

Changing Places in Mendip

Standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with a complex disability, who need extra facilities to allow them to use the toilets comfortably.

Changing Places (CP) are for anyone who needs additional facilities not met by public toilets, this could be people with physical / learning disability, older people or people with a short term acquired impairments.

Changing Places toilets are different to standard accessible toilets (or "disabled toilets") in that they have extra features such as a height adjustable changing bench and a hoist and enough space for the individual to be supported.

Thousands of people with complex disabilities cannot use standard accessible toilets to meet all their needs. Carers are forced to risk their own health and safety by changing people on a toilet floor, there is a lack of dignity / hygiene for the individual who needs support, evidenced by this Mencap campaign video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfGm2fl0z6c>

There are currently NO publically advertised changing places in Somerset (there is one in an education centre in Chard with limited access), the other nearest changing places are in Weston-Super-Mare or Honiton.

Background

The national Changing Places (CP) campaign began in July 2006. The CP Consortium which includes organisations such as Mencap has been calling for Changing Places toilets to be installed in public places since July 2006. Changing places can be in variety of places: leisure centres, supermarkets, sports stadiums, libraries, shopping centres, or as part of public convenience provision.

Locally the Somerset Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB) which is a group of people with learning disabilities (Customers), their Carers and advocates who meet with, and make their experiences and views known to, key policy makers, commissioners and service providers, have made changing places a priority improvement area. They have raised this as an issue to Somerset's Health & Wellbeing Board, which deals with health and social care issues and is attended by officers and members from NHS, SCC and districts.

Need

There are 230,000 severely disabled people in the UK who do not have access to public toilet facilities that meet their needs, based on research from the Changing Places campaign.

Our own research indicates there are over 7,700 people in Mendip alone who would benefit from Changing places (this excluding children and visitors) this is nearly 7% of the total Mendip adult population. With increasing survival rates and an ageing population, this figure is likely to rise to 9,000 people by 2020, with 25% of the Somerset population is likely to be aged over 65 by 2033, evidencing an increasing need for changing places.

In addition to this 58,382 people in Somerset indicated that they provided unpaid care, of which 12,313 provided care for at least 50 hours per week (2011).

The local campaign started by Sue Ripley and Jenny Date of Glastonbury & District Mencap, started due to the lack of CP facilities in their local area they also felt that a popular tourist area such as Mendip should be providing facilities for 'all' visitors. They want a network of changing places in Mendip towns, and for the district to be a flagship area for residents and visitors who need changing places.

This network could include purpose built Changing Places, those already in existence in places such as day centres or community hospitals (although these may have limited access) or facilities which meet some of the Changing Place standards which may still be of benefit to disabled people and their carers. It is not always necessary to build additional facilities, existing ones can be adapted to meet some or all of the Changing Places standards. A Changing Place can be provided as an alternative to an existing disabled toilet and can then be used by anyone whatever their degree of disability.

The campaign is to make Mendip the envy of other areas in the Country and a destination of choice for visitors who require these facilities, whilst also providing individuals with the choice of where they can access activities in their local community which is not limited by time or destination due to the lack of changing places.

Benefits

Having clean and accessible toilets should be the right of everyone. Providing changing places will make your town / facility a destination of choice, increasing visitors and allowing visitors to stay for longer.

Changing Places are advertised on their website with an easy search facility, along with their social media (facebook / twitter), along with 'host' sites being able to advertise their CP facilities as another offer to disabled visitors and their families / carers. The UK's 11.9 million disabled people are said to have disposable income collectively worth £80bn, disabled people are a sizeable economic force and should not be forgotten.

There are only two Changing Places currently registered on the Changing Places website in the County (one of these is in an education centre in Chard with limited access). There is the opportunity to become the one of the earliest registered 'public' Changing Place in the County and the wide publicity and support this will receive.

Costs

The Changing Places campaign appreciates that meeting the 12m² (3m x 4m) size criteria of the new standard may be difficult in, for example in a listed building that cannot be altered. Facilities which do not provide all the features of the CP standard or alternative layouts, may not be identified as a 'Changing Places' toilet, however they may still be of benefit to disabled people and their carers and information such as these facilities can also be included on the Changing Place website.

Estimated equipment costs for a Changing Places toilet can vary but are in the region of between £12,000 - £15,000 including VAT. Equipment costs will vary depending on the specific equipment chosen. Other costs involved will depend on the venue such as building costs (if structural changes are required), maintenance costs (for equipment and cleaning) and any security costs.

Further information on Changing Places including the campaign, installation details and case studies can be found on their website <http://www.changing-places.org/>

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