

Meeting of:	<b>Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Thursday, 10 February 2022</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Summary of work carried out to deliver the Welsh Governments Period Dignity Grants in Light of COVID-19
Purpose of Report:	To update Members of the Task and Finish Group of work carried out to date on the delivery of the period poverty grants.
Report Owner:	Paula Ham, Director of Learning and Skills
Responsible Officer:	Mark Davies Prevention and Partnership Manager, Lisa Lewis Operational Manager, Strategy and Resources, Gareth Davies, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer and Catherine Lindsey, Assistant Democratic Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Councillor Lis Burnett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Education and Regeneration
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group in 2019 to review the costs for parents of sending their children to school. In light of the impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns, Members were asked to consider whether it would be appropriate to incorporate additional areas of focus for their review.</li> <li>• The group discussed period poverty as an area to be incorporated into the review and it was subsequently agreed that a single report on the progress being made within these grants would better serve the group's purposes.</li> <li>• This report outlines how the Vale of Glamorgan Council has been supporting families (to ensure period dignity for women and girls) from low income households throughout the pandemic.</li> <li>• The report also reflects a wide range of actions and activities that have been implemented by officers to ensure that the grant is fully utilised and focussed on ensuring that period products are made available to women and girls, free of charge and accessible in the most practical and dignified way possible.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendation**

1. That Members consider the contents of the report.

## **Reason for Recommendation**

1. To inform Members of the broad range of activities undertaken to address the conditions of the period poverty grants.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1** In 2018 Welsh Government announced that they would be providing funds to help address the issue of period poverty in both communities and schools across Wales. The grants were particularly focussed on the needs of young woman and women in poverty.
- 1.2** The issue of access to free sanitary products in schools was being highlighted extensively in the press.
- 1.3** Vale of Glamorgan Council Members established a Task and Finish (T&F) group to explore the wider implications of access to sanitary items. A small scale survey was conducted by officers and several school visits were undertaken to explore positive examples of processes some schools had put in place. The condition of some toilets was also reviewed as part of the grant was focussed on capital spend.
- 1.4** The work of the T&F group was not only about the financial cost of the provision, but also to highlight the benefits of this investment in terms of promoting dignity, equality and the health and wellbeing of pupils, especially the impact on the education and welfare of those pupils who were living in low income families affected by poverty across the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 1.5** From the work undertaken it was noted that there were similar procedures in place in most secondary schools with most schools supplying products free of charge, often purchased out of the school budget. Some of the comprehensive schools had been receiving free sanitary supplies which usually lasted the year.
- 1.6** In primary schools, responses were more mixed with some primary schools providing free items from the school budget and others were not.
- 1.7** In response to the work undertaken, it was agreed that in addition to some capital work to refresh a number of toilet blocks in primary schools, any additional funding should be distributed to schools via the Council's education funding formula.
- 1.8** Both grants launched by Welsh Government have continued as annual grants since 2018, with only some minor changes to the original conditions. The main purpose of the grants is to ensure access to period products free of charge and accessible in the most practical and dignified way possible.

- 1.9** The Vale of Glamorgan was awarded £49,675 in funding in relation to Period Dignity in Schools Grant (SG) for 2020-21. Due to the Covid pandemic this was half the original allocated fund expected.
- 1.10** The Vale of Glamorgan was awarded the full allocation of £8,682 for the Period Dignity in Communities Grant (CG) for 2020-21. However, this funding is not specifically targeted at schools. The funding notification letter states, "the funding must be used to provide feminine hygiene products to those women and girls most in need in your authority. You are in the best position to determine the most appropriate mechanisms to reach your vulnerable communities which may include distributing through partnerships with local food banks, community hubs or other local groups".
- 1.11** The criteria for distribution of both grants remains very similar with the only other notable feature within the SG allowing for the additional purchase of spare clothing.
- 1.12** Grant Criteria: Period products are to be made available to women and girls free of charge and accessible in the most practical and dignified way possible.
- 1.13** A minimum of 50% of the total amount spent on period products will be used to purchase eco-friendly period products (i.e. reusable products and/or plastic free products) to allow maximum choice for the users.
- 1.14** The funding can also be used for the purchase of the following items:
- sanitary disposal bags; and
  - storage purses / wet bags for use with reusable products.
  - (Only in SG) they can also purchase spare clothing – limited to underwear, trousers, skirts and tights.
- 1.15** Prior to the national lockdown officers had been working on several plans to raise awareness of the purpose of the grant and to widen the free distribution of eco products. This included running several indoor promotional events in council buildings and schools, allowing suppliers an opportunity to promote their products to a mixture of school staff and students. It had also been agreed that colleagues in Public Health and School Nursing who would give out free eco-friendly and reusable products to pupils as part of an ongoing campaign of workshops being delivered in schools. Unfortunately, the lockdown meant that none of this was possible.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

