



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021-22

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH MARCH 2022

PERIOD DIGNITY WITHIN SCHOOLS UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & INCLUSION SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Council's progress of tackling period poverty within schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf and to look at the way forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth and matters considered within the report or the remit of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A notice of motion was brought to the Council in July 2017 seeking that the Council will research the availability of free sanitary products, such as tampons and towels, in all secondary schools in the County as an acknowledgement that they are as essential as toilet paper for the personal hygiene of female pupils.
- 3.2 Following agreement for this work, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee established a Scrutiny Working Group to investigate the current approach to the provision and disposal of sanitary products in primary and secondary schools. The Working Group put forward 15 recommendations which received cross-party support when considered by Council.
- 3.3 Cabinet subsequently considered an implementation plan aimed at improving the availability of free sanitary products for female learners in schools, which would make Rhondda Cynon Taf the first Council in Wales to introduce this measure.

- 3.4 Council supported the move in February 2018, which required all schools in RCT with pupils aged nine and above, to provide free sanitary products for female learners to access independently. Cabinet gave final approval at its meeting on Thursday the 19th of April 2018 which saw a six-month trial commencing in the autumn term 2018 to allow time for installation, before a review and subsequent full implementation in April 2019.
- 3.5 The implementation plan outlined a number of key milestones and delivery dates for the introduction of the scheme, which members were provided an update on in March 2019.
- 3.6 A further update was provided to members in November 2019 which considered learner voice, school surveys and the ongoing management of the scheme by the Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service, as well as frequent on-site monitoring by School Facilities Services.

4. PERIOD DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS - PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST REVIEW

- 4.1 Free period products have continued to be supplied to all educational settings in RCT utilising a formula to determine the allocated funding based on the number of learners who may menstruate entering Year 6 and above that academic year. This figure is taken from the latest school PLASC returns.
- 4.2 The purchase of period products has been funded year-on-year by Welsh Government grants since the last review. However, the amount allocated by Welsh Government and criteria for spend has changed over the lifetime of the grant funding.
- 4.3 During the initial Covid-19 lockdown, all educational settings were requested to provide a three month product supply to all learners to ensure that their access to period products was not impacted by school closures.
- 4.4 In the 2020/21 financial year, £92,989 was awarded to RCT schools and £17,723 allocated for community use. In the current financial year, the grant funding for Period Dignity in Schools was combined with the Period Dignity in Communities for the first time with local authorities able to determine themselves how much spend is allocated to each area. Of the total £203,701, £42,000 was allocated to the community element of the grant which is controlled by Community Services and the remaining £161,701 was allocated to schools.
- 4.5 The current grant conditions stipulate that a 'minimum of 50% of the total amount spent on period products must be used to purchase eco-friendly period products (i.e., re-usable products and/or plastic free) to allow maximum choice for users. The funding also allows for the purchase of sanitary disposal bags, storage purses/wet bags for use with reusable products, spare clothing (limited to underwear, trousers, skirts and tights) and period product dispensers. Reusable products are not recommended for primary aged children and therefore elements of the grant are tailored to ensure that we meet the 50% requirement via secondary phase allocations.
- 4.6 Neither RCT or Welsh Government endorse any specific reusable or eco-friendly products, but we do provide schools with a list of providers where these products could be sourced to assist them in meeting the grant obligations.

