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| Subject: | Countering Period Poverty | | |
| Date of Meeting: | 3 December 2018 | | |
| Report of: | Executive Director for Families, Children & Learning | | |
| Contact Officer: | Name: | Sam Beal, Emma McDermott | Tel: 01273 293533, Tel: 01273 291577 |
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| Ward(s) affected: | (All Wards); | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report has been called for by the NICE committee in response to a petition asking Brighton & Hove Council to implement a policy for the distribution of free period products to schools to counter period poverty.
- 1.2 The report provides detail on the work of volunteer-run group Red Box in Brighton & Hove schools to tackle period poverty both in terms of access to products and the stigma of talking about period. The appendix extensively references the work of Chella Quint of #periodpositive and of the #periodpositive charter. The report also gives examples of other activity in the city to help with period poverty and also recommendations for action the council make wish to support, enable or take.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Committee supports one-off funding of £3,620 be made available from within existing 2018/19 budget provision for the start-up cost to fund Red Boxes for all secondary, primary, junior and special schools in Brighton & Hove;
- 2.2 That the Committee notes that Red Box will be seeking sponsorship from the business community in Brighton & Hove and that the council encourages the private sector corporate social responsibility group to support the ongoing delivery of Red Boxes to Brighton & Hove schools;
- 2.3 That the Committee supports the continuing work of the council's PSHE education service and school nursing service in supporting schools to reduce stigma and shame related to periods and provide education on puberty and changes within the body;
- 2.4 That Committee notes the activity taking place in community settings in the city to tackle period poverty especially that of food banks and libraries.
- 2.5 That Committee approves the council using its internal and external communication channels to promote donations to Red Box.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 According to Plan International UK, one in ten girls in the UK have been unable to afford period products. 49% of girls have missed an entire day of school because of their period. Research also shows significant taboo and stigma surrounding periods and menstruation. We do not have any local data on how widely this affects Brighton & Hove pupils and schools.
- 3.2 The Poverty Proofing the School Day Project was commissioned from Child Poverty North East and we have worked with them to ensure questions about access to period products are now asked to all pupils and students from Year 5 onwards and staff in schools. These questions have only routinely been asked in audits since September 2018. In all the nine schools where these questions have been asked period products were available to pupils and students at no cost. In one school, staff were buying period products to give to students. However, not all pupils were aware that their schools provided free period products to those who needed them, this was particularly the case for primary age pupils. Pupils and students talked with during the audits also raised the issue of where they would like to access period products from. This provides evidence that alongside schools having access to a range of menstrual products they also need to discuss with pupils and students where these should be located and promote widely.
- 3.3 The Red Box Project is a national voluntary organisation that provides boxes of menstrual products to schools and community settings. The 'Red Box' also comes with publicity materials for schools to use to promote the boxes. These boxes are filled through donations and sponsorship. There is a donation point in Hove Town Hall for example. They have publicly partnered with Procter and Gamble, the leading multinational corporation selling disposable menstrual products.
- 3.4 At the time of writing, Red Box Brighton & Hove provides red boxes to 6 secondary, 8 primary, 2 special schools and 1 college. The Brighton & Hove PSHE Education Service has promoted this to schools via a school bulletin and emails to PSHE co-ordinators. The service will continue to provide this support.
- 3.5 There is a local area approach to period poverty led by the Hangleton and Knoll Project (HKP) in partnership with Benfield Valley Healthcare Hub (BVHH) in the west of the city. This project was developed from needs identified in both local youth and community work and from within the local primary care setting. The project aims to reduce stigma and increase confidence as well as get products out to local women. The project provides:
- Posters (in English, Arabic and Bengali) in the public toilets in Portslade Library, Hangleton Community Centre, St Richards Community Centre and BVHC surgery about free period products
 - Free menstrual products for young women attending HKP youth sessions
 - Plastic container in these toilets with free menstrual products to take freely
 - Small cards which can be taken to reception/ library staff to obtain a pack of free menstrual products with no questions asked.
- This service is also advertised in the local community newsletters and with outreach to local community groups e.g. Hangleton and Knoll Multicultural Women's group. Menstrual products have been provided by companies like Sainsbury's, the Co-Op,

Sussex University Students Union, the Hove and West Blatchington Food Bank and BHT First Base.

