

Report of the Strategic Directors of Health and Wellbeing and Corporate Resources to the meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny committee to be held on 14th February 2019

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Subject:

PERIOD AND HYGIENE POVERTY IN THE BRADFORD DISTRICT

Summary statement:

To update Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on work across the Bradford district in relation to 'Period and Hygiene' Poverty

Bev Maybury
Strategic Director Health and Wellbeing
Joanne Hyde
Strategic Director Corporate Resources

Portfolio:
Health and Wellbeing
Corporate Services

Report Contact/s:
Sarah Possingham
Senior Manager –Wider Determinants
Phone: (01274) 431319
E-mail: sarah.possingham@bradford.gov.uk

Overview & Scrutiny Area:
Corporate

Paul Bland - Transport, Education and Discretionary Payments Manager
Phone: (01274) 43 7874
E-mail: paul.bland@bradford.gov.uk

1. SUMMARY

In the last few years there has been a growing understanding that some households in the United Kingdom are financially challenged to the point where they are turning to projects such as food banks and 'pay as you can' markets to supplement their food requirements. Bradford District is no exception and in response there has been a rise in the number of free and 'pay as you can' food projects established to meet these needs.

What is not so well understood is the impact that this type of poverty can have in relation to the need for sanitary and hygiene products. By its very nature this is a more hidden problem due to the sensitivities surrounding personal hygiene; particularly menstruation and the reluctance felt by some people to discuss these and related issues openly.

The following report seeks to outline current activity in relation to period and hygiene poverty in Bradford and what is already understood relating to the impacts of these. The report will also suggest future research work which could help to improve our understanding of the issues and inform service response/s.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Support projects in Bradford, the foodbanks and 'pay as you can' markets, recognise that poverty and deprivation manifests itself across the whole of a households' needs, it is wider than just food and nutrition. It encompasses personal hygiene; the needs of babies and small children and 'Period poverty'. This includes but is not limited to shavers; shaving cream; nappies; wipes; lotion; sanitary towels; tampons; incontinence pads; deodorant; body and hair cleansers; hair brushes; toothpaste and toothbrushes.

2.2 Households using the foodbanks and 'pay as you can' markets come from many different backgrounds; some are employed; working in low income positions; others claim welfare benefits, some do both. Many households include children and other dependants whereas others do not, some are single people. All have in common however, that at times; economic pressures are such that money for food and personal hygiene is stretched to breaking point.

2.3 Whilst gathering information for this report, the Feeding Bradford Co-ordinator (whose role supports the food poverty networks across the district) spoke to seven foodbanks in the area. These represented a range of large; medium and small providers working in different parts of the wider district where poverty relating to food and other needs have been identified. These were Bradford Central; Bradford North; Wyke; St Pauls in Wibsey; St Hughes in Baildon; Salvation Army in Keighley and Bingley Foodbank.

2.4 Of these; six offered period and personal hygiene products routinely and all noted that they often 'run out' of supplies and have to ration what they have until further donations come in. The one project that has not been offering these goods alongside food will be doing so in the future.

2.5 The way that these products are made available also needs to be considered. Many people prefer to keep their hygiene and/or period poverty needs confidential due to their personal nature. This makes it necessary to carefully consider the distribution routes for goods such as menstruation supplies; incontinence pads etc and offer a more discreet way of accessing them for those in need. Some projects have found that routinely including them in food parcels for households with resident women and girls is effective; whilst others leave that open to the individual, preferring to offer a separate 'box' for

people to access the goods. Both have been found to be effective.

2.6 In the last financial year; concerns relating to period and/or hygiene poverty have been formally raised, twice with Bradford Council elected members and the Leader of Council.

2.7. *Hygiene Poverty Scheme*

The first approach came via staff based in the Customer Contact service. Through their work they identified that Period and Hygiene poverty was a hidden and possibly unmet need. As a result of this, a scheme was created for the donation and collection of personal hygiene products in Britannia House and Argus Chambers. The scheme has collection points in all the communal kitchens in Britannia House and takes donations of the following;

- Sanitary supplies; pads and tampons
- Incontinence pads
- Nappies and wipes
- Deodorants
- Shampoos and body wash
- Toothpaste and toothbrushes

2.8 The scheme started on the 13th August 2018 and is a collaboration between the Council's Facilities Management; Customer Services; Health and Wellbeing and a local voluntary organisation; Innchurches which manages the Storehouse project.

2.9 When the boxes are full the facilities management team collect them from each kitchen and Innchurches then picks these up centrally from Britannia House. They are sorted and distributed via the food banks and pay-as-you can fresh food markets which the Storehouse supplies, using separate discreet boxes.

