

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/2018

COUNCIL

28TH FEBRUARY, 2018

AGENDA ITEM 12
FINAL REPORT OF SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP DEALING WITH FREE SANITARY PROVISIONS IN SCHOOLS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide Members with the final report of the Scrutiny Working Group established to deal with 'Free Sanitary Provisions in schools' following the Notice of Motion (as amended) adopted by full Council on the 19th July 2017.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To receive the final report of the Scrutiny Working Group; and
- 2.2 To refer the findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group to Cabinet.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Members will recall at the full Council meeting held on the 19th July 2017, the following Notice of Motion, as amended in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10.4.1, was adopted:-

“That this Council will research the availability of free sanitary products, such as tampons and towels, in all Secondary Schools in the County as an acknowledgement that they are as essential as toilet paper for the personal hygiene of female pupils.”

- 3.2 It was resolved at the Council Meeting that the matter be referred to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the availability of hygiene products in RCT schools and, if appropriate, bring forward recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet in respect of this matter relating to dignity, equality, health and wellbeing and its effect on education in the County.

- 3.3 On the 26th July 2017 the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee resolved to establish a Working Group to consider the Notice of Motion. The Working Group Members comprised of County Borough Councillors S. Rees-Owen (Chair), W. Lewis (Vice Chair), A. Calvert, H. Fychan and J. Brencher.
- 3.4 The Working Group included both County Borough Councillor E. Stephens, initial mover to the Council's Notice of Motion, and Councillor S. Evans, mover to the amended Notice of Motion.
- 3.5 At the Council meeting held on the 20th September 2017, Members received the interim report of the Working Group and it was agreed that the findings and recommendations be reported to a future meeting of the Council.

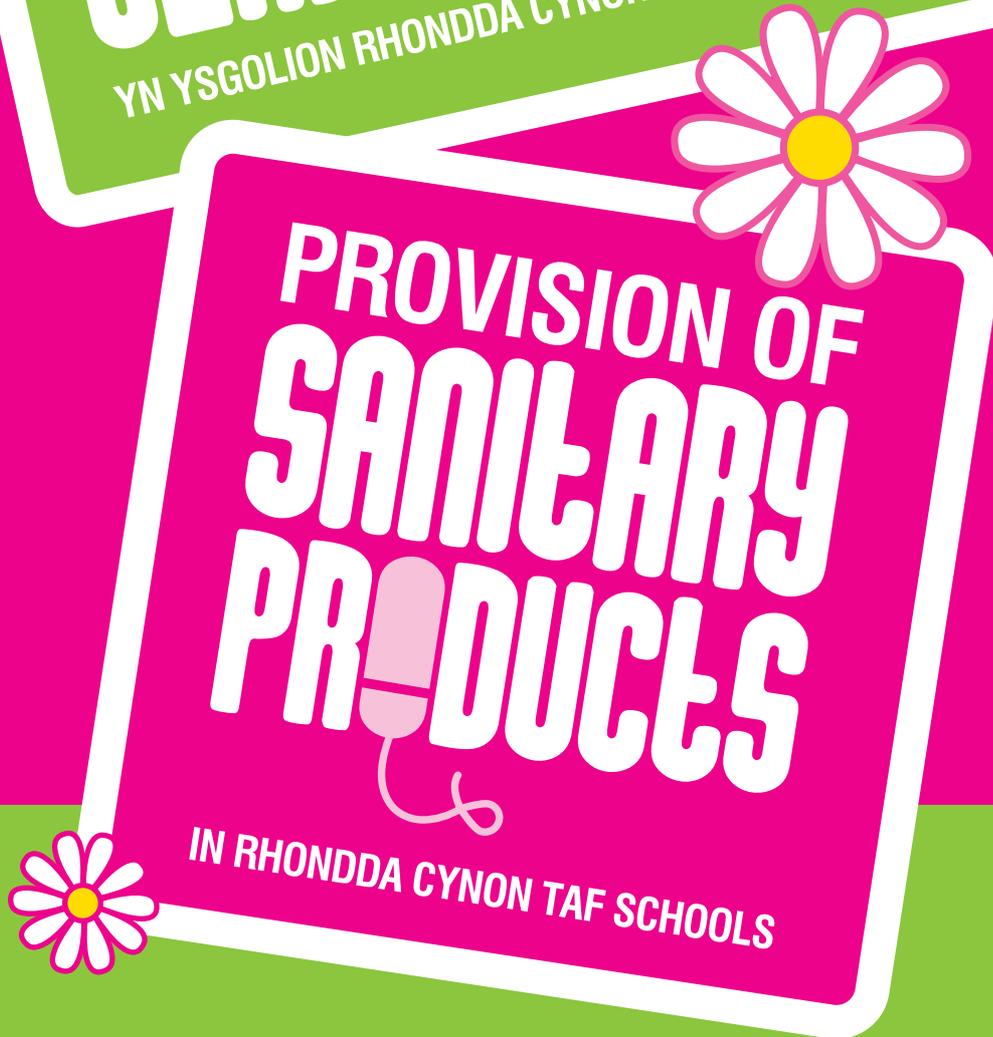
4. FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

