

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2018-19**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Agenda Item No. 7**

**20<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

**REPORT OF:  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND  
INCLUSION SERVICES**

**PERIOD POVERTY UPDATE – FEMININE  
HYGIENE PRODUCTS IN SCHOOLS**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Council's progress of tackling period poverty within schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf following the motion that was approved by Cabinet in July 2017.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider whether additional or alternative work needs to be conducted to tackle this matter further.

**3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

- 3.1 A notice of motion was brought to the Council in July 2017 seeking that the 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 Following agreement for this work, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee established a Scrutiny Working Group to investigate the current approach to the provision and disposal of sanitary products in primary and secondary schools. The Working Group put forward 15 recommendations which received cross-party support when considered by Full Council.
- 3.3 Cabinet subsequently considered an implementation plan aimed at improving the availability of free sanitary products for female learners in schools, which would make Rhondda Cynon Taf the first Council in Wales to introduce this measure.
- 3.4 Full Council supported the move in February 2018, which required all schools in RCT with pupils aged nine and above, to provide free sanitary products for female learners to access independently. Cabinet gave final approval at its meeting on Thursday, April 19, which saw a six-month trial commencing in the autumn term

2018 to allow time for installation, before a review and subsequent full implementation in April 2019.

3.5 The implementation plan outlined a number of key milestones and delivery dates for the introduction of the scheme, which commenced in April 2018.

#### **4. PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 The following table shows the recommendations that were made to Cabinet in April 2018, which were agreed for implementation:

No.	Recommendation	Progress To Date	Future Actions
1	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. To fulfil recommendation a) 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.</li> <li>ii. In respect of primary and special schools with pupils aged 9 and above, the same arrangements as set out in 6 below, be adopted.</li> <li>iii. To review the arrangement as set out in a(i) and a(ii) above in six months to evaluate the effectiveness of these manual dispensers.</li> </ul> <p>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.</p>	<p>Whilst it cannot be made mandatory, this scheme has been rolled out to all schools (primary, secondary, special and PRU) across RCT.</p> <p>Manual dispensers have been sourced, purchased and provided to each school (one per primary, special and PRU, with a varying number in each secondary schools dependent upon number of pupils and toilet blocks.)</p> <p>Most schools have allowed Corporate Estates to install the units, but a small proportion have decided to install them themselves.</p> <p>A survey has been undertaken with both head teachers and pupils to determine if the scheme, dispensing units and management of the scheme is fit for purpose before extending it into 2019/20 financial year.</p>	<p>Physically review the location of the units within each school as part of the School Facilities Services Supervisor role (Catering Services). Any gaps in provision will be reported to the link senior officer within Education to arrange for the scheme to be fully implemented within the school.</p>
2	<p>To develop resources and raise awareness across all schools in RCT of menstrual issues to all learners, staff, parents and carers.</p>	<p>Schools have been asked to take responsibility for this within their own settings, tailored to the pupils within</p>	<p>Promote good practice across RCT using the RCT Source for Schools, sharing resources for schools to</p>

		their care. Many schools are currently using appropriate resources to raise awareness of this matter with schools.	access as and when they require them.
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.	Schools have been encouraged to consider innovate ways to promote the scheme across schools, using pupil voice to lead on this. Many schools are currently using appropriate ways to raise awareness of this scheme with schools.	Promote good practice across RCT using the RCT Source for Schools, sharing resources for schools to access as and when they require them.
4	To ensure that there are adequate disposal facilities in place throughout the school that is easily and discretely accessible to female learners.	School Facilities Services Supervisors are including this as an element of their audit when inspecting schools. Of the schools that have been inspected, it has been noted that there are adequate disposal facilities present in the cubicle with the dispensing units.	School Facilities Services Supervisors will continue to monitor this and should issues arise, they will be addressed directly with the setting.
5	To consider appropriate signage within female toilets identifying the location of the disposal facilities if they are not present in every cubicle.	Stickers have been developed and have been delivered to schools with the dispensing unit. Schools now have the identification stickers on the door of the cubicle where the unit and bin are located.	A few schools have stated that the contractor did not place the sticker on the cubicle doors. Therefore, additional stickers will be produced and sent to these schools.
6	To note that the Head of Youth Engagement and Participation Services has commenced a trial of supplying sanitary products in the after-school provision for female pupils by putting a selection of products in a basket within the toilets for female pupils to use.	This was only an interim measure whilst the dispensers were being purchased and installed. Since then, this basket has been removed and	Consider the need to reintroduce this measure in community building during open youth provision.

