



South Hams District Council

Briefing note on designing out intravenous drug use in South Hams District Council public conveniences

Background

In December 2017 following a significant number of complaints about discarded needles being found in the public toilets on Coronation road Totnes, the decision to close the toilets on a temporary basis to try and break the anti-social behaviour routine of “dirty needle” disposal, protect public safety, and protect our employees from needle-stick injuries.

As part of the process of re-opening the toilets we asked the Architectural Liaison Officer at Devon and Cornwall Police to assess the toilets and to suggest improvements that could be made to the design to limit the ease of drug taking in them.

Potential design features that could be installed

Minimising flat surfaces: Any flat surface can be used to prepare drugs on, this includes but not limited to the cistern behind the toilet, and baby changing facilities in private cubicles. Therefore minimising flat surfaces by boxing in cisterns and moving baby changing facilities to the communal areas. This would also apply to the removal of the toilet seat cover.

Cubicle doors: Doors that are full height are great for privacy of the users, however they also provide additional privacy for drug users. Therefore proposals would be to change the doors so that they are shorter in height, whilst still protecting the modesty of the users of the cubicles.

Concealed toilet roll holders: Recently these have posed an issue where drug users have hidden used needles inside the holder, it is unclear whether this is for malicious purposes but clearly there is an increased risk to both our operational staff and the public.

Changing the toilet roll holders to an open kind, enables the toilet operative as well as the public to see when a roll has been tampered with. It also removes a further flat surface from the cubicle that can be used for the preparation of drugs.

Sharp disposal bins: These should be seen as a way of safely disposing of needles used by the public for other intravenous medications, but it would also help to ensure the safe disposal of needles used by illicit drug users and thusly protect the public from the risk of contracting a blood-borne infection from a needle stick injury.

It would be suggested that these could be sited either above the toilet cistern in the new boxing or in the communal area. The design of the sharps disposal bin would incorporate a lockable cabinet to house a sharps box with a needle chute into it. This design minimises the risk of accidental injury when putting the needle into the bin, and also minimises the risk of persons attempting to access the needles to re-use them in desperation.

An example of the needle bin that could be used is as below;



There is a cost of emptying the bins that would need to be built into the annual servicing cost of a toilet block if they were to be installed and this is estimated as being £x. The Community Safety Partnership has agreed a fund of £x to cover initial installation.

Pay on entry: Evidence has shown that pay on entry does deter illicit drug use in toilets, as this is already proposed for most of the Council owned toilets we should see an improvement.

The Police have however warned that in some areas where the users are begging they will have access to the correct change needed to use the toilets. Therefore the impact of pay on entry on its own may not be as great.

CCTV: CCTV could be installed in the vicinity of the toilet blocks covering the entrances, this would be used to identify any potential culprits of anti-social behaviour in the toilets.

The estimated cost of a CCTV installation can be quite high with recent figures suggesting around £50k for up to 6 cameras and then an annual cost of around £500 per camera for storing the data in a secure location.

It is currently not the Council's policy to undertake the installation of CCTV to protect our assets such as toilets, due to this cost burden.

Proposed way forward

The main anti-social drug use has been associated with male public conveniences on Coronation Road. These toilets have been identified for pay on entry already, therefore it is proposed that as part of these renovation works the following additional works are undertaken;

- Box in the area above the cistern and install a needle sharp box in each cubicle
- Change the toilet roll holders so they are no longer concealed
- Change doors so they are no longer full height

The estimated initial cost of these works is £3,500, a total of £1,000 has been agreed to be paid out of the Community Safety Partnership Budget however there will also be a need to increase the operational budget to cover waste collection from the sharps bin by £1291.16 / annum.

Should we see an escalation of anti-social drug use in other toilets it is proposed that the above list of proposed works be installed subject to budget constraints, with the decision being made by the Senior Specialist for Environmental Protection, Parking and Public Conveniences.