- 4.1 Attached is the final report of the Working Group which contains its findings and recommendations following the review that was undertaken from August 2017 to February 2018 and which met on six occasions during that period.
- 4.2 Members reviewed a range of written evidence from the findings of the surveys as identified in the "Findings" Section of the final report attached. Significant value was attached to the comments of the pupils and staff of St. John's Church School and Ferndale Community School who attended the second meeting of the Working Group held on the 25th September 2017. These pupils were keen that the Working Group broaden its scope to include pupils of Primary Schools and therefore the findings of the surveys that were carried out involving female pupils of the Secondary Schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf also reflected on the experiences of those pupils in Year 7 in respect of the availability of free sanitary products from their former Primary Schools.
- 4.3 The production of an animated DVD, created by pupils from Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg, and observed by the Working Group on the 11th January 2018 was of particular relevance.
- 4.4 The Working Group also reviewed initiatives that had been developed by a neighbouring Authority, the Scottish Government and New York City Council but following consideration of those initiatives it was felt that these approaches would not suit the needs of Rhondda Cynon Taf pupils. Members therefore resolved to find their own solution.
- 4.5 Officers from the Council's Procurement Unit have been involved in this process and have endeavoured to find a supplier that would be able to provide adequate dispensers that would be of suitable use for the pupils.

- 4.6 As can be seen from the recommendations within the Working Group's report the Working Group are now confident that a solution for both those female pupils in primary and secondary schools has been found.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The review of the availability of female-hygiene products which has culminated in the recommendations listed in the Working Group's final report will allow Members to form an evidenced based view on this important matter. The evidence and research provided may support the recommendations to Cabinet by Council.



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FOREWORD



Having this important matter referred to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was one of huge responsibility when considering the associated issues relating to the dignity, equality, health and wellbeing of our children and young adults. It was with this responsibility in mind that as Chair I welcomed the following Notice of Motion from Council on the 19th July 2017 to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee that:-

'This Council will research the availability of free sanitary products, such as tampons and towels, in all Secondary Schools in the County as an acknowledgment that they are as essential as toilet paper for the personal hygiene of female pupils'

Request that a report be presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which will consider the availability of hygiene products in RCT schools and, if appropriate, bring forward recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet in respect of this matter relating to dignity, equality, health and wellbeing and its effect on education in a County that has such a high number of pupils living in poverty".

When we began our work last summer, we could not have anticipated the problems and frustrations this matter causes our young people on a monthly basis when we were provided with the opportunity to listen first hand to the views of many pupils from several schools across the County Borough at our meeting in September 2017. Between that evidence and the responses to our pupil consultation, it was clear that there is a problem with the current provision. The sanitary provision and education about menstruation in our schools is inconsistent and it was evident that pupils are far from content with the present arrangements regarding privacy, dignity, wellbeing, attendance and educational effect. We heard shocking examples of period poverty with some of our pupils having to substitute sanitary products with unsuitable alternatives. Periods are a natural monthly occurrence for thousands of our female pupils and are one of the best indicators of a healthy reproductive system. The information we gathered highlighted the importance and urgency that universal, independent access to free sanitary products throughout our schools within RCT should be a basic right for our pupils and that the matter should be given our highest priority.

That said, as a Working Group we were always conscious of the balance needed when considering a practical solution and potential financial ramifications on the Authority when considering the Notice of Motion and its implementation. This has made our work even more relevant and we have consulted with many stakeholders and witnesses along the way to ensure we conducted our research in a thorough and proper manner.

As a group, we are content that our findings and recommendations will improve the current situation and will provide a much needed standard approach across all schools in RCT. The group conducted its work with the pupils' voice at the forefront of our minds.

It was pleasing to see that our pupils were keen to engage with us in having this very important, long overdue conversation and they complimented the Working Group for including and involving them in something that was so important to them and something that would make a difference to so many Pupils. They agreed with us that we should broaden our terms of reference to include older Primary school pupils as this was a matter that affected them too.

During the review, I contacted Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales and in her response, which is attached to this report at Appendix 1, it is pleasing to see that she fully supports the introduction of free sanitary products for girls in schools. The letter also makes reference to the recent General Comment on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted the need for government:

*“to adopt comprehensive gender and sexuality-sensitive sexual and reproductive health policies for adolescents, emphasising that unequal access by adolescents to such information, commodities and services amounts to discrimination. Lack of access to such services contributes to adolescent girls being the group most at risk of dying or suffering serious or lifelong injuries in pregnancy and childbirth. All adolescents should have access to free, confidential, adolescent-responsive and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health services...including emergency contraception, prevention, care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, counselling, pre-conception care, maternal health services and **menstrual hygiene**”.*

I would like to thank all Members of the Working Group for their diligence, dedication, passion and valuable input. On behalf of the Working Group I would also like to thank all Officers involved and the school staff and Head Teachers that participated. But my biggest thanks must go to the pupils who were open, honest and keen to participate in a piece of work that would reflect their views, take their concerns seriously and implement recommendations that would lead the way in making significant changes to improve the lives of young female students in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

County Borough Councillor Shelley Rees-Owen

Chair

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MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 The Working Group comprised the following Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, together with extended invitations to County Borough Councillors E.Stephens and G.R.Davies (mover and seconder of the initial Notice of Motion) and County Borough Councillors S.Evans and J.Harries (also a Member of the Scrutiny Committee ((mover and seconder of the amended Notice of Motion)):-



S.Rees-Owen
(Chair)



W.Lewis
(Vice-Chair)