2.10 The scheme has generated goods for two collections from inception (in November and December 2018) and there is another collection due shortly. Donations have comprised of 190 different goods; shampoo; deodorant; sanitary supplies and other hygiene oriented goods.

These have been distributed through;

The Anchor Project;

Rockwell Project;

Family Action (Canterbury Project)

St John's Project;

Together Women's Project;

Safety First

All of which provide community based services

2.11 The Leader of Council was further approached in autumn 2018 prior to the full council meeting held on the 16th October 2018 regarding period poverty. This came from a group of local women seeking to raise awareness of period poverty in schools and other youth settings by developing on and expanding a 'Redbox' scheme across the Bradford district.

2.12 Subsequently a motion was passed by full council requesting the following;

This Council notes:

- Because of Government cuts more than one in four children in the UK are living in poverty (27.1% in 2015-16) and this will rise to almost one in three (31.3%) by 2021-22, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

- Food bank use has risen rapidly in recent years with the Trussell Trust reporting it gave out a record 1.3m food parcels to an estimated 66,000 people in 2017-18, up 13% on the previous year.
- People who are unable to afford food might also be unable to afford other essentials such as sanitary products. Young girls may be particularly vulnerable to the impact as it could lead to them missing school or having to choose between buying food or sanitary protection.

This Council will:

1. Carry out more detailed research to identify the causes and extent of the issue, what good practice is already taking place and what more can be done to address the problem most effectively across the district.
2. Work with partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Group, schools, the Red Box project and the Storehouse to establish the best ways to tackle the problem.
3. Ask officers to report back to the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the end of December with their findings and options for scaling up our activity with partners.
4. Call on Government to remove VAT from all sanitary products.

2.13 Research

The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme has, since 2015, supported the work of the Metropolitan Food Bank with funding for food parcels distributed to advice centres throughout the district. Take up of these parcels has been at the point where welfare advice and other support services has been offered along with help towards on going fuel costs and applications for help from the Assisted Purchase Scheme.

In an effort to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable were being met a piece of research was carried out on behalf of the Council in January of 2018. One of the indicative findings from this was that there is a need for non food items to be considered; including feminine and other hygiene products. Following this research the Council's Executive at its meeting on 6 March 2018 resolved to implement the recommendations. This included extending the existing funding for emergency food items to include non food items such as cleaning materials, baby products, toiletries and feminine hygiene products.

Support has been made available from the Local Welfare Assistance fund to assist with researching current needs, specifically into period poverty in schools, and this has yet to conclude. Whilst work is taking place to identify what is needed and the extent of the issue, food banks and providers continue, through their own network of contributors, to maintain a steady supply of products.

A snap shot survey is planned by the Feeding Bradford campaign to examine foodbank usage in 2018/19/20. As part of this it is proposed to ask service users about their experiences of period and/or hygiene poverty. It is hoped this will gather better information to inform service responses and interventions for the future.

Work will also be explored in the coming year with the Red Box project and Educational establishments to see if a clearer picture of period poverty issues can be identified.

2.14. Practical multi-agency service responses

Redbox Bradford

'Redbox' nationally is a programme set up by communities in recognition of the impact

period poverty can have on young women, particularly in terms of how it can prevent and/or disrupt school and/or college attendance. These projects are effective and growing in numbers, there are 216 different Red Box projects operating nationally across Scotland, Northern Ireland; Wales and England. All offer direct practical support for those in period poverty and also aim to encourage dialogue relating to periods and menstruation issues thereby empowering women and girls.

Redbox Bradford has been spearheaded by local women; Charlotte Furness and Victoria Raw amongst other co-ordinators. It has been using advertisements at key meetings such as Full Council meetings; as well as working through word of mouth, Metropolitan Foodbank and social media contacts to collect sanitary products; pads; tampons and underwear supplies to distribute through educational establishments across the district.

They are offering their services to all schools in the area who wish to join and who have pupils of menstruating age; this includes secondary; primary; pupil referral units and special educational needs schools. Out of a possible 212 schools they have successfully set up Red Box schemes in 56 schools with two more wishing to join.

By experience they have found that positive implementation of the scheme requires a time-commitment from the school and that the most successful schemes have a single point of contact for pupils, acting as a 'champion'. The champion's role is to raise awareness of the scheme across the student body and teaching staff as well as practically managing the project ensuring that the red boxes are maintained.

