

Cabinet – 4 September 2019

Period Poverty – response to resolution from Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Portfolio: Councillor Longhi – Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing
Councillor Chattha – Portfolio Holder for Personnel and Business Support

Related portfolios: Councillor Wilson - Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Councillor Towe – Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills

Service: Public Health and Business Change

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Aim

- 1.1 To respond to a resolution from Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Period Poverty.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Period Poverty has a negative impact on women and girls with over 137,000 girls in the UK missing school because of period poverty. 68% of girls have said that they are less able to pay attention in class while menstruating. Both missing education and being unable to concentrate for a few days per month when in class have a direct impact on the achievement of girls and contributes to a direct gender inequality.
- 2.2 The Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at the issue and gained evidence from the charity, Period Power.
- 2.3 Cabinet is being asked to note that there are a number of opportunities in Walsall to supply sanitary products to girls in Walsall schools and to vulnerable women.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the resolution from the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is supportive of raising issue of period poverty.

- 3.2 That Cabinet notes the current provision of free sanitary products in secondary schools and through services supporting vulnerable women.
- 3.3 That Cabinet notes the intention to focus on how to reach and ensure supply of sanitary products to vulnerable women, through services, contact with the business community, and school age girls during the holidays.

4. Report detail – Know

4.1 Context

- 4.1.1 Period Poverty is defined as having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints.
- 4.1.2 Evidence from Period Poverty charities and from research shows a negative impact of period poverty on women and girls with over 137,000 girls in the UK missing school because of period poverty. 68% of girls have said that they are less able to pay attention in class while menstruating. Both missing education and being unable to concentrate for a few days per month when in class have a direct impact on the achievement of girls and contributes to a direct gender inequality.
- 4.1.3 Plan UK identified that nationally 1 in 10 girls cannot afford to buy menstrual products. Nationally 40% of girls have used toilet roll because they cannot afford menstrual products.¹ 25.8% of children under 16 in Walsall live in poverty, in comparison with 20.3% nationally. It would therefore be anticipated that in Walsall, more than 1 in 10 of girls cannot afford products.
- 4.1.4 At its meeting on the 26 February 2019 the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel passed the following resolution:
- a. That Cabinet be asked to become the second Council in the country to agree to provide sanitary products in all publically owned buildings.*
 - b. Cabinet is asked to encourage local businesses to provide sanitary products in their premises.*
 - c. That the Period Power charity are thanked for their hard work and for the contribution that they make in Walsall.*
 - d. The Chair will write to the appropriate Government department and to the LGA, to seek support for the removal of tax on sanitary products, and to seek an appropriate level of funding to provide sanitary products in its publically owned buildings.”*

Provision of free sanitary products in Walsall

- 4.1.5 In the Chancellor’s Spring Statement 26 February 2019, the Government announced that access to free sanitary products would be provided in all secondary schools and colleges to “tackle Period Poverty in schools, and the Department for Education will lead work to develop a national scheme in England to provide free sanitary products to girls in secondary schools”.

¹ <https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/plan-international-uks-research-on-period-poverty-and-stigma>

Although welcomed by campaigners, this does not cover primary schools as girls may start menstruating as young as 8 years old.

- 4.1.6 Currently the Council does not provide free or paid for sanitary products at its facilities, including leisure centres. The Council is aware that some of its partners provide sanitary products. In particular, the Night Shelter, food groups and foodbanks for vulnerable people provide donated sanitary products at no cost to the service user. These products need to be requested rather than being freely available on display
- 4.1.7 While it is important that girls in secondary schools receive free sanitary products as recognised by the Chancellor in his Spring Statement 2019, there are women who have left school who are also affected by period poverty, for example those accessing foodbanks or the Glebe Centre. Council officers will look for ways to support this community offer.
- 4.1.8 From this summer, all women and girls being cared for by the NHS will be given, on request, appropriate sanitary products free of charge.
- 4.1.9 On the 26 February, the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee made the recommendation that Cabinet be asked to become the second Council in the country to agree to provide sanitary products in all publically owned buildings with Stoke Council being the first Council to do this. There is no evidence however that provision of free sanitary products was successful in reaching vulnerable women. It is therefore recommended that Walsall focusses its work on how to reach and ensure supply of sanitary products to vulnerable women including school age girls during the holidays, in primary schools and in local businesses.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities

- 4.2 The corporate plan includes a vision to see inequalities reduced and all potential maximised. The provision of free sanitary products to vulnerable women and girls supports this vision.

Risk Management

- 4.3 There are no risks in relation to the contents of this report.

Financial Implications

- 4.4 There is currently no budget specifically for the provision of sanitary products within Council buildings. If free sanitary products were provided in our buildings the cost would be in the region of £14,000 to £40,000.

Legal Implications

- 4.5 There are no legal implications in relation to the contents of this report.

Procurement Implications / Social Value

- 4.6 Any contract for the provision of free sanitary products within Council premises or schools would need to follow Council procurement policies.

Property Implications

- 4.7 There are no property implications in relation to the contents of this report.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 4.8 Plan UK identified that nationally 1 in 10 girls cannot afford to buy menstrual products. Nationally 40% of girls have used toilet roll because they cannot afford menstrual products. ⁽²⁾ 25.8% of children under 16 in Walsall live in poverty in comparison with 20.3% nationally. It would therefore be anticipated that in Walsall more than 1 in 10 of girls cannot afford sanitary products.

This proposal supports CH2 of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities:

CH2: The gaps in educational achievement between the least and most deprived communities could be narrowed for all underachieving groups.

Staffing Implications

- 4.9 Council staff are asked to raise awareness of the importance in supplying sanitary products to vulnerable girls as part of their normal workload with schools, services and business.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.10 Research from Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D) and Period Poverty charities shows there is strong evidence that Period Poverty has a negative, if indirect, impact on women and girls. The recent announcements by the Government to “develop a national scheme in England to provide free sanitary products to girls in secondary schools” and by NHS England that “all women and girls being cared for by the NHS will be given, on request, appropriate sanitary products free of charge” go some way towards tackling the issue.

Consultation

- 4.11 None.

5. Decide

- 5.1 Cabinet are being asked to support the raising of the issue of period poverty as part of routine service provision and contact with schools, services and business.

² www.freeperiods.org/mission

- 5.2 There is no evidence that council provision of free sanitary ware in vending machines in council owned buildings will reach vulnerable women so cabinet are being asked not to support this recommendation.

6. Respond

- 6.1 Council staff will be asked to implement this recommendation with a particular focus on encouraging schools to supply sanitary products when needed.

7. Review

- 7.1 The take-up and impact of free sanitary products will be reviewed in 12 months.

Background papers

None

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27 August 2019



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27 August 2019

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