J.Brencher



A.Calvert



H.Fychan

Mover and Seconder of Initial Notice of Motion



E.Stephens



G.R.Davies

Mover and Seconder of Amended Notice of Motion



S.Evans



J.Harries

- 1.2 The Working Group undertook its work from August, 2017 to February, 2018 and met on six occasions during that period. Members reviewed a range of written evidence from the findings of the surveys as identified later on in the “Findings” section. Significant value was attached to the comments of the pupils and staff of St.John’s Church School and Ferndale Community School who attended the second meeting of the Working Group held on the 25th September, 2017. The production of the animated DVD which was created by pupils from Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg and observed by the Working Group on the 11th January, 2018 was of particular relevance.
- 1.3 The Members of the Working Group would like to thank the group of pupils and staff from St.John’s Church School and Ferndale Community School who gave evidence and the pupils of Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg who produced the animated DVD. In addition the Working Group would also like to thank the following for their contributions to the process:-
- Ms.Claire Hutcheon – Head of Youth Engagement & Participation and SEET Services
 - Ms.Jessica Allen – Head of Attendance & Wellbeing Service
 - Ms.Lynette Lewis – Procurement
 - Ms.Claire Hendy – Democratic Services Officer
 - Ms.Karyl May – Head of Democratic Services

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Working Group was established as a result of the adoption of the following Notice of Motion, as amended in accordance with paragraph 10.4.1 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution that was considered by full Council at its meeting held on the 19th July, 2017:-

“That this Council will research the availability of free sanitary products, such as tampons and towels, in all Secondary Schools in the County as an acknowledgement that they are as essential as toilet paper for the personal hygiene of female pupils.

Request that a report be presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which will consider the availability of hygiene products in RCT schools and, if appropriate, bring forward recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet in respect of this matter relating to dignity, equality, health and wellbeing and its effect on education in a County that has such a high number of pupils living in poverty”.

- 1.2 On the 26th July, 2017 the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up a Working Group to consider the Notice of motion.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1 At its first meeting held on the 31st August, 2017, in addition to the Working Group taking on board the contents of the Notice of Motion within its terms of reference, the following key points were also to be incorporated:-

- To investigate the current approach to promoting and providing and disposal of sanitary products in Primary and Secondary Schools throughout RCT;
- To receive evidence/views from students, staff and health professionals on the current provision throughout our schools;
- Identify areas of good practice/approaches both locally and within other Local Authorities;
- Identify what can be adopted and adapted in RCT and how it can be resourced;
- To provide education for boys as well as girls in an understanding of the provision;
- To produce a final report with recommendations to Council

- 2.2 As stated earlier, the Working Group of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee undertook the scrutiny of the Provision of Sanitary

Products in Schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf from August, 2017 to February, 2018.

2.3 An interim report was presented to full Council on the 20th September, 2017 and it was **resolved** by Minute No.51 :-

- (1) To receive the interim report of the Scrutiny Working Group.
- (2) To receive a further report outlining the findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group to a future meeting of the Council.

In view of the decision taken by Council, Members were mindful that the recommendations of the Working Group would be brought forward for consideration by the Council and not Cabinet as stated in the Notice of Motion, which would give all elected Members the opportunity to participate in the findings of the review.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Working Group was established in July, 2017 at the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and was Chaired by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee itself. The Elected Members who brought the original Notice of Motion and subsequently the amended Notice of Motion to the Council Meeting on the 19th July, 2017 were also invited to attend meetings of the Working Group.
- 3.2 Desktop research was undertaken to evaluate the current practice in place across the UK and beyond. These findings were brought to the Working Group and were used to formulate lines of enquiry with female learners and school staff.
- 3.3 A staff consultation was developed and sent to all schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf for the attention of Head Teachers, Reception Staff and School Nurses. This was originally available for responses between 13th and 22nd September, 2017, this was later extended until 23rd October, 2017.
- 3.4 A learner consultation was also developed to capture the thoughts and experiences of female learners from across the county. Responses were collated on learners' experiences at both Primary and Secondary Schools.
- 3.5 Female learners from two Secondary Schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, namely St.John's Church School and Ferndale Community School were invited to attend a meeting of the Working Group to discuss their experiences and opinions on the availability and provision of sanitary products.
- 3.6 Procurement Officers were invited to attend meetings of the Working Group to assist with providing costings for the infrastructure needed to implement the recommendations. They engaged with personal hygiene companies to determine whether the types of dispensing devices could be procured and if so, what the purchase and maintenance cost would be.

- 3.7 Desktop research was undertaken to evaluate the current practice in place across the UK and beyond, such as Bridgend County Borough Council, the Scottish Government and New York City Council

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FINDINGS

Please note that the extent of the problem may not be fully represented, as despite all schools within RCT being contacted, not all participated

1. Introduction

1.1 The findings of the surveys that were carried out involving female pupils of the Secondary Schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf which also reflected on the experiences of those pupils in Year 7 in respect of the availability of free sanitary products from their former Primary Schools.

1.2 The school surveys were made available online for all schools to complete in both the Primary and Secondary Sector. Head Teachers, Reception Staff and School Nurses were encouraged to complete the survey as they were the main individuals involved in the process of dispensing the products. This was originally available for responses between 13th and 22nd September, 2017 but was later extended until 23rd October, 2017.

1.3 The participation of the pupils throughout this review is paramount in raising the profile of the provision of sanitary provision within schools throughout the Authority and of particular relevance will be the animation DVD produced by pupils of Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg which formed part of their after school animation sessions and which was viewed by Members of the Scrutiny Working Group at its meeting held on the 11th January, 2018.



link to the animation DVD can be found <https://youtu.be/Qt3q3led39g>

1.4 In addition to the consultation that was undertaken with pupils and staff from the Primary Schools and Secondary Schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf, desktop research has also been undertaken to evaluate current practice in place across the UK and beyond.

