

A Report of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 5th November 2019

Tackling Period Poverty and Raising Period Awareness

Executive Commentary

I welcome this review into tackling period poverty; we are all too aware that in many developing countries it is a struggle with affordability and availability of sanitary products. However, it is not something that we automatically assume is a reality in Birmingham or this country.

Periods are natural, there is nothing 'dirty' about periods, however as a society menstruation is not an issue that is discussed openly enough, leaving many young girls feeling embarrassed. There are cultural factors and many myths and taboos that thankfully organisations such as 'Cysters' are tackling as in many communities periods are associated with impurity; and girls and young women as a result are not taking part in everyday activities. Our schools, with a captive audience of children, are in a great position to ensure our children are educated and can talk openly about periods and menstruation being a completely natural process and a key element of the reproductive cycle without which none of us would be here today.

This report reflects the stark reality of how common period poverty is in Birmingham and the UK, with girls missing school due to being unable to purchase sanitary products. There are also the wider associated health implications as without sanitary products there is an increased risk of infections.

I welcome that this is being addressed with the DfE announcing free sanitary products being made available for all secondary schools, and also primary schools from next year. Climate Change and our environment and sustainability are pertinent issues that are being openly discussed and the need to educate and make more readily available menstrual cups and washable pads needs to be looked at further, as most sanitary products contain plastics and we know the damage that this does to our environment.

This report is an insightful read and I thank the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the work and time taken to gather evidence and am supportive of the recommendations proposed to help us in creating a society where periods can be talked about openly.

Councillor Paulette Hamilton
Cabinet Member, Health and Social Care