		the unit used.	
7	That the Procurement Unit revisits the current contractual arrangements which are scheduled to end on the 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019 and which covers both schools and corporate buildings. The new contractual arrangements from the 1 <sup>st</sup> April, 2019 would be in accordance with the Council's agreed policy in this area.	This recommendation has been superseded by the purchasing of the dispensing units at the initial trial phase. There is no further requirement for tendering for equipment.	This will only need to be revisited if it is determined that the current dispensing units are not fit for purpose and alternative units should be sourced.
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.	Complete – the numbers were used to determine how many units were needed per school.	N/A
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.	This recommendation has been superseded by the purchasing of the dispensing units at the initial trial phase. There is no further requirement for tendering for equipment.	This will only need to be revisited if it is determined that the current dispensing units are not fit for purpose and alternative units should be sourced.
10	Adequate funding be provided by the Council to enable all schools to implement the following first phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Cost of approximately 100 baskets for use in Primary Schools – approximately £100</li> <li>ii. Cost of the provision of product for use in Primary Schools estimated £21k</li> <li>iii. Cost of 150 dispensers for use in Secondary schools £27k</li> <li>iv. 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</li> </ul>	Welsh Government provided capital funding which was used in the refurbishments of toilet blocks and to purchase the dispensing units. As such, the interim measure (baskets) was not required and so were not purchased.  Welsh Government has also provided revenue funding for the purchase of sanitary	Review responses from schools as to whether the current level of product is adequate to meet the needs of the pupils in schools.

	<p>(16) x cost of pack (£1.60) = £73,305. This cost for the trial period of six months is approximately £50k;</p> <p>In respect of (ii) above, these costs are based on a single drop point. Additional costs will be incurred for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributing the products throughout the Authority</li> <li>• Fitting the dispensers to the walls/cubicles</li> <li>• Filling the dispenser with products from the pack.</li> </ul>	<p>products to fill the dispensing units. This is to the value of £17,700 for two financial years (2018/19 and 2019/20). These products have been purchased on a local authority-wide level, and distributed to schools in quantities in line with their female population. Should schools require more product than their allocation, additional funding will need to be sought to purchase additional product. To date, no schools have requested more product above their initial allocation.</p> <p>Schools are currently arranging for the storage of the product and filling the dispensers.</p>	
11	<p>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.</p>	<p>Links to information, lesson plans, worksheets and guidance documents relating to this matter have been provided to schools for consideration and use in PSE lessons.</p>	N/A
12	<p>That representations be made to the Welsh Government highlighting the Authority's concern with regard to these issues.</p>	<p>Ongoing work between the Council and Welsh Government continues to raise the profile of this matter.</p>	<p>Good practice is starting to be shared between local authorities across Wales and beyond to best meet the needs of the service users</p>

			impacted by period poverty.
13	That there is a need to raise the awareness of teachers, both male and female, to reduce the stigma associated with menstrual matters.	Links to information, lesson plans, worksheets and guidance documents relating to this matter have been provided to schools for consideration and use in PSE lessons to raise the awareness of this matter with teachers.	N/A
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 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2019.	Cabinet accepted the recommendations in April 2018. Since that time, work has been ongoing to implement the scheme as detailed above.	N/A
15	A review of 14 above will be undertaken in six months.	See this report.	To further review the scheme in 6 months to determine if it should continue and to seek funding to sustain it beyond the Welsh Government grants.

## **5. CONSULTATIONS**

5.1 Two surveys have been conducted as an initial review of the new scheme: one has been offered to pupils and the other to school staff. The responses of both are below:

### **5.2 Pupil Views**

5.2.1 To date, 79 pupil responses have been received.

5.2.2 Respondents ranged from Year 7 to Year 13, with the majority enrolled at Pontypridd High School. Pupils from nine secondary schools responded in total. 66% were KS3, 27% were KS4 and 8% were KS5 pupils.

5.2.3 76% stated they were aware that free sanitary products were available in the school.

5.2.4 76% knew where the free sanitary product could be obtained. The places included a dispenser in the girls' toilet (49%), Reception area (48%), designated member of staff (41%), and 20% stated as 'other' which included YEPS, pupil services, Heads of Year and changing rooms.

5.2.5 29% had used these products. Of the 71% who replied that they had not used them, 69% stated they would consider using them in the future. For those who stated they would not use them, they stated the reason as they were poor quality, they didn't like to ask, there weren't enough available or they were too embarrassed to ask.

5.2.6 When asked if the school had informed them of the new dispensers, 49% stated they had been told. Of these 16% were via leaflets, 51% via an assembly, 27% during a lesson discussion, 30% through posters and 16% stating 'other'. Comments included that pupils had witnessed the units being installed; the form tutor had explained it in registration class; the youth worker had informed them; they had viewed a video on Facebook.

5.2.7 41% of respondents stated that they were aware of stickers on cubicles doors to notify them that a dispenser was present. 34% said they did not know as they hadn't looked for them, and 25% there were no stickers on the cubicle doors.

5.2.8 69% of pupils stated that the disposal bins were present in the same cubicles as the dispenser, with 16% stating they were not and a further 16% stating they did not know. Additional comments about this question stated that the disposal bins were often full.

5.2.9 When asked if the dispensers were always filled, 28% stated they were, 39% stated they were not and the remainder 33% said that they did not know. Additional comments about this question stated that the dispensers needed refilling more frequently.

### **5.3 School Views**

5.3.1 105 school responses have been received.