1.5 It is worthy to note, that following discussions with a local GP, it was confirmed that there is no age restrictions on the use of tampons. In relation to the moon cup, It was evident that there was a lack of understanding of the product, however, there was a desire to find out more.

2. Findings – Female Pupils of Secondary Schools

- 2.1 The learner consultation was completed with females aged between 11 and 16 years from 12 Secondary Schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf. The online consultation consisted of 15 questions, with 784 female learners completing it over a four week period. This included 68 Year 7 learners who reflected on their primary school experiences from across 12 primary schools.
- 2.2 When asked if free sanitary products were available to them from their Secondary School, 52% responded that `yes` they were, 9% responded that `no` they were not and 48% stated that `they didn't know`.
- 2.3 With regards to the Primary School responses 37% responded that free sanitary products were available from their school, 26% responded that they were not available and 37% didn't know.
- 2.4 88% of girls responded that sanitary towels were the most available product to them from Secondary Schools and 43% responded tampons. 67% of female learners responded that sanitary towels were the most available product to them from Primary Schools and 10% responded tampons.
- 2.5 When asked where in the school are the sanitary products available, 58% responded from the Secondary School main reception, 37% responded from a school nurse, 35% responded from a teacher and 6% responded from a machine in the toilets. The results were slightly different from the Primary School responses with 50% of female learners responding that the main way in which to access the products was through a teacher, 24% responded the school reception area.
- 2.6 63% of female learners responded that they were happy with the choice of products from their secondary school and 38% responded that they were not happy with the choice of products available to them. Responses from those that reflected on the Primary Schools choice of products were very similar with 62% happy with the choice of products available to them and 39% who were not.
- 2.7 55% of female learners responded that they were happy with the quality of the products from secondary schools and 45% responded that they were not happy with the quality of the products. Responses from those that reflected on the Primary Schools quality of products were again very similar with 54% happy with the choice of products available to them and 46% who were not.
- 2.8 When asked if sanitary product disposal facilities (bins) were available in the girls' toilets in secondary schools, 93% of learners responded that these were available and 76% responded that these were based within the actual cubicle.

7% of learners responded that there were no facilities available to them in the girls' toilets in Secondary schools and 24% responded that they were not available in individual cubicles. With regards to Primary Schools, 79% of learners responded that sanitary product disposal facilities (bins) were available in the girl's toilet and 69% responded that these were based within the actual cubicle. 21% of learners responded that there were no facilities available to them in the girls' toilets in Primary Schools and 31% responded that they were not available in individual cubicles.

- 2.9 61% of female learners responded that the Secondary School they attended did not offer any lessons/sessions to inform them about periods. 39% stated that they had received this information in Secondary Schools. 46% of learners responded that the Primary School they attended did not offer any lessons/sessions to inform them about periods. 54% stated that they had received this information in Primary Schools.
- 2.10 Female learners were asked if their periods have had an impact on their secondary school attendance. 46% of learners responded that it had and 54% responded that it had not. With regards to their periods having an impact on their Primary School attendance, 29% of learners responded that their periods have had an impact on this. **However, it is important to note that some learners had confirmed that they had not started their periods and therefore this is the reason why they answered `no` to the question.**
- 2.11 Female learners were asked if their periods have had an impact on their Secondary School performance. 62% of learners responded that it had and 38% responded that it had not. With regards to their periods having an impact on their performance in Primary School, 36% of learners responded that it had and 64% responded that it had not.
- 2.12 When asked how they would like to access free sanitary products in their Secondary School, 76% responded from a machine in the girls' toilets, 26% responded from a School Nurse and 25% responded from a Teacher. When asked how they would like to access free sanitary products in their Primary School, 55% responded from a machine in the girls' toilets, 30% responded from a Teacher and 27% responded from the school reception.

- 2.13 When asked what sanitary products would they like available to them from the Secondary School, 93% responded with sanitary towels, 61% responded with tampons and 15% responded with moon cups.

Secondary Schools



When asked what sanitary products they would like available to them from the Primary School, 89% responded with sanitary towels, 38% responded with tampons and 8% responded with moon cups.

Primary Schools



Note: The percentages represent multiple option choices

- 2.14 The learners were also offered the opportunity to add text into the online survey. Some of the comments made were:-

- “Periods are never discussed in school”
- “The products are cheap and do not last long”
- “The school does not seem to understand the affects that periods can have on your physical and mental health”
- “Periods have 100% affected my attendance and performance”

- 2.15 The narrative findings from the online consultation are shared in the DVD as referred to earlier in paragraph 1.3 above.

3. Findings – Head Teachers/Reception Staff and School Nurses –

Primary Schools

- 3.1 51 Primary School responses were received from 44 English Medium Schools (of which two were Special Schools and three were Faith Schools) and seven Welsh Medium Schools.

