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Councillor Carthy seeks improvements for disabled in new buildings

"There are building regulations and standards in place at present that do not meet the needs of those wishing to use them," stated Sinn Féin's Colm Carthy when Monaghan Co Council met on Monday.

Councillor Carthy was moving a motion seeking better disabled toilet provision in public buildings.

The motion read: "That Monaghan Co Council ensures that any future publicly funded building projects, accessible to the public, will have properly designed disabled access toilet facilities which will include a 1m clearance on both sides of the lavatory (allowing those who may be able-bodied on one side and/or for those who need assistance to use it) and a changing bench at 1.9m long with washable upholstered surface.

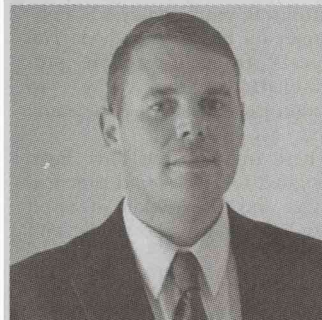
"We also call on the Government to introduce the above steps in the building regulations for privately built facilities that will be open to the public."

Councillor Carthy in moving the motion said that the positioning of toilet bowls in allegedly 'wheelchair accessible' toilets was a constant worry for those on wheels and those caring for them. Both sides of the lavatory should have at least 1m of unimpeded space to allow those who may be able-bodied on one side and/or for those who need assistance to use it.

"It is rare to see a toilet bowl on a long wall as opposed to being positioned in a corner," the SF representative told the meeting.

"There are still occupational therapists and architects in the system that are allowing this to be ignored when signing off on publicly funded buildings."

Councillor Carthy said he had spoken to one individual who told him that his adult daughter, who had severe physical difficulties, was unable to use the 'disabled access' toilet in the Civic Offices in Carrickmacross, for example. It was not designed to suit all wheelchair users despite this particular constituent of his informing the contractors and the local authority at design stage.



• COUNCILLOR COLM CARTHY: Called for design of wheelchair accessible toilets to be improved

He thought a wheelchair accessible toilet should also offer a suitable changing area. The constituent who contacted him on this issue had informed him that he wrote to the Taoiseach and the Royal Institute of Architects Ireland to request that the building regulations and standards be changed to suit these requests – he had not received a response.

"To build a proper, purpose-built toilet would cost the same as they currently are if incorporated at design stage," Councillor Carthy added. "I ask you all to agree to this important motion so that everyone, no matter what their physical condition, can use all public facilities in the future."

Seconding the motion, SF representative Noel Keelan said it made sense to get a building project right on the first day – this approach would be cost-effective into the future.

Fianna Fáil councillor Pádraig McNally referred to a cousin of his own who had passed away earlier this year. He had been an activist on behalf of the disabled and had consistently said to him that the regulations in relation to disabled toilets were deficient.

Councillor McNally described it as a step in the right direction that an accessibility certificate now had to be issued in relation to all industrial and commercial buildings.

"Standards need to be changed and upgraded and this is something we all should get behind," he added.