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| <b>Report of:</b> | <b>Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care</b>              |
| <b>To:</b>        | <b>Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>      | <b>20<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b>                         |

## **Progress Report on Implementation: Tackling Period Poverty and Raising Period Awareness**

### **Review Information**

|                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Date approved at City Council:      | 5 <sup>th</sup> November 2019 |
| Member who led the original review: | Councillor Rob Pocock         |
| Lead Officer for the review:        | Rose Kiely                    |
| Date progress last tracked:         | N/A                           |

### **Introduction**

'Period poverty' refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products for menstrual hygiene management, (MHM) due to financial constraints. WHO/UNICEF (2012) defined MHM as:

- Women and adolescent girls being able to use clean materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood, and to change them in privacy as often as necessary throughout their menstrual period.
- Being able to use soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.
- Women and girls having access to basic information about the menstrual cycle, and how to manage it, with dignity without discomfort or fear.

Period poverty is a harsh reflection of poverty and inequality.

The report of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee into Period Poverty is welcomed. Action against the recommendations to date is detailed below. Progress against a number of these actions was initially deferred as Public Health resources were diverted to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic.

1. In approving this Review the City Council asked me, as the appropriate Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, to report on progress towards these recommendations to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. Details of progress with the remaining recommendations are shown in Appendix 2.
3. Members are therefore asked to consider progress against the recommendations and give their view as to how progress is categorized for each.

## Appendices

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Scrutiny Office guidance on the tracking process</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Recommendations you are tracking today</b>           |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Recommendations tracked previously and concluded</b> |

## For more information about this report, please contact

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## Appendix ①: The Tracking Process

In making its assessment, the Committee may wish to consider:

- What progress/ key actions have been made against each recommendation?
- Are these actions pertinent to the measures required in the recommendation?
- Have the actions been undertaken within the time scale allocated?
- Are there any matters in the recommendation where progress is outstanding?
- Is the Committee satisfied that sufficient progress has been made and that the recommendation has been achieved?

| Category                                       | Criteria  |
|--|---|
| <b>1: Achieved (Fully)</b>                     | The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has been fully implemented within the timescale specified.  |
| <b>2: Achieved (Late)</b>                      | The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has been fully implemented but not within the timescale specified.  |
| <b>3: Not Achieved (Progress Made)</b>         | The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved, but there has been significant progress made towards full achievement.<br><b>An anticipated date by which the recommendation is expected to become achieved must be advised.</b> |
| <b>4: Not Achieved (Obstacle)</b>              | The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved, but all possible action has been taken. Outstanding actions are prevented by obstacles beyond the control of the Council (such as passage of enabling legislation).              |
| <b>5: Not Achieved (Insufficient Progress)</b> | The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved and there has been insufficient progress made towards full achievement.<br><b>An anticipated date by which the recommendation is expected to become achieved must be advised.</b> |
| <b>6: In Progress</b>                          | It is not appropriate to monitor achievement of the recommendation at this time because the timescale specified has not yet expired.  |

## Appendix 2 : Progress with Recommendations

| No.  | Recommendation  | Responsibility                          | Original Date For Completion | Cabinet Member's Assessment |
|--|---|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>R03</b>   | That the feasibility of commissioning a research programme aimed at establishing the nature and extent of period poverty in Birmingham be explored. A further focus of this review should be on the impact of cultural attitudes and ways of widening 'period awareness' within a super-diverse city. | Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care | September 2020               | 2                           |
| Evidence of Progress (and Anticipated Completion Date if 'Not Achieved')   |   |   |                              |                             |
| <p>R03 has been completed. As previously reported, it was not feasible to undertake research with school children on the topic of period poverty. This was due to logistical challenges, challenges with obtaining funding and the requirements for ethics compliance which would make the work disproportionately time consuming and protracted. Instead we conducted a focussed piece of exploration with West Birmingham Schools and have used findings from other local research carried out by Spring Housing (see page 6 for more detail).</p> <p>Our initial assumption was that girls from more deprived backgrounds would not have sufficient access to period products. School visits to test this assumption revealed a different story. Benson school was visited and they reported that access to period products was not the primary issue. They said, "We have enough period products to paper the walls of our office." The girls have no difficulty and can obtain products in a discrete manner. "The problem we face is that girls do not come to school during their periods. This is far more of an issue and causes them to frequently miss school and therefore not succeed to the extent that they are capable of." The school nurse at George Dixon Academy also confirmed that this was also an issue in their school.</p> <p>An event was planned at George Dixon Academy to explore these issues. This was undertaken as a collaboration between Birmingham City Council Public Health Team, Ladywood and Perry Bar Locality Partnership and George Dixon Academy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Together with the school nurse and staff at George Dixon Academy, we sought the support of a local GP, Dr Susheel Randahwa who has an interest in menstruation health.</li> <li>• A session was held with young women to discuss the issues and share information with the aim of empowering them to attend school and take part in activities during their periods.</li> </ul> <p>The table below summarises the findings which are being used to develop a learning package to be used specifically in education settings. It will provide added value to the already completed HOSC recommendation R01.</p> <p>Along with the research and insight gained from work relating to R04, it is apparent that the supply and availability of products in settings is adequate and that work needs to continue to increase awareness of available support and understanding to reduce stigma about periods.</p> |   |   |                              |                             |