- 3.2 Of the respondents, 78% (40) were Head Teachers, 18% (9) were Receptionist Staff and 4% (2) were School Nurses.
- 3.3 78% stated that they offered feminine hygiene products in their schools, and of these 93% said they offered them free of charge to their learners.
- 3.4 The respondents were then asked about the types of products they offered. Of those that did offer products, all offered sanitary towels, with 13% also offering tampons. Two schools also stated that they offered other options but did not state what these other options were.
- 3.5 When asked how these products were dispensed, 58% of Primary Schools respondents stated that the sanitary products could be sourced from a designated Teacher, with a further 36% available from the School Receptionist, the remaining respondents stated that they could be found in a dispensing machine in the girls' toilet or from an alternative location but the specific nature of this was not disclosed.
- 3.6 67% of Receptionist Staff stated that pupils could request products from them at any point of the school day. The number of products given would vary between schools with some dispensing one item and others offering as many as were requested. All Receptionists said that there were alternative discreet ways to request products if there were visitors present at the reception desk.
- 3.7 Head Teachers were asked about the disposal facilities for these products within their schools. 83% stated that there were bins provided, with the remaining 17% stating there were not. However, of those provided, 9% were not present in the individual toilet cubicles.
- 3.8 Furthermore, respondents were asked to comment on the privacy provided by the current female pupil toilet cubicles. Again, 83% stated their facilities provided adequate privacy for their female pupils to use these products and the disposal facilities. One school did comment to say that their facilities were not appropriate for every pupil due to female pupils becoming taller.
- 3.9 All responding Primary Schools stated that their pupils were allowed to leave lessons to use the toilet facilities, although, 18% stated that pupils would be required to gain a pass to do so.
- 3.10 97% of Primary Schools responded to say that they offered lessons to female learners to inform them about menstruation, with 73% stating they also offered lessons to male learners.
- 3.11 To their knowledge, 23% of Head Teachers stated that in their opinion pupils had been absent from school as a result of their period. This rose to 50% of responses from Reception Staff and School Nurses.

- 3.12 All Schools Nurses who responded stated that pupils could be referred to them for menstrual issues, but that these issues had never prohibited them from accessing the full curriculum. To their knowledge, pupils had never been sent home as a result of menstrual issues, although they were aware of pupils being absent from school as a result of their period.
- 3.13 Primary Schools **do not have budgets** for sanitary products, with many Teachers purchasing the items themselves for the learners.
- 3.14 Schools inform pupils of the availability of these products in a variety of ways ranging from discreet conversations with pupils following an unexpected menstrual crisis, to class discussions during year 6 PSE lessons. However, there is not a consistent approach across RCT.

4. **Findings – Head Teachers/Reception Staff and School Nurses – Secondary Schools**

- 4.1 23 Secondary School responses were received from across 10 Secondary Schools, of which eight were English Medium Schools, two were Welsh Medium. No Faith Secondary Schools responded.
- 4.2 Of the respondents, 42% (8) were Head Teachers, 37% (7) were Receptionist Staff and 21% (4) were School Nurses.
- 4.3 91% stated that they offered feminine hygiene products in their schools and of those 100% said they offered them free of charge to learners.
- 4.4 The respondents were then asked about the types of products they offered. Of those that did offer products, all offered sanitary towels, with 80% also offering tampons.
- 4.5 When asked how these products were dispensed, 90% of Secondary School respondents stated that the sanitary products could be sourced from a receptionist, with a further 20% available from the School's Nurse and 10% from a designated Teacher. 50% of the respondents also said that they could be found in `other` but did not state what this referred to.
- 4.6 100% of Receptionist Staff stated that pupils could request products from them at any point of the school day. The number of products given would vary between schools with some dispensing one item and others offering a sufficient amount to last until the end of the school day. All Receptionists said that there were alternative discreet ways to request products if there were visitors present at the reception desk.
- 4.7 Head Teachers were asked about the disposal facilities for these products within their schools. 91% stated that there were bins provided, with the

remaining 9%, stating there were not. However, of those that did provide bins, 18% were not present in the individual toilet cubicles.

- 4.8 All responding Secondary Schools stated that their pupils were allowed to leave lessons to use the toilet facilities, although 25% stated that pupils would be required to gain a pass to do so.
- 4.9 100% of the responding Secondary School said that they offered lessons to female learners to inform them about menstruation, with 100% stating they also offered lessons to male learners.

Note: This is in contrast to the findings of the pupils survey as referred to in paragraph 2.9 above

- 4.10 To their knowledge, 64% of Head Teachers stated that in their opinion pupils had been absent from school as a result of their period. This rose to 86% of responses from Receptionist Staff and 75% for School Nurses.
- 4.11 33% of School Nurses responding to the survey stated that pupils had been referred to them for menstrual issues, but that these issues had never prohibited them from accessing the full curriculum. To their knowledge, pupils had never been sent home as a result of menstrual issues, although they were aware of pupils being absent from school as a result of their period.
- 4.12 A small number of Secondary Schools allocate a very limited budget for purchasing these products (up to £100) but the vast majority do not. They rely on staff purchasing the items or they are purchased from petty cash.
- 4.13 Schools inform pupils of the availability of these products in a variety of ways ranging from discreet conversations with pupils following an unexpected menstrual crisis., to class discussions at transition and in Year 7 PSE lessons. **However, there is not a consistent approach across RCT.**

5. Excerpt of Further Findings from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Working Group held on the 25th September, 2017

- 5.1 The Working Group identified that as part of their scrutiny into the provision of free sanitary products within schools across RCT, it was essential that Members heard the views and experiences of young people. As a result, at its second meeting held on the 25th September, 2017, Members met a group of staff and pupils from St.John's Church School and Ferndale Community School.
- 5.2 Below is a list of some of the comments that were made by pupils which Members felt should be incorporated within this report:-
- "Boys make fun of us if they see us going to the toilet with our bags – it's embarrassing".