- 5.3.2 86% stated that the sanitary towel dispenser had been installed at their school. It should be noted that some schools did not want the item fitted upon delivery, stating that they wished to fit it themselves.
- 5.3.3 52% of these have been fitted within the girls' toilet cubicle; 17% in the hand basin area; 14% in the disabled toilet; 8% in the staff toilet and the remaining 10% in 'other', which included the first aid room, nurse's area and the main office.
- 5.3.4 When asked if an identification sticker had been placed on the cubicle door, 50% responded it had, 38% that it had not, and 12% stating they did not know. For those stating 'no', reasons included that the dispenser was not in a cubicle; that they hadn't received a sticker; that they did not know about the sticker.
- 5.3.5 90% of schools stated they had received the sanitary products to fill the dispensers.
- 5.3.6 68% had briefed their pupils on the reason for the dispensing unit and what they can expect from the scheme.
- 5.3.7 Schools were asked for their opinion as to whether there had been a positive reaction for the units and products. 59% stated 'yes', 15% stated 'no', and 27% stated that they did not know as it was too soon to determine. Additional comments to these questions were mainly positive, stating that the school had texted parents to inform them of the scheme; that female learners had welcomed the availability of the products; that access to the products had improved; and that whilst there was some abuse of the scheme at first, this has now reduced.
- 5.3.8 56% of schools stated that it was too early to say if the scheme had improved school attendance.
- 5.3.9 78% stated the scheme had not been abused since its implementation, with 15% it had and 7% stating they did not know. The comments highlighted that any abuse in the first few weeks of the scheme had now reduced or stopped completely.
- 5.3.10 To date, only 8% of schools stated they had sought feedback about the scheme from their pupils, with some schools saying they would look to do this in the future once it had been in situ longer.
- 5.3.11 Schools were asked if they felt a wider range of products were required: 79% stated 'no', 14% stated they did not know, and 7% stating 'yes'. Schools suggested tampons, wet wipes, deodorant, and a range of towel sizes. One school suggested an alternative dispensing unit with a cover.
- 5.3.12 Overall, the final comments suggested the scheme has been positively received by schools.

## **6. MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF THE SCHEME**

- 6.1 To date, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service has managed the scheme, including purchasing of the dispensing units using the Welsh Government grant; placing regular orders for the sanitary products; arranging delivery of the products via the service's officers; facilitating the surveys with pupils and school staff and having regular update reports from the School Facilities Services Supervisors. Whilst this has been effective to date, it doesn't allow for a timely response to the scheme due to other priorities that also need to be managed. Moving forward, management of the scheme will need to be considered to ensure it is managed efficiently.
- 6.2 Monitoring reports from the School Facilities Services Supervisors will be instrumental in ensuring the scheme is maintained. To date, this role has been key to ensuring the recommendations have been and continue to be fulfilled by schools and local authority service areas.
- 6.3 As the scheme embeds, it is anticipated that schools will develop communication links with appropriate officer/service area within the local authority to inform them about shortages in products, issues with the dispensing unit, abuse of the scheme. These details will allow for a constant rolling review to be undertaken to ensure the scheme remains fit for purpose by developing with changing school and pupil needs.

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 See point 4.1, recommendation 10.
- 8.2 There are currently no additional financial implications to the Council beyond the extent of the revenue provided by the Welsh Government grant.
- 8.3 However, this funding has only been committed until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Therefore, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, the Council may have to consider whether it wishes to fund the scheme in order to maintain it. If so, it would need to be considered whether to maintain it at its current level or at a proportion of its current scale. Feedback from female pupils within schools would provide an indication of the demand and if current provision meets the needs of the users.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

## **10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP**

- 10.1 Cwm Taf's Wellbeing Plan 2018-2023 is a statement of intent which introduces new principles to guide public sector organisations in the region to work together in the future to further develop a collaborative service for "resilient communities that are informed, connected, active and resourced and have the ability to adapt to and influence change and improve well-being".

10.2 This scheme has allowed young people to express their views on period poverty and connected matters, in an effort to create a better future for themselves and the future generations of female learners throughout RCT.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

11.1 Based on responses from schools and the progress against the recommendations, the scheme appears to be well implemented across most schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

11.2 The vast majority of responses from schools were positive, suggesting that the local authority lead on this was well-received and needed.

11.3 Further work will be undertaken to gather the views of additional female learners to ensure the scheme is recognised and subsequently used to improve their educational experience.

11.4 A continuation of the review will be necessary to ensure that all dispensers are fitted in the most accessible locations in all schools. The remaining schools without the dispensers will be contacted and the units fitted within the toilet cubicles where possible by the end of the Spring Term 2019. In addition, the review will continue to monitor the filling of the dispensers to ensure that there is always product available to female learners across the borough.

11.5 A final recommendation is being made to undertake a further review of the scheme in 6 months and for this to be brought to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee in preparation for Cabinet's consideration of additional funding from April 2020 onwards upon the cessation of the Welsh Government grant.