- 4.7 Throughout the lifetime of the scheme, we have maintained central direction over the period product dispensers sourced to ensure they are fit for purpose and fit with the wider design of our school toilet facilities. We have also worked with companies to provide cost effective solutions to school settings of purchasing products. We do not determine the use of suppliers but have negotiated offers and disseminated these details to schools for consideration. The Welsh Government National Procurement Service provides period product information within the core items of their new Cleaning and Janitorial Materials Framework Agreement.
- 4.8 In July 2021, a meeting was arranged with Welsh Government colleagues to discuss the grant funding and associated impact. The concern held at the time was that the grant funding had significantly grown in recent years and by limiting its use to period products, there were potential opportunities around education that would be missed and also an issue schools faced with storage of bulk purchases. The conversation surrounded our desire to use elements of the funding to undertake training within schools (and communities) that would support education on the use of reusable and eco-friendly products to increase the uptake and resources for those who do not menstruate to respect and understand the menstrual cycle and what period experiencing people go through. Many schools have been concerned about purchasing reusable products that may go unused by learners due to a lack of understanding. Schools have also raised the current inability to use the grant for disposal of products which was also raised with Welsh Government at this time.
- 4.9 In October 2021, a grant variation letter was received from Welsh Government which introduced that up to 20% of the total combined grant may be used for the purposes of training or education within schools and communities, for professionals, learners and community members. This must provide information and the opportunity to take home reusable period products.
- 4.10 To date, we have looked to work with other agencies (e.g., Hafod Housing) to source training in this area that is cost effective and have offered this to all schools with secondary-aged pupils in the first instance. We are awaiting uptake of this element before purchasing the training. We are also exploring pilot workshops with 'Behavioural Change' to inform a longer-term training strategy if successful.
- 4.11 In the interim, schools (and the public) have access to resources created by Welsh Government in conjunction with Keep Wales Tidy Eco Schools. This is available via the Hwb 'Busting the Myths' and aims to break down the myths around periods and period products as well as the benefit of sustainable product alternatives.
- 4.12 Since the last review, the Welsh Government Programme for Government 2021-2026 priorities embedding period dignity in schools as well as expanding free period product provision in communities and the private sector. We have formed part of the Welsh Government Roundtable Discussions and the Information and Good Practice Sharing Sessions to highlight the work that RCT has undertaken, and continue to undertake, in this area.
- 4.13 The Sharing Sessions are currently looking at the grant funding arrangements going forward including a Strategic Action Plan and partnerships with key agencies and services who can support this agenda.

- 4.14 One of the main areas of focus is to drive forward pupil voice in this area at a Strategic Level. Pupil voice has been central to the work in RCT and, although various Covid restrictions have made it difficult in the past 18 months to hold our traditional focus groups with learners, this is an area we plan to revisit over the next year to better understand the current needs within our educational settings.
- 4.15 RCT are also involved in the mapping of period product availability across Wales via the NHS Wales Mislif Fi/Bloody Brilliant resource tool. This has been updated with the 113 schools who distribute free period products as well as the 34 community groups/third sector/LA buildings which those on low income including young people can also access for products. It is due for launch in the new financial year and will be enhanced with education resources.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 An Equality and Diversity Assessment has not been carried out in connection with this report as the contents and actions do not require a policy change, resulting in no reasonably foreseeable differential impacts.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment has not been carried out in connection with this report as the contents and actions do not require a policy change, resulting in no reasonably foreseeable differential impacts.

7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The views of schools have been informally gathered throughout the operation of the scheme and used to determine the steer of conversations with those parties involved, i.e., Welsh Government.
- 7.2 It is envisaged that we will revisit learner and school feedback over the next year to determine areas for improvement and focus.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are currently no additional financial implications to the Council beyond the extent of the revenue provided by the Welsh Government grant. If funding was to be withdrawn in the future by Welsh Government, the Council would need to consider whether it wishes to fund the scheme in order to maintain it. At the current time, funding for next year is scheduled for release by Welsh Government.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 The implementation of the scheme has a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision specifically the priority of 'People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone'.

- 10.2 Cwm Taf's Wellbeing Plan 2018-2023 is a statement of intent which introduces principles to guide public sector organisations in the region to work together in the future to further develop a collaborative service for "resilient communities that are informed, connected, active and resourced and have the ability to adapt to and influence change and improve wellbeing".
- 10.3 It will also help the Council to meet some of the wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place including 'A more equal Wales' and 'A healthier Wales'.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Based on responses from schools and continued oversight of the scheme, the scheme appears to be well implemented across most schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 11.2 Feedback from schools has indicated the level of funding this year was high and due to the specification of the grant funding it could result in a surplus of products being stored at schools. It is believed that flexibility in the grant conditions to cover education and training, and disposal of products could help ensure there is no waste or bulk storage.
- 11.3 Continued engagement with Welsh Government is planned to ensure that frequent feedback is provided surrounding the scheme and where possible, the scheme is improved for the learners of RCT.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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