- “We don’t know where to go. Not told. Encouraged to go to Head of Department but most are male and we wouldn’t go”.
- “People miss school because of periods or leave school early if they have an accident or need sanitary products and don’t have them on them – it affects attendance”.
- “I would rather go home than have to ask a member of staff, especially a male member of staff”.
- Need to educate Teachers – male and female of every age”.
- “Boys mature later – need to know basics, but probably told at around the age of 15. Needs to be put into perspective as they are going to be future partners, fathers, employers and the stigma needs to be taken out. They need to realise that it’s a normal bodily function and the impact it can have on females”.
- “We would like free machines – with option of tampons or towels and needs to be of a high quality.
- “Bins not emptied when there are bins”.
- “Not really keen on using a moon cup as there would be an issue of having to wash in a sink etc. and not many girls know about this product”.
- “We like the starter packs that are given and it would also be nice if the packs could be given out at the end of term”.
- “We are aware of friends that have to compromise in using unsatisfactory materials because they cannot afford proper sanitary ware”.

5.3 It was also discussed at this meeting of the Working Group the inconsistency across the schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf of:

- access to toilets during lessons (including permission to take personal belongings to the toilets) and the appropriateness of disposal facilities

5.4 In addition to the above comments, the young people stated that the current way of accessing products caused a great deal of anxiety. Having to ask Reception Staff or explain why they needed to go to the toilet was a cause of concern, with all stating they would rather go home to deal with the situation. This results in absenteeism from school.

5.5 Following the comments made by the pupils at the meeting of the Working Group held on the 25th September, 2017, Members felt that as the contributions made by the pupils played such a significant part in this review, that the draft recommendations would be discussed with the pupils for their endorsement and thus giving them the opportunity to raise any further comments in relation to this matter.

5.6 It was further agreed at that meeting of the Working Group that the Chair contacts Sally Holland, Children’s Commissioner for Wales and Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales Attached at **Appendices 1 and 2 respectively** to the report are the responses of both Commissioners dated

24th October, 2017. Where it will be noted that in the letter from the Director of Policy, Legislation and Innovation on behalf of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, it was felt more appropriate for the Children's Commissioner to respond "*because of the issues you raise are primarily about children's rights and this sits within her remit (which is to support children and young people, to find out what's important to them and to speak-up for them nationally on important issues)*". The Children's Commissioner for Wales in the final paragraph of her letter states "*I welcome and fully support the Council's motion to introduce free sanitary products for girls in schools*".

6. Research Findings – UK and Beyond

- 6.1 In addition to the consultation that was undertaken with pupils and staff from the Primary Schools and Secondary Schools within Rhondda Cynon Taf, Desktop research has also been undertaken to evaluate the current practice in place across the UK and beyond.

Bridgend County Borough Council

- 6.2 During the review it was ascertained that the neighbouring Authority, Bridgend County Borough Council have started an initiative with a charity organisation - Wings Cymru. Wings Cymru were set up to deal with the issue of sanitary provision in schools and has the support of the Council's Director of Education and Assembly Member, Huw Irranca Davies.
- 6.3 A pilot scheme in the Maesteg area of Bridgend involving three schools – Maesteg Comprehensive School and two of its feeder Primary Schools has commenced.

Scotland

- 6.4 Research found that a pilot being undertaken by Community Food Initiatives North East (CFNE) on behalf of the Scottish Government to operate and co-ordinate a pilot scheme for six months through which sanitary products would be made available free to all those on low incomes who need them and were to be issued via the 'Food Bank' Service. This pilot was more for those living in poverty and there was no commitment by the Scottish Government to maintain the service beyond the life of the pilot.
- 6.5 However, in a statement made to the Scottish Parliament on the 5th September, 2017, it was announced by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon when outlining her plans within the 2017-18 Programme for Government:

"I am extremely proud that Scotland is one of the first countries in the World to tackle 'period poverty' through the current pilot scheme in Aberdeen – I welcome Cross Party support for that approach".

- 6.6 In the statement, the First Minister for Scotland confirmed that free access to sanitary products to students in schools, colleges and universities would be provided. It was also indicated that some local authorities have already made this commitment in relation to schools. The Scottish Government was to work with CoSLA and other partners to consider actions to help women on low incomes across Scotland in light of the learning from the pilot scheme in Aberdeen.

Below is the link to the full statement made by the First Minister for Scotland:

https://www.snp.org/first_minister_nicola_sturgeon_scottish_programme_for_government

New York City Council

- 6.7 The information gained from the research undertaken was also shared with the Working Group in respect of the effectiveness of the scheme that had been introduced by New York City Council, the installation of free sanitary product dispensers in all public schools, prisons and shelters in June, 2016. This was built upon the highly successful pilot introduced for those living in deprived boroughs, schools and high schools in Queens and the Bronx launched in September, 2015 by New York Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland at the High School for Arts and Business. Attendance at the schools increased from 90% to 92.4% since the installation of the free dispensers and where fewer girls asked to be excused from their classes throughout the day.



Links to the scheme can be found below:

https://www.nonwovens-industry.com/issues/2016-04-10/view_breaking-news/free-feminine-hygiene-products-coming-to-25-nyc-public-schools/

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/nyc-schools-are-now-offering-free-feminine-hygiene/>

Conclusion

- 6.8 Members discussed the above initiatives but following consideration of the findings of UK and beyond it was felt that these approaches would not suit the needs of our pupils. Members resolved to find their own solution.