## Feedback and Learning Points

A few of the young women felt that it was important for the boys, younger students and the school as a whole to also be taught what they had learnt that day with some writing:

*'Have the boys in the assembly aswell so they know'*  
*'I think primary (year 5 and 6) students should learn about it as well as boys.'*  
*'need to normalise/support period within school'*

### Learning Points

- With 19.1% of the girls still not being sure of the difference between what's normal and what's not when it comes to their period, this suggests that in next sessions, it will be important that we have a system in place to check that those in attendance have understood the content such as hand up quizzes during the session.

**40%**

Of the young women in attendance had at one point stayed off school because of their period.

**23.3%**

Still didn't think they would come to school if they were on their period after the talk.

**40%**

After the session, over of them now felt confident they could recognise period symptoms that would need them to see a GP.

| No.        | Recommendation  | Responsibility  | Original Date For Completion | Cabinet Member's Assessment |
|------------|---|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>R04</b> | That ways of establishing a more collaborative approach to providing co-ordination and support to third sector organisations working to alleviate period poverty across the city be developed, with particular reference to accessing marginalised communities. This should include examining whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) a programme to provide free period products to the full spectrum of homeless people and those in temporary or supported accommodation can be developed through the relevant support agencies; and</li> <li>(2) a central location in Birmingham for the storage of donated products by third sector organisations can be provided.</li> </ul> | Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety & Equalities<br><br>Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods | September 2020               | 2                           |

### Evidence of Progress (and Anticipated Completion Date if 'Not Achieved')

R04 has been completed. Following a review of period product supply and research into the needs of homeless and vulnerable women, it has been identified that the supply of period products is sufficient and distribution across the third sector is being improved further.

Regular corporate bulk donations of sanitary and other products from Beauty Bank have been secured with centralised delivery to storage facilities at Incredible Surplus, Winson Green B18 4QF. Further corporates have been contacted for additional donations to supplement supply.

Incredible Surplus is a Food Justice Network community collection point and is accessed by 62 organisations that support marginalised groups on a weekly basis, and approximately 1000 individuals.

Larger donations will also be delivered direct to third sector organisations where appropriate.

The distribution chain will include exempt providers undergoing the SEAQS (Supported Exempt Accommodation Quality Standards) where there are gaps identified.

Mapping of places where women can access shower and wash facilities has been carried out by a multi-agency working group, all these places will have a supply of sanitary products and clean underwear. These locations will be incorporated into the Street Support Handbook and the BVSC website.

In addition to the above further distribution and storage sites are being explored to allow greater and easier reach for third sector organisations as well as direct access for marginalised communities and individuals. Sites will be categorised as follows.

Tier 1: Large storage able to accept pallet load donations and organisations to collect a medium/large amount of stock

Tier 2: Medium storage - organisations able to collect a smaller amount of stock

Tier 3 – Localised access points for third sector groups and individual members of community to have access to free sanitary products

Tier 3 City Centre locations will also allow outreach services to have daily ready access to sanitary products to support their clients with direct access also available at some facilities.

The Active Wellbeing Society will maintain oversight of all sites and will share information on collection points but will not directly coordinate collection and distribution from all sites.

Research carried out by Thea Raisbeck into women and rough sleeping in Birmingham highlighted that education and awareness around both period poverty and menstruation itself was low to non-existent in the homelessness sector, and there were concerns that (usually male) staff members were not comfortable talking about menstruation or had not received enough information to enable them to empathise and assist menstruating clients. A training proposal, including a toolkit for homeless settings, to address this is also being developed by Spring Housing in collaboration with the homelessness services and public health. It will enhance further the support around period poverty for homeless women.

| No.        | Recommendation   | Responsibility                           | Original Date For Completion | Cabinet Member's Assessment |
|------------|--|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>R05</b> | That where a service is commissioned by the City Council the possibility of including a clause about alleviating period poverty and raising period awareness be considered for inclusion in future contracts wherever appropriate. | Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources | September 2020               | 2                           |

Evidence of Progress (and Anticipated Completion Date if 'Not Achieved')

FURTHER EVIDENCE & UPDATE:

R05 has been completed as far as possible within legal obligations. The social value guidance document was amended to include the following:

*When planning your social value offer, within every measure and activity, consider how you can target the benefit to:*

- *Children, particularly those in care and care leavers*
- *Elderly people in poor health and in need of support*
- *Homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless*
- *Young unemployed people from deprived wards of the city*

- Disabled people in need of support
- People suffering from fuel poverty, food poverty, **period poverty** and digital poverty
- People experiencing modern slavery or at risk of exploitation

