

Tackling Period Poverty and Raising Period Awareness



Photograph provided by Cysters





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1.1 Definition	

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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.







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- (2) a central location in Birmingham for the storage of donated products by third sector organisations can be provided.



1 Background

1.1 Definition

1.1.1 Period poverty is a complex issue with a variety of causes including uninformed attitudes and stigma around menstruation. The evidence presented to the committee by Birmingham Public Health highlighted that:

Period poverty is a harsh reflection of poverty and inequality.

1.1.2 'Period poverty', or menstrual hygiene management (MHM), refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints. The World Health Organisation has defined MHM as:

Women and adolescent girls being able to use clean materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood and change them in privacy as often as necessary throughout their menstrual period.

Being able to use soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to safe and convenient facilities to






1.5 Birmingham context

1.5.1 Evidence submitted on behalf of Birmingham Public Health provided some contextual information about the estimated scale of period poverty in Birmingham:

There are an estimated 324,900 women and girls in Birmingham aged between 10-50 years, just over 56.6% of the total number in:

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- 2.1.3 As part of the campaign the first ever Period Poverty badge was designed for girls and leaders to wear to show their support for the campaign and encourage others not to be ashamed or embarrassed about periods. **Girlguiding worked with the charity WaterAid** to produce an educational resource pack which can be delivered to all age groups (from 5-18 years old). Many Girlguiding groups all over Birmingham have already completed this badge curriculum designed to raise awareness of period poverty as an issue and have already been awarded their badge.
- 2.1.4 Language is very important in contributing to and tackling stigma and shame around periods. Girlguiding members across the country are being asked to take a pledge to always talk openly about periods and to help make sure that no one feels embarrassed or ashamed about periods. Members of the Committee were invited by **Girlguiding Birmingham** to take the pledge to end stigma around periods and were pleased to do so to demonstrate support for the work being done to tackle stigma and to be advocates alongside Girlguiding Birmingham for young women in the city. **([Link to R02](#))**



2.5.2 The group will seek to work together with a range of different organisations already working on period poverty from across the public, private and third sectors. It will bring together a range of charities and businesses to tackle stigma and education around periods, alongside accessibility of period products and to develop a comprehensive and sustainable response to period poverty in the UK.

2.5.3 The remit for the Taskforce will include:

looking at the evidence and data about how period poverty affects different groups in our society;

addressing stigma will be another area of focus; and

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improving education



homeless shelters, drug and alcohol services, food banks and job centres. It was suggested that GP surgeries might also provide ideal distribution centres for free sanitary products.

4.2.2 Several Councils in England have put period poverty schemes in place (see paragraph 3.1). The most common method has been the strategic placement of free sanitary product supplies in key locations, such as schools, youth services, voluntary sector settings and food banks. Significant learning has already emerged from programmes aimed at addressing period poverty. For example, successful schemes tend to be those that make sanitary products available in a range of areas without the need for them to be requested via a teacher or other adult.

4.2.3 Neelam Heera, founder of the charitable organisation **Cysters** which works to spread awareness of reproductive health in particular among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Women, presented a comprehensive submission to the inquiry which gave an overview of Cysters and set out the work being undertaken to tackle period poverty through their project '**Our Cysters**'. The project works with ethnic, marginalised communities and those living under the poverty line to tackle period poverty in Birmingham by asking for donations of menstrual products and providing them to those who need them. They collect menstrual products from companies and distribute items between charities working with homeless women and schools within the Handsworth Association of Schools. They have recently expanded and been asked to support the Food Bank



4.2.5 There was also evidence from **Girlguiding Birmingham** that individual groups and volunteers have worked to ensure that their members have easy and free access to period products in their weekly meeting places and during camps, residential events and other trips, but that this is not yet consistent in every group across



27% of girls have overused sanitary towels because they cannot afford fresh ones.²

4.4 Cultural and social attitudes towards menstruation

4.4.1 Amongst some faiths, traditions and cultures, people may find it difficult to talk about the menstrual cycle and, f. (r (.d 2.3 1246.3 [0')10 1(O-(an7n0u-(an3-0r)6.7 (aCyt)r315 3t0.(n0)-67(0 r




5 What can Birmingham City Council do?

5.1 Education - Work closely with schools and teachers

5.1.1 Birmingham City Council needs to work more closely with schools and teachers to educate students about period poverty and specifically in relation to:

raising awareness/dealing with stigma and shame;

information about the products available and dispos



ordination between the Council and the third sector would help, especially in relation to accessing marginalised communities and facilitating the upscaling of projects across Birmingham. 'Our Cysters' have a large network of volunteers and could potentially extend the project to more centres. Advice, facilitation and support with applications for grant funding by third sector organisations would be another aspect which should be examined. **(Link to R4)**

- 5.3.2 Members were told that currently Cysters volunteers store products in their own homes. Really, they require a central hub in Birmingham to store donated products where they could then be collected and distributed as needed, but that they are not in a position to pay the high fees charged by corporate organisations. They have had conversations with various corporate organisations who would charge a high fee to store and hold products which the charities cannot afford. **(Link to R4)**

6 Conclusion

The evidence highlighted that in spite of work being done and support being provided across the city, especially by a number of third sector organisations,