

READING HEALTH AND WELL BEING BOARD

DATE OF MEETING:	11th OCTOBER 2019	AGENDA ITEM:	10
REPORT TITLE:	Period Poverty		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report informs the Health and Well Being Board of proposed actions to tackle the issue of period poverty in Reading.
- 1.2 'Period poverty' refers to being unable to afford sanitary products due to financial constraints.
- 1.3 A question was submitted to the Policy Committee on 14 January 2019; about what was being done to tackle period poverty in Reading. In the response it was agreed that RBC would develop actions to tackle this issue.
- 1.4 Please see Appendix A- Reading Borough Council (RBC) Period Poverty Action Plan

RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.

To note:

- 2.1 RBC will support plans to ensure provision of free menstrual products for young girls and women living in homeless hostels in Reading.
- 2.2 RBC will work with partners to cover gaps in the provision of free menstrual products supply for school pupils in need e.g. during school holidays or whilst national funding is awaited.
- 2.3 Supports communications to reduce period stigma and shame.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Studies have highlighted that one in ten girls or women aged 14 to 21 in the UK have been unable to afford period products and 26% of girls and women had missed school or work because of problems related to period poverty.
- 3.2 Since the question was asked, Government announced to offer access to sanitary

products in all primary schools in England on 16th April 2019. Menstrual Health will be taught to all pupils in schools from 2020. The lessons will be compulsory and will begin when children are in primary school. Therefore proposals within this paper aim to fill the gaps that this policy does not cover.

- 3.3 The government also announced that period products would be made available in secondary schools, colleges, hospitals, and in police custody to those who need them. A taskforce has also been set together by the government with the aim to tackle stigma around periods, improve education in schools, and increase accessibility of period products.
- 3.4 The Red Box Project is an existing local community based non-profit initiative that provides red boxes filled with period products in some schools in Reading. The project currently supports 18 schools in Reading. The process is once the Reading Red Box Project Coordinator receives confirmation from the school, they make up a box filled with menstrual products (tampons and sanitary pads) and organise delivery. The team also provide 'top-ups', so when supplies are running low with school they can let the team know and boxes are re-stocked within 48hrs. In light of the policy context, this project is stopping. However there is still a need to cover a gap.
- 3.5 Trade Union partners have created a Period Dignity campaign, with associated campaign resources, aiming to reduce stigma and embarrassment around periods and to advocate for the provision of free sanitary products in places of education and work.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 RBC will support provision of free menstrual products for young girls and women living in homeless hostels in Reading by working with hostels, local foodbanks and donation schemes.
- 4.2 RBC will support more schools in Reading to set up donation boxes filled with free sanitary products. This will be done by either linking schools with The Red Box Project before September 2019 or supporting them to access government funded supplies. Signposting schools to free period related information will also help tackle stigma and education around periods alongside accessibility of period products.
- 4.3 RBC will support the provision of free menstrual products for other vulnerable women in Reading e.g. those who are sexually exploited and victims of human trafficking by linking them with the local food banks. There are already existing charities who work with this group such as Rahab and Victim's First-Willow Project.
- 4.4 The above proposal would be accompanied by relevant communications to raise awareness of the service provision by local authority communication channels and the food banks. This communication plan would incorporate period dignity messaging to help reduce period shame and stigma.
- 4.5 It is intended that we will work with Union colleagues about how RBC can support the Period Dignity campaign to reduce period stigma and shame.
- 4.6 When published in October 2019, RBC will review the Director of Public Health's Annual Report- which this year focuses on workplace wellbeing- and will carefully consider any period poverty relevant recommendations it makes for large employers such as RBC.

Similarly, RBC will advocate for businesses in Reading to also adopt any period poverty related actions

5. CONTRIBUTION TO READING'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Reading's Health & Wellbeing Strategy aims to promote and protect the health of all residents, particularly those disadvantaged. By promoting access to free period products for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, the local authority can help reduce this specific health inequality in Reading. The proposal supports Reading Borough Council's strategic aims to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Reading by tackling period poverty.

6. COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Whilst there is no formal engagement, part of the work involves linking with schools and food banks and other community and voluntary sector organisations in Reading.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

While there is no formal Equality Impact Assessment required for this proposal. It should be noted that due to the unequal distribution of period poverty among residents of the Borough, it is anticipated that this proposal will reduce inequalities currently experienced.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications for this proposal.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This proposal is cost neutral to RBC because the supply of sanitary products will be funded either by food bank donations or (in the case of schools) via central government funding.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following websites contain more information about the issue of period poverty

<http://redboxproject.org/get-involved/>

<https://unitetheunion.org/campaigns/unite-demands-period-dignity/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-sanitary-products-in-all-primary-schools>

<https://themustardtree.org/projects/rahab/>