7. Procurement

- 7.1 At its meeting held on the 26th October, 2017, the Working Group received an interim report from the Council's Corporate Procurement Unit. Members were informed that corporately there is a contract in place via Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) for the provision of Washroom Services which includes both sanitary disposal bins and vending machines. Whilst the preferred supplier for these services is PHS the Working Group needed to determine if the machines they could offer were fit for purpose.
- 7.2 At the meeting of the Working Group held on the 5th December, 2017, Members were informed that the Category Manager, Business Services and the Chair had met with a representative of PHS to discuss the provision of a machine in each female toilet block in schools within RCT. The PHS representative seemed very much on board with the idea and agreed to check with her line manager in relation to the best way of supplying the products. It was explained that the survey that was carried out found that independent access to a machine/dispenser in the girls toilet without having to ask reception for a token to access the product was what our female pupils were asking for.
- 7.3 At that meeting the Chair stated that the representative of PHS had agreed to attend the meeting on the 5th December but did not attend nor submit any apologies.
- 7.4 The Category Manager, Business Services provided Members of the Working Group with draft figures for the provision of the machine and it was explained that the Council receives preferential rates via the EPSO framework, therefore there was no negotiation on the cost. What was also of concern to Members was the fact that the company concerned could not provide an adequate machine that would suit the needs of the pupils. Pupils asking a member of staff or at reception for a token was essentially the same as asking for a sanitary product; as a result, the Working Group asked Officers within the Council's Procurement Unit to explore the availability of other dispensers. Following which it was found that dispensers holding approximately 200 towels can be obtained at a cost of £27k for 150 dispensers. These would require fixing to a wall or cubicle.

8. Summary of Findings

- 8.1 The online survey received 784 responses from female learners and 74 responses from schools.
- 8.2 It was evident that whilst most schools, who responded offer some form of free sanitary products, not all schools offer this to female learners as was stated through both online consultation processes. There is no standardisation across the Authority.
- 8.3 Of those sanitary products that are offered by schools, sanitary towels were the most frequently offered; this was identified as the most preferred product of choice by female learners.
- 8.4 The majority of primary schools offered the products via a designated Teacher whilst the majority of Secondary Schools offered the products via a Receptionist. However, the majority of female learners would like to independently access free sanitary products from a machine in the girls' toilets.
- 8.5 Most Primary Schools offered sanitary disposal facilities but these were not always in the cubicles. All Secondary Schools offered sanitary disposal facilities, although these were not necessarily in the cubicles. This supported the response from the majority of female learners who responded that there were sanitary disposal facilities available to them in the toilets; however, these were not always in individual cubicles.
- 8.6 It was referenced that the level of privacy provided by the female cubicles in some Primary Schools may not be adequate for every pupil (children are now taller than in previous generations).
- 8.7 Almost every Primary and every Secondary School who responded said that they delivered sessions to female pupils about menstruation with all Secondary Schools stating that they also educated male learners. Almost three quarters of responding Primary Schools said that they educated male learners about these matters. However, this is in contrast to over half of the female learners respondents who stated that they had not received any sessions to inform them of periods.
- 8.8 Many schools required the learner to obtain a toilet pass before leaving class.
- 8.9 Anecdotal evidence from school staff confirms that menstrual issues are having an impact on female learner education either through attendance or

access to the curriculum. Similarly, nearly half of the female learners responded that their periods have had an impact on their school attendance and over half of the female learners responded that their periods have had an impact on their school performance.

- 8.10 There is no consistent approach across RCT to the availability, quality, awareness and dispensing of products.
- 8.11 Education of menstrual matters and PSE programmes is inadequate in some schools and inconsistent across the County Borough.
- 8.12 There is no school budget assigned to pay for these sanitary products.
- 8.13 The extent of the problem may not be fully represented, as despite, all schools in RCT being contacted, not all participated.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were approved by the Working Group at its final meeting held on the 8th February, 2018, subject to a meeting being held with the pupils who attended the second meeting of the Working Group (as referred to in paragraph 5.5 of the `Findings` Section above).

On the 14th February, 2018 the Chair, County Borough Councillor S.Rees-Owen and County Borough Councillor E.Stephens met with the pupils and presented the findings and recommendations of the Working Group. The pupils remarked that the recommendations “covered everything we asked” and “are very clear” and were grateful that they had been given a further opportunity to play a major part in this historic pioneering piece of work.

1. To ensure that it is mandatory that all schools within RCT with placements for children and young people aged 9 years and above, provide a range of free sanitary products to their female learners which they can access independently within the toilet blocks.
 - (a) to fulfil recommendation 1 above, by implementing an interim measure of sourcing a manual dispenser for the products to be installed in the toilet blocks in all secondary schools across RCT.
 - (b) In respect of primary and special schools with pupils aged 9 and above, the same arrangements as set out in 6 below, be adopted.
 - (c) to review the arrangement as set out in 1(a) and 1(b) above in six months to evaluate the effectiveness of these manual dispensers. Following the review, if it is determined that alternative machines in the toilet blocks would be more appropriate then a recommendation be made to the Cabinet for a new purchasing framework.
2. To develop resources and raise awareness across all schools in RCT of menstrual issues to all learners, staff, parents and carers.
3. All schools to raise awareness to female learners aged 9 years and above as to how they can access free sanitary products on school sites.
4. To ensure that there are adequate disposal facilities in place throughout the school that is easily and discretely accessible to female learners.

