool but is actually very liquid (it can be like water) and pretty constant. Your bag fills up very quickly and can need emptying as often as every hour or even half hour. You can never forget it is there and you are constantly patting it to see if it is getting full and needs emptying. You are always thinking ahead to the next toilet and where it is. You are filled with fear and dread if you think you may not reach it in time.

We acknowledge that if what we have described is not your own lived experience, you may not have understood just how utterly dependent some people are on public toilets. What we've described is a fraction of what people live with; it happens to be our own lived experiences. Please don't let lack of knowledge or understanding lead to enforcing something that is clearly discriminatory and prejudicial to the wellbeing of so many. Please don't force us and others like us to stay home because we simply do not dare to venture out into our home city.

Supporting Information

“In the UK alone, 1 in 5 people has a disability, with 80% of those having an invisible disability.”

<https://www.progresslifeline.org.uk/news/living-with-hidden-disabilities/>

“Around one in five people in the UK will experience IBS at some point in their life and around two thirds of the people affected are women...IBS is a long-term condition of the digestive system which can be painful and difficult to live with if you don't have your symptoms under control. The symptoms tend to flare up in bouts lasting anywhere from a few days to a few months.”

<https://www.circlehealthgroup.co.uk/health-matters/womens-health/ibs-facts-for-sufferers>

- There are 15 million woman who are of menstrual age in the UK.
- The average age for commencement of menstruation is 12.5 years. Due to improved diet and lifestyles, this is much earlier than would have been the case around 150 years ago when the average age would have been 17 years.
- On average a woman will menstruate until she is fifty years old, for an average total of 37.5 years. During which time she will menstruate around 500 times.

https://www.ahpma.co.uk/menstruation_facts_and_figures/

“A reported 165 000–200 000 people are living with a stoma in the UK, with approximately 21 000 patients undergoing stoma formation surgery each year (Colostomy UK, 2021)”

<https://www.colostomyuk.org/>

“Research conducted by Crohn's & Colitis UK in 2022 suggests 1 in every 123 people in the UK have either Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. This amounts to a total of nearly half a million people in the UK living with IBD.”

IBD Statistics 2022: Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis

[https://ampersandhealth.co.uk › Resources \(IBD\)](https://ampersandhealth.co.uk › Resources (IBD))

“Over the next few years we are investing £3 million to refurbish public toilets across the city. We will start Phase 1 of the programme once the summer season is over. This will allow us to keep public toilets open throughout the city's busiest time of year...The council has secured £330,000 from the government, that has been match funded with £95,500 from the council to increase the number of Changing Places Facilities in the city too. “ [July 2021]

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/libraries-leisure-and-arts/update/public-toilet-refurbishment-programme>

“Cllr Nemeth said: “The city-wide closures of public toilets we are seeing is solely a consequence of the administration's public toilet insourcing policy. This policy change was completely unnecessary, given that the city had a ten-year private contract for cleaning and maintaining the city's public toilet blocks which had five years left to run. We must remember that all public toilets were open while this contract was running. The administration's policy

of cancelling this contract and setting up its own service has completely failed and led to the collapse of a basic service. Had this policy not been pursued, all public toilets would currently be open.””

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23259945.brighton-council-blame-public-toilet-closures-tories-claim/>