Period Dignity Project

As a result of a recent approach from the Unite Union Regional Secretary, Karen Reay and Unite Bradford Council Branch Equality Officer Patricia Tillotson Bradford Council is preparing a 'Period Dignity' project starting in February 2019. Unite requested that Bradford Council provide sanitary products in the workplace and that places of education provide sanitary products for students and employees too. They believe that workplaces who make sanitary products accessible to their employees and girls in education, will reduce days lost through menstruation and will also increase morale and wellbeing. Through this campaign Unite hopes to ensure that all women and girls have period dignity in the future.

Since the launch of the Unite campaign, many organisations have joined including Leeds Council and have adopted a Period Dignity Policy as well as providing sanitary products within their workplace.

The Period Dignity trial in Bradford District will be situated in Sir Henry Mitchell House, Bradford City Hall and Keighley Town Hall; chosen as they are accessed by the public as well as Council staff. It consists of a 'Redbox' type service which will make sanitary products available anonymously from the women's toilets; including accessible toilets so that Council staff and/or the general public who may be experiencing period poverty or unexpectedly need to access sanitary products will be able to access them freely. This will be run on a pilot basis and reviewed in two months time.

2.15 Council Reportage

Included in the resolution made at the Full Council meeting on the 16th October was a request that officers report back on Period Poverty to the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the end of December 2018.

Subsequently the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed this at their meeting held on 25th October 2018 resolving that;
'Following consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and in the view of the fact that the issue is related to poverty rather than health or social care, that the recommendation of Council be referred to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration'

At their meeting on the 15th November 2018 the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee formally resolved to include the Period Poverty report into their work programme and set the date of that for the report as 14th February 2019.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 There has been little research undertaken regarding period poverty in the UK, with the main study being undertaken by the girls' rights charity Plan International UK. In 2017, the study found that in girls and young women aged 14-21 years:

- One in ten girls have **been unable** to afford sanitary protection
- One in seven girls have **struggled** to afford sanitary protection
- One in seven girls have had to ask to borrow sanitary protection from a friend due to affordability issues
- More than one in ten girls has had to improvise due to affordability issues
- One in five of girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost

3.2 In Bradford District there are 27,193 girls and young women aged 14-21 years. Applying the results from the study to the Bradford population would mean that between 2,719 and 4,079 girls and young women would either struggle or be unable to afford sanitary supplies.

3.3 *Always* –a subsidiary of Proctor and Gamble who manufacture and sell a variety of sanitary products commissioned research from 'We are Futures' in 2018 and found the following;

- 137,700 children missed school due to period poverty in 2017/18
- 68% of young women say they lose concentration in school and/learning environments when menstruating
- Menstrual products cost up to £13 per month, aggregating to £18,000 over an average woman's lifetime

3.4 The Scottish parliament recognised issues relating to period poverty in August 2018 and have invested £5.2 million in tackling the associated problems. These funds are to be distributed through Fareshares Scotland and Hey Girls (an East Lothian social enterprise company) with the aim of supplying free sanitary products through community based organisations and local authorities for all menstruating women.

3.5 A legal campaign has recently been launched by #Free Periods and Red Box led by an individual (19-year-old Amika George) to ask the government to invest in period poverty across all schools in the same way as Scotland has chosen to. This could be resolved in the coming months.

3.8 Anecdotally it is clear that many teachers have supported their students in the past

with ad hoc arrangements around access to sanitary goods. Extending a scheme such as Redbox however gives more opportunity to open a positive dialogue around menstruation tackling some of the taboos and mythology which surround this.

3.9 It is positive that Foodbanks and other projects make arrangements for period and hygiene poverty needs however there can be a 'stigma' associated with using such establishments that prevents some who need this help from accessing it.

3.10 The Council has a multi-agency group charged with considering the impact that Poverty has across the district and ensuring that recently adopted Anti-poverty is implemented. It has been agreed that issues relating to period poverty will be incorporated into their future work plan.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 Project funding of £5,000 has been made available to support the Redbox Project via dedicated staff time from Wellsprings Bradford and created a positive link to the Feeding Bradford Campaign. Redbox are also seeking access to storage facilities for the donations they receive.

4.2 Accessing the schools networks and raising awareness of what is possible is now a key activity requiring some support from the Council. Experience has shown that internal 'buy in' from a dedicated champion within the school environment helps make Redbox type projects more successful and sustainable.

4.3 Money for the provision of all or some non food items remains available from the Local Welfare Assistance fund

4.4 Officer time from the Council is invested via the Health and Wellbeing department; Facilities Management; Schools/education and Revenues and Benefits.

4.5 Support for the scheme from Council staff in Britannia House and Argus Chambers has been steady; with a regular collection of personal hygiene products being received and redistributed. Picking up the items and distributing them via food poverty networks and the pay and you can markets by the Storehouse is free

4.6 Facilities Management staff time dedicated to the project will be increased as the Period Dignity project is developed to work from Sir Henry Mitchell House and Bradford and Keighley Town Halls.

