

Extract from Minutes of:-

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY
PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8th August, 2023

Sustainable Period Product Scheme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the success of the Period Waste Scheme (March 2022 - current) and seek direction on future delivery.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and make a recommendation that the Environmental Education & Outreach team will cease provision from April 2024 given that:

- **current demand appears to have been met through the first two pilot programmes;**
- **there is no available budget to run a third programme**
- **provision will be established through the new legislation**

2.2 The Committee is also asked to authorise the Director of City and Organisational Strategy to submit a formal written response on behalf of council, as outlined at 3.13, to the TEO consultation on the provision of free period products.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 The aim of the Period Waste initiative was to raise awareness and encourage increased use of reusable period products. This will have an environmental benefit as it will reduce the amount of period waste that is entering our waste stream and being landfilled, and it will also reduce plastic waste. Disposal of single use menstrual products - tampons, pads and applicators generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year in the UK¹. In addition, sanitary waste can be made of up to 90% plastic.

3.2 In the most recent BCC Waste Composition Study (2014) it was found that 1.87% of all miscellaneous combustible waste (the largest category of waste we collect) was of a sanitary waste nature

¹ Calculation by Natracare 2018

(including other absorbent hygiene products but excluding nappies). This means each household was producing on average 3.38Kg of this type of product waste per year.

- 3.3 This project was primarily focused on waste reduction but also had the benefit of providing a sustainable resource for those affected by period poverty which is an added pressure on individuals and families as a result of the current cost of living pressures.
- 3.4 The pilot scheme was launched on 30 March 22 to unprecedented demand and in less than 24 hours the pilot had to be closed because of demand. Through the scheme we provided free access to reusable period products to 3,159 people in the Belfast area. Council worked with the social enterprise, 'Hey Girls'. (www.heygirls.co.uk) to deliver the scheme, where participants could register and order reusable sanitary products online.
- 3.5 Social media coverage and feedback on the scheme was also very positive. Commentary praised Belfast City Council for bringing the initiative forward. Over 95,000 people were reached through Council social media on the topic with over 225,000 people having viewed twitter posts promoting the scheme.
- 3.6 Market research targeted at participants of the pilot found that 94.2% of respondent use the products they received all or some of the time. 43.5% said they no longer use single use period products and 86.9% say it has lessened their use of single use products. The project has recently been awarded the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful 'Behaviour Change Award for Tackling Single Use Plastic' for 22/23.
- 3.7 In August 22, SP&R approved expansion of the project and an additional budget allocation so that another tranche of the pilot could be delivered. This was launched in January 2023 and is currently ongoing. To date, 1770 individual orders of products have been processed during this phase of the pilot. As would be anticipated, the rate of requests for products has significantly decreased, given that products are reusable and therefore repeat orders from individuals would not be expected. This pilot continues to be promoted and it is projected that the remaining budget will be utilised by March 2024.
- 3.8 In addition to the extension of the pilot, a project with support from the Climate Change Fund was launched in June 2023. This project engages with partners in the Community Voluntary Sector (CVS) to provide them with reusable sustainable solutions to period poverty which they can then pass on to their service users. Officers have been engaging through women's groups and other CVS groups and have shared information with the Women's Steering Group as well as promoting the initiative through council's social media. Any group interested in becoming involved should email EnvironmentalOutreach@belfastcity.gov.uk

Future Considerations

- 3.9** Period products are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status.
- 3.10** In recognition of this, the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) was made by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022 and requires that period products will be made available from May 2024. The requirements of the Act go beyond seeking to make provision for those in financial difficulty, there is a recognition that period products are necessary and essential items that should be available free of charge and accessible by all persons who need to use them.
- 3.11** The Executive Office (TEO) is currently undertaking a public consultation process which is seeking views on how best the Executive Office (TEO) can ensure that period products are ‘obtainable free of charge’ by ‘all persons who need to use them’, ‘while in Northern Ireland’. Further detail on the background is contained in the full consultation document available here: www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-free-period-products.
- 3.12** A reasonable choice is required by the Act. Within the Act ‘products’ are defined to include tampons, sanitary towels and articles which are reusable. It is anticipated that there will be an expectation that council will be a partner in the delivery of this service though no details are available at this stage.
- 3.13** The TEO consultation survey is predominantly seeking the views of those who use period products and/or who buy products on behalf of other family members. Therefore, whilst it would not be appropriate for council to answer the TEO these questions, it is recommended that council should submit a letter of response outlining our support for the need for period products to be offered to everyone as they are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status. In addition, we will request early engagement with Council to explore our role in any delivery mechanism which is envisaged. Our response will also highlight the learning we have gained from our pilot initiatives on period poverty (as part of our Gender Equality Plan and linked, Belfast City Council launched a pilot offering free period products for the public in council buildings and facilities and free access to reusable period products and) and stress the importance of ongoing collaboration around this issue.

Recommendations for Reusable Period Product Pilot

- 3.14** The legislative requirement to be introduced by the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 will ensure that period products are available to individuals to ensure period dignity. The reasonable choice element will supersede the reusable period product pilot in that individuals can request reusable items within the legislation.

3.15 Given that;

- **current demand appears to have been met through the first two pilot programmes;**
- **there is no available budget to run a third programme**
- **provision will be established through the new legislation**

It is recommended that the pilot does not continue after March 2024.

Financial and Resource implications

3.16 To match the initial scheme would mean a further £50,000 budget which is not within existing budgets.

3.17 For reference, participants could choose to order a Full Cycle Pack (containing 1 x reusable pantyliner, 2 x day reusable pads and 2 x night reusable pads) to the value of £21.40 per pack or approximately £12.99 for a Period Cup Combo (including all associated costs).

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.18 The pilot scheme was designed to be accessible to as many residents in the Belfast area as possible.”

Several Members noted that they were pleased with the success of the scheme and hopeful that the introduction of the new legislation would help to ensure that period products would now be available to individuals to ensure period dignity.

A Member encouraged officers to join up with schools to maximise value for the Council scheme prior to its cessation in April 2024.

The Committee noted the report and agreed the recommendations as outlined at 2.0 of the report, with the addition that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy, in his written response, on behalf of Council, as outlined at 3.13 of the report, to the TEO consultation also highlight the Committees' concern regarding the budget cuts and withdrawal of funding by the Department of Education for the scheme.