

This report is public	
Period Poverty	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	4 March 2024
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities Councillor Phil Chapman
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	Full Council 18 December 2023
Report of	Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, Nicola Riley

Purpose of report

To respond to the motion passed at Full Council on 18 December 2023.

To combat period poverty, this Council asks the Executive

- a) to investigate and report back on the number of accessible locations across the Council's estate where free sanitary products can feasibly and sensitively be provided.
- b) to consider the report and the recommendations therein to make a decision on implementation."

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To provide free sanitary products in Bodicote House in the publicly accessible women's lavatories.
- 1.2 Furthermore, to provide an opportunity for community partners from the warm spaces network, community food network and community centres to opt in to providing female hygiene products at no cost to customers.
- 1.3 To provide a grant of £150 for up to 80 community locations who opt in.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The motion laid out in December focussed on the Action Aid report into period poverty. It stated;

'We have seen the cost of living crisis leave many of our residents with unacceptable choices between heating or eating.

However, the cost of living crisis has caused highlighted another crucial issue: period poverty. Many women and girls do not have access to sanitary products due to the rising cost of other essentials such as food and energy, which are necessarily being prioritised.

A poll by Action Aid in May 2023 showed that more than 21% or 1 in 5 women and people who menstruate are experiencing period poverty. Furthermore, the percentage of those affected has risen from 12% to 21% in just one year.

Being unable to comfortably leave home for several days every month due to lack of sanitary products is unbearable for the individuals and missing work or school has further financial or educational implications.

There are also serious health risks: 41% of respondents used sanitary products for much longer than recommended and 8% resorted to re-using disposal products. In addition to the physical dangers, the impact of shame and anxiety on mental health is significant.”

- 2.2 Cherwell District Council has one publicly accessible building in its direct management; Bodicote House. In responding to the proposal, the recommendation proposes that sanitary products should be available in the publicly accessible toilets. The number of visitors to the council offices make it unlikely that there will be a great demand for products there, but this shouldn't be a reason not to supply them.
- 2.3 Furthermore, through the cost of living work the Council has been engaged in with its community partners there is a further opportunity to connect with women who find the cost of sanitary products necessitates some change to their everyday lives when they have a period.
- 2.4 Some of the community venues in the warm space network, alongside community food network members, and some community centres run by community associations offer hygiene products. There is an opportunity to partner with them, highlighting their support for women and offering some small-scale support.
- 2.5 Cherwell Officers will undertake an evaluation to ascertain how many of the spaces continued to provide hygiene items once the grant was spent at 6 months post award.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	The recommendations will require £12,000 to cover up to 80 community venues plus an additional cost for provision of hygiene products at Bodicote House of £1,000. These cost can be met through the utilisation of the Household Support Fund grant but will require the current programme of equipment grants and draught proofing to accommodate this new expenditure.

	Kelly Wheeler Finance Business Partner			
Legal	There are no legal implications arising from the report. Shahin Ismail - Interim Head of Legal Services			
Risk Management	There are no risks associated with the report. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact	x			This intervention will have a beneficial impact on women and girls who are currently experiencing period poverty. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			
Climate & Environmental Impact		x		Not applicable
ICT & Digital Impact		x		Not applicable
Data Impact		x		Not applicable
Procurement & subsidy		x		Not applicable
Council Priorities	Healthy, resilient, and engaged communities			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	Minor variation to Facilities management at Bodicote will be required and can be delivered. Claire Banks Site Facilities Manager			

Consultation & Engagement	Community partners will be consulted about their willingness to participate should the recommendation be agreed via email.
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Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Action Aid report referred to in the motion to full council sets out the issues surrounding period poverty. The headlines of that report apply as equally to Cherwell as any other area in the country. Given the known levels of deprivation across the district we can assume that there are women in Cherwell who are struggling to meet the costs of having periods.

4. Details

- 4.1 UK based charity Freedom4girls asked Plan international to run a large scale survey of women and girls to gather statistics and analyse the extent to which period poverty had an impact on them.
- 4.2 From the investigations towards the report, Plan International also defined period poverty as having three levels to it:
1. The cost of menstrual products.
 2. A lack of education around periods and general menstrual health.
 3. Shame, stigma and taboo associated with menstruation.
- 4.3 Period poverty has been recognised nationally as a topic requiring some response from devolved and local authorities.
- 4.4 Locally Schools have been providing free products for girls in schools who need them and many of the food banks have hygiene products available and some community buildings also have free products to use.
- 4.5 There is no reason to believe that the scale of the issues nationally would not be reflected locally.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To do nothing. Given the motion that was passed at Full Council and the potential impact on health and economic independence period poverty can have, this option has not been recommended.

Option 2: Consider providing more sustainable products rather than free disposable ones. The prohibitive costs of more sustainable products and the administrative resource needed to offer them makes this a commitment beyond our current means and so hasn't been recommended.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 In conclusion, period poverty is a local issues and the recommendations continue the spirit of the motion in providing products at Bodicote but recognises that women struggling to meet everyday costs of living are more likely to access community buildings and community food provision making support of these spaces the best way to get district coverage of free hygiene products.

Decision Information

Key Decision	No
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	None
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	Freedom4girls website and Action Aid report into Period poverty
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