- 3.6 In addition, the Young People's Centre has been providing menstrual products, advice and support to young people accessing the centre, support for this has been provided through Fare Share. BWC (Brighton Women's Centre) has made period products freely available to women using its Food Bank and Peer Group Drop-In and associated services since period poverty was raised as an issue over five years ago. These products are provided through donations and relationships with companies like local supermarkets/shops, e.g. Sainsbury's, Co-op and Superdrug.
- 3.7 The Brighton and Hove Emergency Food Network (EFN) identified the need for period products in 2016 and through its annual survey reported in 2017 and 2018 that toiletries came joint highest in needs/gaps: "12 of the 16 food banks would like to include more toiletries in their parcels. With comments specifying a need for more period products and nappies." The EFN discussed period poverty at its most recent meeting in November identifying the following issues: demand continues to outstrip supply – other areas have lower need but higher donations, its important to offer choice, a need for awareness raising that period poverty exists in the city, for more donation points and signposting to places for free products. [The Hygiene Bank](#) has a collection point in the Open Market and is looking to setup more, Whitehawk Food bank has funding from the Homity Trust to provide monthlies packs and Fareshare will soon be working with Morrison's which will be donating period products for distribution across the EFN.
- 3.8 The School Nursing service, commissioned by Public Health and provided by Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, has been working with schools across the city to offer the following:
- Health promotion education on puberty and the changing body aimed at some year 6 pupils
 - All year 7 pupils are provided with health questionnaires and the choice to have appointments for follow up support. This includes puberty and changing body education
 - Period / puberty education and sign posting to where they can access free products in schools via the school health drop-ins or CHATHEALTH texting service.
 - Health promotion opportunities such as assemblies, drop-day days to promote puberty, periods and access to free menstrual products
- 3.9 The Public Health Funded PSHE Education Service has, in the last academic year, reviewed and developed guidance and resources related to relationships and sex education to support quality teaching and learning of this subject in schools. The new primary relationships and sex education lesson plans take a period positive approach and some of the excellent resources developed by 'Girlguiding UK' have also been shared with schools. In addition, a document was adapted from #periodpositive and the #periodpositive charter (www.periodpositive.com) to encourage schools to take a period positive approach and this promotes Red Box Brighton & Hove. This is shared in Appendix 1, with a view to looking at attaining the charter mark.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 There are menstrual products being provided to young people at no cost in schools and youth settings although in schools these are not always well promoted. There is more work to do across all settings to prevent and reduce stigma related to periods and talking about periods.
- 4.2 The Red Box Project provides an offer that is being embraced by schools. There are a range of branded disposable products provided in the red boxes and this is welcomed by young people as they are able to choose what they need. Red Box requests continued support from the PSHE Education Service to promote the offer to schools. If all schools sign-up for a Red Box then the project will need support in funding this offer through their existing system of donations and sponsorship.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 This report has been informed by research and campaigns such as those led by Girlguiding UK and #periodpositive as well as local feedback from community organisations including the Emergency Food Network.
- 5.2 Since September 2018, Poverty Proofing the School Day research has included questions to pupils and students in Year 5 and above about the availability of period products.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 There is a need for free period products for young people and for these to be effectively promoted in and around schools. The Red Box Project already has a positive reputation in Brighton & Hove and has established itself in a number of schools. The Red Box Project is run by committed and knowledgeable volunteers with sponsorship from Procter and Gamble and the Council do not see a need to undermine this, but to provide support to the Project locally and nationally and use its resources to support and work with Red Box.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The start-up cost to fund Red Boxes for all secondary, primary, junior and special schools in Brighton & Hove would be £3,620. The scheme has not been running long enough to ascertain how much it would cost to maintain the boxes throughout a year. Start-up costs can be met from within the existing Communities, Equality and Third Sector 2018/19 budget. Pupils have not been surveyed to track incidence or causes of period poverty. Red Box does not promote reusable products.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Michael Bentley Date: 25/10/18

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Local Authorities have duties under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to promote public health and the work described in this report will support the

Council in meeting that duty. The work will also support the Council in delivering its s149 Equality duty to promote equality of opportunity. Branded products, lesson plans or partnerships may unduly influence pupils.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date: 24.10.18

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Due regard has been shown to all groups in the development of this work.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The focus of Red Box on disposable products creates a self-perpetuating reliance upon disposables which could undermine any education about reusables.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.5 Red Box's partnership with disposables market leader Procter and Gamble could indicate bias. Partnership with private companies or reliance on council funding could disempower young peoples' choice and the #periodpositive charter could be a way to make this work more self-sustaining

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix 1

**1. The #periodpositive charter approach in Brighton & Hove Schools
*#periodpositive and the #periodpositive charter programme have been developed by Chella Quint***

In a #periodpositive school:

