

Report title	Period Poverty – Motion from Council 20 July 2023
Report author	Darren Williams, Corporate Head of Community Services
Department	Community Services
Exempt	No

Purpose of report:

To Recommend for approval by Corporate Management Committee

Synopsis of report:

Following a motion being presented relating to Period Poverty, at the meeting of Full Council in July 2023, the amended and agreed motion has resulted in Community Services Committee being asked to consider how the Council can provide free products across the borough.

This report considers some of the work being done in this area, and sets out how the Council intends to provide support to ending period poverty, in the borough

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to recommend to Corporate Management Committee, the approval of a combined budget of £24,000 over three years.

Members are asked to approve the delegation of authority for agreeing the delivery of this project to the Corporate Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Community Services Committee and the original Councillor proposer of the motion, to Council.

1. Context and background of report

1.1 Following a motion being presented relating to period poverty, at the meeting of the Council in July 2023, the following amended and agreed motion was carried:

“Ask the Community Services Committee to look at ways to provide free, and as a preference, plastic-free and bio-degradable, period products in all of the council’s public accessible toilets and buildings including leisure centres, libraries and community centres.”

1.2 This report summarises some of the support known to be available within the borough, the role of national charities working to end period poverty and considers the opportunity for the Council to provide additional support to women and girls in Runnymede, who are experiencing period poverty.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

- 2.1 Within the motion presented at the Council, statistics on period poverty were provided (taken from Action Aid, 2022), to give context to the issue facing girls, women and people who menstruate in the UK today. A summary of the information presented is as follows:
- 1 in 8 women had recently struggled to buy menstrual products, either for themselves or a dependent
 - Of those who struggled to afford menstrual products, 75% had needed to prioritise spending money on food and 49% needed to prioritise spending money on gas and/or electricity.
- 2.2 An article by Action Aid, published on 26 May 2023, on their website ([UK Period poverty rises from 12 to 21% | ActionAid UK](#)), outlined how period poverty had risen in the UK over the course of a year.
- 2.3 Within the report, updated data relating to period poverty following the undertaking of an online poll, completed by over 2000 people, is included. Some of the key statistical data is listed below:
- 21% of girls, women and people who menstruate in the UK are now struggling to afford period products – an increase of 12%
 - 41% kept sanitary pads or tampons in for longer and 8% have to re-use disposable pads.
 - 37% said they had used tissues or cotton wool instead of sanitary pads, whilst 13% said they had used socks or other clothing and 9% resorted to using paper or newspaper.
 - 60% of respondents had to prioritise purchasing food, and 48% prioritise purchasing gas/electricity, over purchasing period products.
 - 24% said they sacrificed period products for themselves so they could afford to buy products for their dependent(s)
 - 17% of respondents said that they had stayed at home due to a lack of access to period products, missing out on access to school, work, exercising or socializing and potentially resulting in wider health and wellbeing impacts.
 - 39% said that they deliberately missed sport or exercise, whilst 25% missed socializing with friends whilst on their periods (these statistics relate to both period poverty and ongoing stigma)
- 2.4 This more recent data shows that period poverty in the UK has worsened over the past twelve months, during a cost-of-living crisis and has a significant social, health and wellbeing impacts for girls, women and people who menstruate.
- 2.5 In response to period poverty, the government have funded a scheme to provide access to period products within education settings to girls and women up to the age of 19 ([Period product scheme for schools and colleges in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)).
- 2.6 The offer is not a universal offer of free period products to everyone under the age of 19, but instead provides access to period products if needed. Examples of such scenarios are where personal products have been forgotten, where individuals cannot afford products and in situations where girls, women and people who menstruate have their period unexpectedly.

- 2.7 In response to period poverty, several charities have been set up nationally to provide access to free products across the UK. One such example is Hey Girls, a UK charity set up in 2018, that has provided 30 million free products over their five years of operation (*taken from Hey Girls website – August 2023*).
- 2.8 More locally, in 2021, Surrey County Council launched their Period Dignity campaign across the county, working with the charity Binti International [Period dignity across Surrey - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#).
- 2.9 Surrey County Council focuses on two main project strands, these being providing free period products in locations across Surrey and working towards eradicating period stigma.
- 2.10 Surrey County Council have made available the collection of free period products from libraries (including Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham), as well as from their council offices across the County (nearest offices to Runnymede are the Dakota building in Weybridge and Quadrant Court, in Woking).
- 2.11 Local charities are also attempting to support addressing period poverty, with Runnymede Foodbank currently receiving donations of, and distributing, period products to families in need of support across the borough.
- 2.12 For all the above, the Council recognises that more needs to be done and has sought funding to be able to support girls, women and people who menstruate, in the borough, who are experiencing period poverty.
- 2.13 As a result, it is proposed that the council commits the sum of £24,000, over a three-year period, to support the distribution of period products to children, women and people who menstruate, who are experiencing period poverty.
- 2.14 The funding has been identified from within the following budgets (see section 4 for more information of funding sources).

