

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

This evening you will be considering several really important motions including one brought to you by the Labour councillors on period poverty.

Over the past 24 hours we have heard an announcement that money is going to be put into addressing period poverty in secondary schools in England. This is to be welcomed. Period poverty has a particular impact on school girls who have no source of income and are therefore entirely reliant on the adults in their lives to provide them with the products they need to manage their periods. We hear too many stories about teenagers having to improvise sanitary wear, using rolled up socks or toilet roll and sellotape for example, and missing out on education because they can't afford the sanitary products they need. I am really glad that this is now being widely recognised as an issue that needs to be addressed.

However, the announcement made yesterday does not make this motion redundant. Far from it. Instead, if agreed, this motion will put B&NES Council at the forefront of efforts to end period poverty by providing a long lasting and sustainable solution.

We hear so much about climate change and ocean plastic and indeed you will be debating that tonight too. Many people will be shocked to learn that some disposable sanitary products contain the equivalent of four carrier bags of plastic which takes hundreds of years to biodegrade. Reusable products not only address environmental concerns but have built into them the means of addressing period poverty in the long term. As a teenager, I would have felt far too embarrassed to have freely helped myself from a basket by the sinks. Being provided with reusable products would have avoided this, but the provision of reusable sanitary wear will need to go hand-in-hand with education as many people will be unfamiliar with these items. It will also be important to provide girls and women with a choice through the provision of plastic-free disposable products to those in need.

Periods are still surrounded by embarrassment, but slowly the stigma is being eroded. Tonight you have a great opportunity to open up the debate even further. When you get to that item on the agenda, I hope to hear lots of councillors talking about periods and in doing so you will be making a big difference to women and girls in our area.