

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
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To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 1 October 2019

Subject: Period Poverty

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

Period Poverty is the term used to describe the struggle that some girls and women go through when experiencing their menstruation cycle due to not having access to appropriate products and facing the stigma that still exists around this topic.

This report provides an overview of statistical estimates on the prevalence and impact of Period Poverty in the UK; details of national initiatives (and their local delivery) tackling the issue of Period Poverty; and the UK Government's response.

Recommendation(s):

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the report.

Introduction

- 1.1. Period Poverty is the term used to describe the struggle that some girls and women go through when experiencing their menstruation cycle due to not having access to appropriate products and facing the stigma that still exists around this topic.
- 1.2. Whilst this issue has previously been attributed in the main to developing countries, research and campaigns over recent years have brought this into focus within the UK. Sanitary products in the UK are classed as a "luxury, non-essential item" and taxed at 5%.
- 1.3. Although we currently do not have Kent specific data, in December 2017, girl's rights charity [Plan International UK](#) provided statistical estimates of the prevalence of Period Poverty in the UK. They estimate that:
 - One in ten girls (10%) have been unable to afford sanitary wear
 - One in seven girls (15%) have struggled to afford sanitary wear

- One in seven girls (14%) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues
- More than one in ten girls (12%) has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues
- One in five (19%) of girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost
- Nearly half (48%) of girls aged 14-21 in the UK are embarrassed by their periods
- One in seven (14%) girls admitted that they did not know what was happening when they started their period and more than a quarter (26 per cent) reporting that they did not know what to do when they started their period
- Only one in five (22%) girls feel comfortable discussing their period with their teacher
- Almost three quarters (71%) of girls admitted that they have felt embarrassed buying sanitary products
- One in ten had been asked not to talk about their periods in front of their mother (12%) or father (11%)
- 49% of girls have missed an entire day of school because of their period, of which 59% have made up a lie or an alternate excuse
- 64% of girls have missed a PE or sport lesson because of their period, of which 52% of girls have made up a lie or excuse

1.4. A study undertaken by YouGov found almost half of British girls have witnessed their peers being bullied and shamed about their period.

1.5. The British Medical Association stated that it felt that period products are a basic human need, just like food, and should be made freely available at all hospitals in Britain.

2. Initiatives Tackling Period Poverty

2.1. [The Red Box Project](#) is a community-based charity initiative which supports young people throughout their menstruation cycle through the provision of red boxes containing free products.

2.2. These boxes are located in a range of settings in Kent and across the country, these are mostly in Primary and Secondary Schools, but locations also include community health settings, children's centres and youth hubs and other local voluntary sector locations. Locations have their own Facebook pages to share updates and to promote the project locally. Further details on the locations can

be found on their website.

- 2.3. A similar initiative is [The Hygiene Bank](#), which has drop-off points to take donations of a range of essential toiletries, including period products. These are then distributed via other local organisations such as foodbanks, schools, supported housing schemes, refuges, etc. The Hygiene Bank is in operation within several locations in Kent and across the UK. Further details on the locations can be found on their website.
- 2.4. Kent County Council's Libraries Registration and Archives service is developing a pilot project called [Tricky Period](#), which aims to deliver a free service to provide period products to girls and women from low income families and to support those who lead chaotic lifestyles e.g. those who are homeless or sofa surfing. As yet this has not been evaluated so it is not possible to determine the impact of the pilot.
- 2.5. The pilot will be similar to that of The Red Box Project and The Hygiene Bank, whereby the library will act as a distribution point for the period products. Libraries are central and easily accessible location for people to donate and collect period products.
- 2.6. Recognising that Thanet is an area of potential need, the pilot operating from Westgate and Newington libraries. All Thanet libraries are accepting donations of sanitary products. The pilot launched on 1st August 2019 and responses to their Facebook posts about the pilot have been well received. It is anticipated that engagement and consultation with families and young people involved in the pilot will be able to assist in the evaluation and development of the initiative if it is considered to be effective.
- 2.7. [Girlguiding](#) is one of the leading campaigners to take action against period shame and stigma and actively encourage girls involved in their programmes to talk openly about periods and how to deal with them.
- 2.8. The #FreePeriods campaign, which aims to put an end to Period Poverty in the UK and globally so that no child misses out on education because of their period, was established by Amika George, with support from the Red Box Project and [The Pink Protest](#). The Pink Protest promotes and supports individuals to actively engage in the campaign, including providing videos to encourage young people to get involved.

3. Government Response to Period Poverty

- 3.1. The research from Plan International UK and campaigning from charities and social action communities such as those described above and Headteachers has helped to bring the issue of Period Poverty in the UK to the attention of the UK Government.
- 3.2. In March 2019, Minister for Women and Equalities and Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt announced the UK Government's bid to end Period Poverty in the UK and across the world by 2030. This

campaign will see:

- i. an investment of £2m through the Department of International Development (DFID) in international aid to fund project around the work providing period products as well as education programmes to promote a better understanding and open discussions on periods.
- ii. an advisory taskforce with representatives across government departments, manufacturers, retailers, social enterprises and charities. It was announced that £250k funding will kickstart this work, which “will also lever funding and expertise from the private sector to develop a sustainable solution to period poverty in the UK”.

3.3. Ms Morduant’s announcement also stated that AmplifyChange (a multi-donor challenge fund supporting civil society advocacy for sexual and reproductive health and rights) has committed £1.5m to support over 50 projects working across 27 countries helping girls to manage their periods with dignity.

3.4. In April 2019, Chancellor Philip Hammond announced in his Spring Statement that the Government would provide funding for free period products in all secondary schools and colleges in England from 2020. Full details of the funding are expected to be announced in the spending review.

3.5. The Treasury is to set up a similar scheme to that which was put in place in Scotland, where, following a pilot programme in Aberdeen, a £5.2m scheme was put in place to provide free period products to schools, colleges and universities.

4. Conclusion

4.1. The government announcements in March and April 2019 indicate that significant progress is being made to address Period Poverty nationally and globally. To date, much of the progress made to tackle this issue has been through the efforts of charitable organisations, at both a national and local levels.

4.2. Until any announcement as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review it remains unclear where any potential spending might be allocated and how or whether any Kent based charities/ business could become beneficiaries of the fund.

Recommendation(s): The Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the report.
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Background Documents:

None

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