- Periods are talked about in schools openly and without stigma or shame, and staff receive targeted training to ensure this is supported school-wide
- The school regularly audits the ease of menstruation management and makes improvements according to pupil need, including providing information about reusable and disposable menstrual products or the products themselves as appropriate, and this provision is promoted and known about by all.
- All pupils and students from year 4 receive age and development appropriate period education within a planned programme of relationships and sex education.
- Pupils with very early onset puberty and trans pupils and students are provided with additional support perhaps from a school nurse, if needed.
- Learning about periods is seen to be of benefit to all genders.
- When appropriate and with careful management single gender sessions are provided for in depth, safe discussion about managing periods.
- Pupils and students are involved in developing learning about periods and puberty along with staff, who will receive support to write lessons using best practice.
- Lessons are unbranded, taught by trained staff, factually accurate, up-to-date and well-researched, with learners' needs in mind, and regularly evaluated with pupils and students.
- There is excellent communication to other members of the school community including, parents and carers about the content of lessons.
- Lessons include the biological, social, emotional and practical elements of having and managing a period and including self-care and menstrual well-being.
- Lessons on periods complement lessons on body parts, puberty, human reproduction fertility, puberty and reproductive health, with an awareness of physiological differences and medical conditions related to reproductive health and healthy menstrual cycles.
- There is a cross-curricular approach to learning about periods, particularly in science and PSHE but also in media studies, PE, maths, graphics, and textiles

- Adults avoid the language of 'sanitary hygiene', 'sanitary products' and refer instead to periods and menstruation, pads and menstrual products.
- Language and learning about periods is inclusive of all genders, cultures, faiths and sexual orientations. For example; 'girls and women and others who have periods'.
- Adults adapt learning so that it meets the needs of SEND pupils and students and seek expert advice if needed for example to support children with sensory needs or physical impairments.
- There are links to information about periods on the school website for parents and carers so that they can support this learning, and additional training opportunities offered for staff and parents.

Key messages for learning about periods:

- Periods are a natural and normal part of the menstrual cycle and of human development and growth.
- Periods should not stop someone from doing things they usually do, but might be a time to focus more on self-care and menstrual well-being.
- Periods are not dirty, disgusting or something to be ashamed of or embarrassed by.
- Periods contain blood and tissue but this is different to bleeding from a cut or injury.
- Periods can be something to celebrate and we can see this in ceremonies and celebrations across the world.
- Most people who have periods, leak onto their clothes at some point.
- There are a range of menstrual products available, including reusable products such as menstrual cups, period pants, and washable pads.
- Menstrual products should be changed regularly.
- Menstrual products should be disposed of appropriately, in a bin, not down the toilet.
- Trans boys and men and non-binary people may have periods.
- It's ok to ask questions about periods (and signpost the staff who can offer support.)
- If periods are difficult to manage or very painful, seek help from the school nurse or a doctor.

Methods for challenging stigma and shame:

- Develop positive messages (such as the ones above) and build self-esteem and period confidence.
- Explore feelings of embarrassment and develop coping strategies.
- Explore the social media campaign for the period emoji in challenging stigma and embarrassment.
- Grow a critical awareness of any euphemisms or tactics of shame used in marketing of period products.
- Support a pupil or student who experiences a leak or a stain on their clothes and safely challenge any unsupportive reactions.
- Be aware that some abusive behaviours such as 'skirt lifting', 'upskirting' or 'groping' may cause even greater impact on those with a period.
- Consider using older students to support younger ones with menstruation management.

Practicalities:

Period poverty can stop some people from attending school and doing activities. Schools are encouraged to have a box of menstrual products available in a variety of accessible locations. Check with pupils that they feel comfortable with the locations of period product boxes.

The Red Box Project - <http://redboxproject.org/> is a national project which aims to provide free menstrual products within schools. Information about the Brighton & Hove project bringing red boxes into schools can be found here: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/redboxprojectbrighton/>

Pupils and students are aware of where they can access free period products in school if their period starts unexpectedly, if they are in an exam (see #examsperiod) or they cannot afford menstrual products.

Schools have a clear policy on support they are able to provide to pupils and students experiencing period pain ie hot water bottles, pain killers etc

Bins for used disposable menstrual products are provided in all toilets from Key Stage 2 and pupils are made aware not to flush them.

Pupils and students have access to toilets during lessons and exams.

For further information:

#periodpositive - <https://periodpositive.wordpress.com/> This website offers a #periodpositive school charter <https://periodpositive.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/sef-period-positive-prepared-for-puberty.pdf>

Plan International: [Break the Barriers: Girls' Experiences of Menstruation in the UK, https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/girls-rights-in-the-uk/break-the-barriers-our-menstrual-manifesto](https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/girls-rights-in-the-uk/break-the-barriers-our-menstrual-manifesto)

<https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/join-our-campaign-for-a-period-emoji>

Menstrual Matters - www.menstrual-matters.com

Menstrupedia - <https://www.menstrupedia.com/>

Betty Bus - <https://bettyforschools.co.uk/betty-bus>

Always - <https://www.always.co.uk/en-gb/puberty-education-programme-always-tampax>
(Schools may want to take care with 'promoting' branded products)

28th May – Menstrual Hygiene Day - <http://menstrualhygieneday.org/>

Adventures in Menstruating - <http://www.chartyourcycle.co.uk/zines>

The Bollywood film breaking the taboo around periods: Pad Man - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42732782>