4.7 The estimated financial outlay in the initial supply of sanitary products is the following;

An example cost is:-

Initial layout for basket £2.99

Box 18 Tampons £2.49

Packet of Sanitary Pads £1.19

Total Cost £ 6.67

4.7 At the end of the Council based initiatives' pilot periods a review will be undertaken to look at the outcomes of the two schemes and identify if there are more streamlined ways of delivering them.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Funding granted has been managed through the Council's Procurement standing orders and the outcomes will be used to inform any future service needs.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 The Local Authority has a duty to identify, assess and make provision to meet the special educational and wider needs of children within its area and to monitor progress against outcomes taking account of educational, health and care needs, outcomes and appropriate provision

6.2 The Local Authority has statutory duties to ensure that efficient education is available to meet the needs of the population of the area, ensure that its education functions are exercised with a view to promoting high standards ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and learning, and promote the fulfilment of learning potential;

6.3 The Children Act 1989 sets out the provision of services for children and their families. Section 17 places a duty on every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need within their area.

6.4 The Local Authority has duties under the Childcare Act 2016 to improve well-being of young children & reduce inequalities between them.

6.5 The Local Authority has statutory Public Health responsibilities, including a duty to improve Public Health.

6.6 In exercising its statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 towards those 16+ years of age has a duty to promote the individuals well-being, including in matters relating to personal dignity, physical and mental health and emotional well-being, control by the individual over day-to-day life, participation in work, education, training or recreation.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

7.1.1 All women and girls of menstruating age in the Bradford District can be affected by period poverty. This is more likely to be felt in areas of multiple deprivation and in families of low income and/or who are dependant on state benefits.

7.1.2 Homeless women and girls; those rough sleeping and/or in uncertain housing circumstances (sofa surfing) and those who are destitute are at greater risk of period poverty.

7.1.3 Women from BME origins who are fleeing violence and /abuse in the home may be particularly disadvantaged in relation to period and/or hygiene poverty. It is not uncommon for women in this situation to have unclear legal status to reside in this country and therefore they may have 'no recourse to public funds' of any kind. This means that food and period poverty support is even more vital.

7.1.4 In exercising its functions and making decisions, the Council must comply with its Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when exercising education functions.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

7.2.1 Tackling period and hygiene poverty strengthens the wider social, education and economic position of women and girls. It removes additional barriers to education, study and employment supporting stronger communities overall.

7.2.2 The dialogue that the 'Red box' programme encourages around menstruation can also help tackle mis-information and the embarrassment that young women can feel in relation to this routine and natural part of life.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

7.3.1 The packaging of sanitary and personal hygiene products can cause environment issues if not disposed of properly. This can be minimised through recycling packaging and encouraging the disposal of used sanitary goods through the appropriate routes.

7.3.2 There are reusable sanitary products available on the market however these are more expensive and harder to source than the products sold from local retailers. They may not suit all women particularly those living in insecure, shared or temporary housing settings as they need to be maintained regularly.

7.3.3 No aerosols are accepted as part of the Council collections in Britannia House.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

7.5.1 Tackling gender inequality underpins the work in respect of period poverty. As noted above these issues if not actively challenged can act as additional barriers to accessing work; education and school.

7.5.2 Hygiene poverty affects a wider population including men and boys due to its often hidden nature

7.6 TRADE UNION

7.6.1 The Council's Period Dignity pilot has been prompted directly by the approach of the Unite Trade Union. This will create a resource for the public and also Bradford Council staff who may be experiencing period poverty.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Areas of the district with wards which fall into the definition of multiple deprivation may see higher rates of households at risk of/ or in period and hygiene poverty.

It should be noted that even in areas where statistically multiple deprivation is lower, this type of poverty often remains 'hidden' by its very nature and research planned into

understanding needs should be extended to representatives and wards from a wide sample across the district.

7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Corporate parenting issues arise for those children of menstruating age for whom the Council has a corporate parenting duty.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

None

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

9.1 That members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report

9.2 That members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and request a future report be prepared for the committee including more detailed information on service needs and responses re period poverty locally.

9.3 That officers are asked to liaise and work with The Red Box Project; The Storehouse; Fareshares and other local organisations to understand the impacts of period poverty better in the Bradford district

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended -

Those options 9.2 and 9.3 are adopted by this committee.

That officers are asked to work closely with current providers across the district to better understand the impacts of period and/or hygiene poverty and that a further report be prepared for this committee in 12 months time

11. APPENDICES

None

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None