

Council 14 March, 2019

Addressing Period Poverty

Labour Group to move:

Council notes that:

- 1 A survey by girls' rights charity Plan International UK found that:
 - one in ten girls in the UK are unable to afford sanitary products;
 - one in seven girls have also struggled to afford sanitary products;
 - one in seven girls have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues;
 - more than one in ten girls has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues; and
 - one in five girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost.
- 2 A January 2018 report also by Plan International UK *Break the Barriers: Girls' Experiences of Menstruation in the UK* found that periods are surrounded by shame and stigma. 48% of girls feel embarrassed by their periods rising to 56% of 14 year olds.
- 3 A number of different approaches are being taken to address period poverty including the Red Box Project which provides sanitary products in schools. Brook, in partnership with Plan International UK is piloting a P-Card scheme which will provide free period products, education and information to vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.
- 4 Safe disposal of menstrual products poses an increasing environmental problem. Some packs of single-use pads have the equivalent of four carrier bags worth of plastic in them which takes centuries to biodegrade and releases toxic gases if burnt.
- 5 Research by Anglia Water found that nearly half of women flush tampons and consider this a normal method of disposal. This can lead to blocked sewers and polluted rivers and oceans.
- 6 B&NES MYP, Hannah Powell, has said that many teenage girls would love to try menstrual cups because they are so much better for the environment, but the cost can be prohibitive.
- 7 That from this summer, the NHS will offer hospital patients free sanitary products in order to tackle period poverty.

This Council believes that:

- 8 Talking about periods and ending the taboos that surround them, means that we can better equip every girl with the products and information she needs to manage her periods effectively without shame, stigma or embarrassment.
- 9 Addressing period poverty should also involve education so that girls understand what is available and the environmental impact of disposable products. Reusable menstrual products, as well as being better for the environment, by their very nature help to address period poverty in a sustainable and long-lasting way. However, they will not be suitable for everyone and it is important that girls have a choice of products.
- 10 Individual councillors as public figures and community leaders, have a responsibility to take a lead in opening up the debate about periods so that we can begin to address the shame and stigma felt by so many girls and women.

Council resolves therefore:

- 11 To welcome the £50K committed by this Council to address period poverty.

- 12 To work in partnership with those organisations seeking to address period poverty, to set up a pilot scheme to test the feasibility of providing girls, on a universal basis, with a choice from a range of reusable products, including menstrual cups and washable pads, along with the advice and support that they and their parents or carers need to start using these products. The pilot should seek to establish:
- the most appropriate age for providing reusable products to girls;
 - the method of distribution; and
 - the extent to which these products gain acceptability amongst girls.
- 13 Alongside this, working in partnership with schools, colleges, universities, local foodbanks and businesses, to provide access to plastic-free disposable sanitary products on a needs basis for school-aged girls and women and to ensure that the Council's own services have access to the sanitary products they need to support those experiencing period poverty.
- 14 To consider the outcome of the P-card pilot and whether the lessons learnt from it can be applied in the context of B&NES.
- 15 To meet the project management costs and staffing required to deliver this work from the identified budget.
- 16 To ask officers to report progress on the pilot scheme and the other measures to address period poverty to the relevant PDS Panel.