

Health Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 14 May 2019

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

The issue of Period Poverty and how it can best be addressed

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

This report as requested by Full Council provides an outline of the issue of period poverty and how engagement with the work of the national government taskforce would further support a collaborative approach across Lancashire.

Recommendation

The Health Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Note the information contained in the report
2. Formulate any recommendations on how to engage with the Government's joint taskforce on period poverty
3. Formulate any recommendations as to how to collaboratively develop and implement supportive interventions as a result, across Lancashire.

Background and Advice

Full Council at its meeting held on 18 October 2018, resolved that:

"Council welcomes the recent commitment from the Scottish Government to tackle Period Poverty and the pledge from the Minister for Women, Victoria Atkins, to remove VAT from sanitary products following Brexit.

Council notes research that suggests one in ten girls have at some point been unable to afford sanitary products with 49% having missed an entire day of school because of their period.

Council also notes some of the work already going on in this area from the likes of Red Box, The Girl Guiding Association and the sanitary product manufacturer, Always.

Council recognises however that whilst many women and girls will benefit from this, there is scope to work with partners to provide help to others who may be in vulnerable situations.

Lancashire County Council therefore:

- Instructs the Director of Public Health to produce a report to the Health Scrutiny Committee on the issue of Period Poverty and how it can best be addressed.
- Commits to work and consult with all our partners including the NHS, girls, Schools, Colleges, Universities and those mentioned above to understand the local issues, raise awareness and tackle stigma."

Period poverty is a global issue. Worldwide, across low and middle-income countries it is estimated that over half of all women and girls are forced to use homemade products, rags, grass or paper to manage their periods. In many countries there is a lack of information and appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

It is also an issue in the UK and in Lancashire. Research suggests one in ten girls between the ages of 14 to 21 years in the UK have, at some point, been unable to afford sanitary products with 49 per cent having missed an entire day of school because of their period. 64 per cent of girls have missed a PE or sport lesson because of their period, of which 52 per cent of girls have made up a lie or excuse. There is no specific information available on period poverty within Lancashire.

There is work already going on in this area from organisations such as Red Box, The Girl Guiding Association and the sanitary ware manufacturer, Always. In addition to this, there is activity in some local schools across Lancashire.

Government's Response to Period Poverty:

On 4 March this year the Minister for Women and Equalities, Penny Mordaunt, announced that the Government would establish a **new joint taskforce** on period poverty in the UK. This initiative recognises the importance of tackling period poverty for the dignity and empowerment of women and girls. Ms Mordaunt announced that up to £250,000 has been committed in seed funding to support the work. An update on the Government's response on Period Poverty made on 24 April 2019, [is available on Parliament's website](#).

The **taskforce** will launch in June 2019 and will bring together a range of different organisations working on period poverty from across the public, private and third sectors. Its objective will be to join up learning and ideas and develop a comprehensive, sustainable response. By linking different sectors, it will build on the range of diverse initiatives that already exist, promoting those which are delivering impact, and helping them to grow and become sustainable. Priorities for the taskforce include:

- Obtaining better evidence and understanding of how period poverty affects different groups in our society;
- Addressing the stigma;
- Role of education, communications and role models in shifting social attitudes

In the Spring Statement of 13 March 2019, the Chancellor, Phillip Hammond, announced support for a new scheme to provide free sanitary products in secondary schools and further education colleges.

On April 16th, it was further announced that free period products will be offered to girls in all primary schools in England from early next year. Extending the programme to all primary schools follows feedback from teachers, students and parents. The Department for Education is now working with key stakeholders in the public and private sector to roll-out the programme in a cost-effective manner that supports girls and young women across the country.

Useful links:

Research on period poverty: <https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/plan-international-uks-research-on-period-poverty-and-stigma>

For consideration:

A population-wide approach is required in order to break the stigma, foster dignity and raise awareness to address the reality that too many girls lack the knowledge and understanding of how to manage their period, are too afraid to ask for advice, and are unable to afford the products to support them.

We intend to continue:

1. Elected member engagement to review the outcomes and findings of the new taskforce and their application to Lancashire.
2. Sharing of best practice and evidence based approaches from this taskforce with a view to implementation in Lancashire in conjunction with our communities, schools and local partners including the NHS, girls, schools, colleges and universities.

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Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

This report has no significant risk implications.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A