*Targeting the activity on groups most in need will increase the impact of the social value activity. Which groups you focus your activity on should be relevant to the subject of the contract. Targeted groups need to be relevant to the activity and could include children in care, care leavers, homeless, elderly, those experiencing fuel poverty and/or on low income, Black and Minority Ethnic communities, those with a disability, LGBTQ+, etc...*

*'Period poverty' (or menstrual hygiene management, MHM) refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints. It is a harsh reflection of poverty and inequality which is often suffered in silence. Consider donating products to food banks and working with schools to provide free products to those who need it. The Active Wellbeing Society ([theaws.co.uk](http://theaws.co.uk)) can provide more information and provide ways that you can donate locally.*

This amendment was incorporated in the December '21 update of the social value documents together with other amendments as approved by the cabinet in October '21.

The HOSC held on 15/02/2022 recommended that

1. Once the procurement process is complete, they want to see a clause of 'alleviating period poverty' included as a condition of contracts.
2. They would like period poverty to be included in the weighting of the scoring when the social value of a bidder is being considered. That it's not just in the ITT stage but is also included in the assessment stage.

#### **Procurement response:**

- 1- Contract clauses **must be** relevant to the specific contract as stated in the Social Value Act (2021) and the Public Contracts Regulation 2015. Alleviating period poverty is not relevant to every contract. The Council's standard terms and conditions are published and available to all bidders. If the terms are deemed to be not relevant, then the Council is open to legal challenge and would likely lose on this issue.
- 2- Only items that are specified in the tender can be assessed and scored. Period poverty can be specified under the social value element of the scoring. However, as stated in the Social Value Act (2012), "... only matters that are relevant to what is proposed to be procured and, in doing so, must consider the extent to which it is proportionate ...", only matters that are relevant and proportionate can be considered. For example, period poverty may be relevant to a school maintenance contract but not necessarily to an IT software maintenance contract.

The Council's social value mechanism is used to contribute to many causes and campaigns. The Social Value Policy sets out the Council's priorities as stated in the corporate plan. It can be downloaded here: [The Charter and policies | Birmingham City Council](#)

The Birmingham Charter for Social Responsibility transposes these priorities into 6 Themes that can be delivered against via specific measures. The Charter guidance document provides further insight to the type of activity that the Council is looking for. Each tender document specifies what is particularly relevant to each procurement or commissioning exercise. If a specific issue such as period poverty is relevant to a particular commissioning or procurement exercise, then it should be referred to in the social value questions. The bidders' responses can be assessed and scored according to the questions set out in the tender. Aspects that are not specified in the tender cannot be scored, otherwise there is a great risk of legal challenge.

The social value resources from contractors are limited. Therefore, target groups, causes and campaigns need to be prioritised against each other so that these limited resources can be targeted appropriately,

while the Council remains compliant with the “relevant and proportionate” requirements of the Social Value Act.

**Further steps to be taken:**

- 1- It is suggested that a communication is sent to contract managers of relevant contracts to ask that their contractors contribute to this agenda as part of their current social value delivery. A list of appropriate contracts can be produced by the CPS (Corporate Procurement Service). This list could include, for example, school maintenance, food and supplies contracts to schools, hygiene product suppliers, housing repairs and maintenance.
- 2- Procurers and commissioners are reminded to include this agenda in the social value questions where relevant.
- 3- A written article produced by the Public Health Division and supported by CPS is published through existing internal communications on the importance of the agenda and how contractors can contribute.
- 4- Public Health and CPS colleagues to work with relevant local charities and food banks to post projects on the Match My Project portal [Match my project](#) to make products and advice available to those most in need.

**Conclusion:**

The legal obligations placed on the Council do not permit pursuing the committee’s recommendations of 15/02/22. However, there are some actions that have been or will be taken to progress the aims of alleviating period poverty.



## Appendix ③: Concluded Recommendations

These recommendations have been tracked previously and concluded. They are presented here for information only.

**concluded**

| No.         | Recommendation  | Responsibility                                 | Date Concluded by Overview and Scrutiny Committee | Tracking Assessment |
|-------------|---|--|---|---------------------|
| <b>R0 1</b> | That a plan be developed, aimed at supporting schools and teachers in educating and informing students about period poverty and period awareness. This plan should, in particular, deal with stigma and provide information about the range of products, including reusable products available and their use and disposal.  | Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture | November 2020                                     | 1                   |
| <b>R0 2</b> | That the City Council should:<br>(1) declare its support for the pledge promoted by Girlguiding Birmingham to prevent stigma around periods; and<br>(2) initiate a programme to tackle stigma around periods in the workplace centred on the City Council workforce and that ways of developing a wider programme for partner organisations and Small and Medium Enterprises, with special reference to sectors employing significant numbers of female employees in low pay sectors, be pursued. | Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care        | September 2020                                    | 2                   |
| <b>R0 6</b> | That an assessment of progress against the recommendations in this report be presented to the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.   | Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care        | November 2020                                     | 1                   |