Sum	Identified Budget	Business Unit Responsible
£7,500	2023/2024 Communities First	Community Services
£7,500	Ringfenced funding from NHS for local projects and initiatives	Community Services
£9,000 (£3,000 per annum)	Housing Revenue Account – Existing Budgets	Housing

- 2.15 In terms of how this money will be used and the offer delivered, this will be worked through in the remainder of 2023/2024 and into the following year, although Members are asked to note that this project is not included in the 2023/2024 Community Services, Service Area Plan.
- 2.16 When considering the options for delivery in light of the Council motion, Officers have identified risks in the context of managing the distribution to ensure that it can meet the identified need and reflect the intention of the motion. Officers are exploring delivery mechanisms in this context and with regard to existing organisations in the area who can assist in targeting period products to those most in need. In addition to

the options for delivery outlined in the original motion; there may be other possible options that include:

- Partnering with local voluntary, community, and faith sector organisations to provide local access to free period products for those who need them making products accessible,
- Making products accessible within proximity of social housing estates within the borough
- Working with leisure providers to make products available to encourage the continued take up of sport and leisure.
- Making products available at Council buildings, including the Civic Offices (in doing so also supporting Council employees). It is also intended to engage with Surrey County Council on their work to explore any opportunity to collaborate.

3. Policy framework implications

3.1 This report meets the corporate objectives of the Council, specifically in relation to Health and Wellbeing. The following objectives within the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy are also supported:

- Creating healthy homes
- Creating healthy communities
- Working in partnership to tackle health inequality.

4. Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)

4.1 Paragraph 2.14 of this report outlines the sources of funding to create the total budget of £24,000. It is important to note that with £7,500 of this funding coming from 2023/2024 budgets, this will need to be carried forward and split over the three-year period.

4.2 The ringfenced NHS funding was subject of a report previously brought to committee in June 2022. This provides discretion for RBC to focus this money on Runnymede projects, centred on prevention and the wider determinants of health. This money will partly, in future, be utilised through the soon to be launched Runnymede Health and Wellbeing Partnership, linked to the North West Surrey Alliance. For this project, the £7,500 allocated will be moved to general fund balances and applied to the three-year project.

4.3 The Corporate Head of Housing has confirmed that from within those budgets in place to support social housing tenants suffering hardship, a contribution of £3,000 per year is possible.

4.4 At the time of writing, no additional funding has been identified to extend the project beyond the 3-year timescale.

5. Legal implications

5.1 No legal implications have been identified within this report.

6. Equality implications

6.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010. Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to;

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - b) advance equality of opportunity
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics.
- 6.2 We should at all times act in a way that is non-discriminatory through our policies and procedures and interactions with people.
- 6.3 In the development of a plan to distribute and make accessible period products across the borough, an equalities impact screening assessment will be completed, considering the proposed approach.
- 6.4 Whilst socio-economic circumstances are not a protected characteristic; this initiative is clearly relevant to age and sex.
- 7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**
- 7.1 In developing the project, consideration will be given to the use of environmentally friendly products and reusable products. The possible inclusion of reusable products will both have environmental benefits and enable the funding allocated to support more people.
- 8. Timetable for Implementation**
- 8.1 In the event that approval is received from Corporate Management Committee, this project will then be added to the work programme within Community Services.
- 8.2 Given the existing commitments for 2023/2024 and additional projects and tasks identified so far this year, whilst Officers will look to move this project forward within quarter 3 and quarter 4 of this financial year, actual timescales are not able to be committed to at this time.
- 9. Conclusions**
- 9.1 The motion presented to full Council was unanimously supported by Councillors, and demonstrated the issue of period poverty across the UK. The Council has considered how it can provide additional support to actions already being undertaken across the county.
- 10. Background papers**
None stated.
- 11. Appendices**
None.