5. To consider appropriate signage within female toilets identifying the location of the disposal facilities if they are not present in every cubicle.
6. To note that the Head of Youth Engagement and Participation Services has commenced a trial of supplying sanitary products in the afterschool provision for female pupils by putting a selection of products in a basket within the toilets for female pupils to use.
7. That the Procurement Unit revisits the current contractual arrangements which are scheduled to end on the 31st March, 2019 and which covers both schools and corporate buildings. The new contractual arrangements from the 1st April, 2019 would be in accordance with the Council's agreed policy in this area.
8. That the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing and Officers within Corporate Estates determine the number of toilet blocks and cubicles that are located within the schools in RCT which will assist in establishing where such dispensing units can be placed together with the costs.
9. To consider that the Council's Procurement Unit develop a corporate purchasing arrangement for both schools and corporate buildings should the interim arrangements in schools not be suitable for the long term. For schools this would ensure that an adequate, cost effective infrastructure is available to dispense the products within their schools in a timely fashion, as and when a female learner requires them. For corporate buildings, contract arrangements providing a similar level of service as existing provisions
10. Adequate funding be provided by the Council to enable all schools to implement the following first phase:
 - (a) Cost of approximately 100 baskets for use in Primary Schools – approximately £100

Cost of the provision of product for use in Primary Schools estimated £21k
 - (b) Cost of 150 dispensers for use in Secondary schools £27k

Cost of the provision of product for use within the dispensers based on number of secondary pupils x usage x months in school year = number of product/pack size (16) x cost of pack (£1.60) = £73,305. This cost for the trial period of six months is approximately £50k

In respect of 10(b) above, these costs are based on a single drop point.

- (c) Additional costs will be incurred for:-
 - Distributing the products throughout the Authority

- Fitting the dispensers to the walls/cubicles
 - Filling the dispenser with products from the pack
11. That all schools within RCT review their practice in meeting the needs of pupils. The provision of PSE across all schools with regards to quality of resources and sharing of good practice needs to be addressed and improved.
 12. That representations be made to the Welsh Government highlighting the Authority's concern with regard to these issues.
 13. That there is a need to raise the awareness of Teachers – male and female to reduce the stigma associated with menstrual matters.
 14. That the above recommendations commence for a first phase trial period prior to commencement of the Summer term 2018 to allow time for installation with full implementation of the revised arrangements on the 1st April, 2019.
 15. A review of 14 above will be undertaken in six months.

Note:

Whilst making the above recommendations, Members of the Working Group were mindful of the change in number of schools following the opening of the 21st Century Schools in September, 2018 in the following areas:-

- Tonypandy – New School Ysgol Nant Gwyn (3 – 16 year olds) resulting in the closure of Tonypandy Community College, Tonypandy Primary School, Penygraig Junior School, Penygraig Junior School and Ysgol Aros, Penygraig.
- Porth – Community School (3 – 16 year olds) resulting in the closure of Porth County School
- Tonyrefail – Community School (3 – 18 year olds) resulting in the closure of Tonyrefail Primary School

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Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

Sally Holland

To: Councillor Shelley Rees-Owen
CC: Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

24 October 2017

Dear Cllr Shelley Rees-Owen,

Re: Council Motion – Introduction of Free Sanitary Products in Schools

Thank you for your email on 1st October 2017 with regard to a Council Motion to introduce free sanitary products for all girls in schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

As Children's Commissioner for Wales it is my role to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of all children in Wales. You will be aware that the work of my Office is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Girls all across the world face unique challenges in being able to access, claim and experience fulfilment of their human rights. Drawing attention to these challenges and promoting opportunities that actively empower girls is a significant priority. Wednesday 11th October 2017 was International Day of the Girl Child and I attended a launch event of a new charity in Wales called Girls Circle. During the event, Girls Circle launched a [report](#) highlighting the state of fundamental rights of girls in Wales. I heard the direct experiences of girls from across Wales challenging gender discrimination and campaigning for gender equity and equality.

The Council's motion to introduce free sanitary products for all girls in schools across the county is a timely and poignant action. In their recently published General Comment on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted the need for government:

“to adopt comprehensive gender and sexuality-sensitive sexual and reproductive health policies for adolescents, emphasizing that unequal access by adolescents to such information, commodities and services amounts to discrimination. Lack of access to such services contributes to adolescent girls being the group most at risk of dying or suffering serious or lifelong injuries in pregnancy and childbirth. All adolescents should have access to free, confidential, adolescent-responsive and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health services...including emergency contraception, prevention, care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, counselling, pre-conception care, maternal health services and menstrual hygiene.”

With this in mind, I welcome and fully support the Council's motion to introduce free sanitary products for girls in schools.

Yours sincerely,



Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales

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By email

24/10/2017

RE: Children and young people scrutiny committee in RCT

Dear Shelley,

Thank you for getting in touch with Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and myself about the council motion for free sanitary wear for school girls in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. It gives a legally-binding common purpose and the seven well-being goals set out a full picture of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being for Welsh Government, local government, local health boards and other specified public bodies.

The Act also provides for better decision-making by ensuring that public bodies adopt the five ways of working: taking account of the long-term, helping to prevent problems occurring or getting worse, taking an integrated and collaborative approach, and considering and involving a diverse range of people. These ways of working are a very important part of the Act as they are about how public bodies need to work differently to make better decisions for future generations.

The Future Generations Commissioner has a general duty to promote the sustainable development principle (including the five ways of working listed above), to act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and to encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things that they do. In exercising these duties, she has to be mindful of a range of issues and can only work within the powers that the Well-being of Future Generations Act confers on her.

We have spoken with the Children 's Commissioner and we have decided that it is more appropriate that Ms Holland responds because the issues you raise are primarily about children's rights and this sits within her remit (which is to support children and young people, to find out what's important to them and to speak-up for them nationally on important issues).



Thank you again for getting in touch and we wish you every success in your campaign.

Yours Sincerely,

Marie Brousseau-Navarro
Director of Policy, Legislation and Innovation

p.p. Sophie Howe

c.c. Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales

