

Period Dignity Roundtable
At Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay
11:00am-12:30pm on 24 October 2019

Chairperson: Deputy Minister and Chief Whip

Attendees:

Keep Wales Tidy
PHS Group
Plan International UK
Neath Port Talbot Council
PHS Group
Trussell Trust
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) & National Union of Students Wales
Cardiff & Vale College
Newport Council

Welsh Government Officials:

Equality and Human Rights Division

Apologies from representatives of:

BAWSO	Children in Wales
Disability Wales	Dwr Cymru
Llamau	Love Your Period Campaign
Periods in Poverty	Sport Wales
Stonewall Cymru	Universities Wales (HE)
Welsh Women's Aid	Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
WINGS Cymru	

Welcome and Introductions

The Minister welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting to discuss the issues around period dignity in Wales.

Item 1. Purpose of the meeting

The Minister reminded everyone that she wrote to stakeholders and representatives from the private sector to invite them to join today's meeting to discuss ideas to tackle this issue across Wales.

The Minister said she wanted the issues to be considered from a dignity perspective. The Minister said she wanted to move from period poverty to period dignity policy. The Minister said she wanted the roundtable to consider how we can work together

to tackle the challenges faced by many girls and young women to have access to period products when they need them.

The Minister explained that she wrote to Cabinet Ministers and Assembly Members on 3 June to provide them with an update on period dignity and requested that they consider how period dignity can be considered and supported within their portfolios. The responses from Ministers and AM's was very positive.

The Minister said that the work to tackle the issues related to period dignity is progressing across Welsh Government, and the involvement from stakeholders and partners is key to driving this work forward.

The Minister invited delegates from around the table to share their views and their expert knowledge of the challenges faced by girls and young women.

The following points were made as part of a discussion that followed:

- PHS completed a research project in May in schools with girls aged 13-18 years. The research found that 52% of girls missed school during their period and 1 in 14 girls missed school because of lack of access to sanitary products. PHS has started a campaign to install coin free sanitary vending machines in schools. They are currently working on a pilot scheme with Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr County Councils. PHS is a member of the UK Period Dignity Task force – working with the UK Department of Education, leading on the work 'Access for All'. PHS agreed to feedback to this group any significant progress of the UK taskforce. PHS recycle used period products that are not plastic free to keep them from being used to landfill. The products are recycled into fuel.
- The Minister thanked PHS for sharing the findings of their research and development.
- WLGA reported that there were some unresolved issues from LA's in relation to lack of storage for sanitary products and distribution arrangements to schools. There was also some concern about training needs for boys as well as girls and for related health issues such as toxic shock syndrome.
- Trussell Trust fed back that there had been an increase in donations of sanitary products at foodbanks. This was due to a recent publicity campaign relating to the challenges that girls and young women have accessing appropriate products. The Swansea based charity 'STOPP' is leading on work to tackle period poverty in their area, making sure that sanitary products are given freely to those who need them.
- Plan International UK (PIUK) stated that work is being done to equip mobile libraries with sanitary products to deliver to rural and more isolated communities – not necessarily to deliver to schools. PIUK is a member of the UK Task force.

The Minister said that issues about training and, guidance about how the funding can be spent is coming through from the Local Authorities (LA's) The Minister asked that WLGA put together a report with the key issues from LA's to be considered at the next meeting.

Action: WLGA will compile a report on the key issues raised by LA's to the Minister before the next meeting.

Item 3. Summary of current Welsh Government support and funding

The Minister said that the Welsh Government has provided funding to LA's to provide period products for people who may otherwise be unable to afford them. In 2018, £700k capital funding was provided to LA's for improvements to toilet facilities in school and community spaces. Revenue funding of £220k was provided to LA's in each of the 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years to support period dignity in communities.

In 2019, £845k revenue funding was provided to Further Education colleges to make period products available free of charge to learners.

In 2019, £2.3m revenue funding as part of 'the period dignity grant for schools', was provided to LA's to make period products available to learners in all schools across Wales free of charge.

The Period Dignity Grant for schools will provide 141,000 girls in primary and secondary schools with a range of sanitary products. As well as being free of charge, the products should be accessible in the most practicable and appropriate way possible. Schools are encouraged to support reusable, environmentally sustainable products.

This included a commitment to spend at least 10% of the funding on re-usable products in order to provide choice for students who may want to try them.

Since awarding the grant, we have received a number of queries from LA's about the 10% that should be spent on reusable products. To address this, we issued revised guidance to LA's on 3 July, to explain what can be purchased under the conditions of the grant. The revised guidance also addresses the issues raised regarding the use of reusable products by primary school children.

The Welsh Government is funding the Eco-Schools programme in Wales and it is delivered through Keep Wales Tidy. The programme in Wales is free for LA schools. Independent schools are required to contribute towards the support they receive.

Eco-Schools is a global program engaging 19.5 million children across 67 countries, making it the largest educational program on the planet. The program is designed to empower and inspire young people to make positive environmental changes to their school and wider community.

It will provide resources for schools which will help to promote open discussion with young people and help break down the social stigma and taboos around periods and period products. The resources will educate pupils about sustainable alternatives to single use period products and the impact these can have on the environment.

Item 4. Highlighted issues with current funding

The Minister said that in March this year, the Welsh Government announced that free period products would be made available to all women admitted to hospital in Wales.

LA's have reported that they need further guidance about the commitment to spend at least 10% of the funding on re-usable products in order to provide choice for students who may want to try them.

Caerphilly County Borough Council (CBC) has decided to spend the remaining 90% of their allocation of funding on plastic free products. Caerphilly CBC has raised its target to use recyclable products to 25% and eco-friendly pads and tampons to 75%.

LA's have asked for clarity about the use of the funding from Welsh Government. Some LA's want to spend the funding on school uniform to replace soiled garments during school time. Other questions have been raised by LA's about the need to supply storage cupboards to store products and disposal bins for soiled products.

LA's have asked for funding for staff to provide training. It was noted that there are a lot of materials available from Keep Wales Tidy and Plan International (which will shortly be available on Hwb for teachers and pupils to access). The Plan International guidance also provides an information sheet for parents.

Renewed guidance was issued from Welsh Government to LA's on 3 July in an effort to address these issues.

The Minister said that if continual funding can be found, we can move towards providing reusable and plastic free products.

Actions:

- Equality officials to raise the issue of free period products in hospitals with Health officials at the Cross Government Meeting
- Officials to consider flexibility in the spending of the funding by LA's and schools.

Item 5. Priorities for future support

The Minister said the UK Government Period Poverty Taskforce met for the first time on 23 July. The UK Taskforce is co-chaired by Plan International UK, Procter & Gamble and Minister for Women & Equalities, and brings together representatives from government, business and the third sector.

Their focus will be on tackling the issue of period poverty and wider stigma around menstruation in the UK. The Taskforce is supported by up to £250,000 of funding from the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to generate learning and test new ideas and schemes.

Officials in the Equality team, participated in a Four Nations meeting on 12 September and GEO provided a brief update on the work of the UK Taskforce as well as other Nations providing updates on their work in this area. There are three main areas of focus for the UK Taskforce:

- i) improving access for to period products for everyone
- ii) providing improved data and evidence
- iii) breaking down stigma, shame and taboos around menstruation

Equalities officials provided feedback from Scotland's approach to period dignity. The Scottish Government Office has asked businesses to provide sanitary products in hospitals, sports venues and airports, in the same way that they would supply toilet paper. Businesses are encouraged to take the initiative in making products accessible – without relying on public funding.

There is a call for eco-committees to be established in LA's and schools. Newport County Council is investigating this. Keep Wales Tidy has produced a newsletter addressing this issue. The newsletter is distributed to eco-friendly schools in an effort to raise awareness of recycling and eco-friendly products. The Minister asked if this could be shared with members of the round table before the next meeting. PHS has also produced materials about recycling policies.

The Minister announced that Welsh Government has established a new Cross-Government group of officials to work together to tackle issues related to period dignity and period poverty. Representation from departments include: Education, Tackling Poverty, Health, Environment, Equality and Strategic Budgeting. The Minister has asked officials from the Equality team to co-ordinate this ongoing work across the Welsh Government

Actions:

- Equality Officials to feedback progress from the Cross-Government group at the next roundtable meeting.
- Officials to share materials from Keep Wales Tidy, PHS and Plan International UK about eco-friendly policies to roundtable members.
- Minister to issue a statement in the New Year.

Item 6. Way Forward

The Minister thanked the group for asked for their views about the way forward.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that:

- There are policy gaps at the round table including representation from schools and FE/HE colleges
- In terms of officials; Health, Education and Sports colleagues should attend the next roundtable meeting.
- Officials to invite views from charity groups who are already working in campaigns to tackle period dignity in Wales such as: STOPP, Wings Cymru, Love your Period Campaign etc.
- A further meeting of the roundtable should be arranged early in 2020.

Actions:

- The Minister said the Education Minister will be informed of the discussions at the roundtable meeting. We will do this by sending a copy of these minutes to her office.
- The Minister will issue a statement in the New Year to raise awareness of period dignity.
- Officials to arrange a roundtable meeting early in 2020.