### **The Impact of COVID-19**

- 2.1** In response to the pandemic, Welsh Government requested that flexibility was required in ensuring that both School and Community Grants could be delivered. This built on an already established expectation on Local Authorities and schools to explore how they could support those pupils who required sanitary items whilst away from school for extended periods such as school holidays.

- 2.2** In addition, Welsh Government's Community Grant funding for supporting access to period products included an expectation of a minimum of a 50% spend on eco-friendly period products (i.e. re-usable products and/or plastic free). In the Vale of Glamorgan, 100% of the Community Grant has been utilised for the purchase of eco-friendly items.
- 2.3** Following the First National lockdown in late March 2020, officers had to rethink their plans on how they could meet the expectation to provide sufficient period products to those who needed them.
- 2.4** Initially a voucher project was established which ensured that 595 girls on the FSM register were sent a £15 voucher to enable them to purchase sanitary items at identified supermarkets. An additional voucher was distributed to over 900 girls in March 2021 at a total cost for both issues of £43,920.
- 2.5** Existing partnerships and third sector organisations (including food banks, community hubs, family centres etc.) were offered funds and products to put in place systems to ensure access to period products free of charge and accessible in the most practical and dignified way possible. These offers have yet to be taken up and further work with these partners continues.
- 2.6** During the summer term, various eco-friendly and recyclable items (reusable sanitary pouches/bags containing items such as reusable pads and pants) were purchased and distributed through projects such as the 15plus team, youth wellbeing service and various housing partners. A small number of Children Looked After (CLA) working with the CLA mentor also received hygiene bags with various sanitary items included.
- 2.7** During the initial period of lockdown, the Vale Youth Service also distributed resources to those young females accessing the Pupil Referral Unit, those Educated Other Than At School, those who were accessing HUB provisions and also those isolating from the above provisions (approximately 20 young people, aged 11-16).
- 2.8** Products were also offered and distributed to a variety of hostels with a particular focus on those with women and young girls living within Llamau housing and other homeless accommodation.
- 2.9** In June 2020 there was a launch of Councils Period Dignity webpage <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/living/schools/Period-Dignity.aspx> This was established to allow visitors to the Council website to be aware of the work that was taking place, to demonstrate how the work was progressing and how to access free products.
- 2.10** During October 2020, all primary and secondary schools were informed/reminded that funds were available to support the purchase and distribution of sanitary products to their pupils. Schools were encouraged to replenish existing stocks via the grant for when pupils returned to school. Additional communication was sent to all schools in January and February 2021.
- 2.11** All schools were also informed that whilst schools remained closed to the majority of pupils, free period products could be delivered to pupils in a safe,

practical and dignified way by contacting [periooddignity@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:periooddignity@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk) requesting free products by providing the pupil name, school, year group and address in order to ensure we could respond as quickly as possible. Mixed bags of mainly eco-friendly products estimated to last approximately 3 months were distributed. Over 80 packs have been delivered to young people and their families. The greatest take up has been from pupils at St Cyres and Llantwit Major Comprehensive schools. Various primary school pupils also benefitted from this distribution.

- 2.12** In addition, 3 primary schools (Llandough, St Illtyds, and Cogan) requested direct deliveries from Council held stock (Eco only) and 2 of these schools wanted additional stock to organise some community deliveries to their most needy families. Oakfield Primary, Llantwit Comprehensive, Ysgol Y Deri, Rhws Primary, All Saints Primary, Jenner Park Primary, Ysgol Y Ddraig and Albert Primary ordered their own stock and we were able to reimburse the costs from the grant.
- 2.13** The Vale Youth Service developed a Wellness Project and as a part of this sanitary packs have been included. The young people were referred by various agencies, including Education, Wellbeing, Youth Service, Youth Offending Service, school nurses and individual schools. Around 100 females aged 11-18 are being supported through a 10-week project along with their families.
- 2.14** In addition to this, the 12 young people (aged between 12-17) who are open cases to the Youth Homelessness Prevention team have also been provided with sanitary products, along with their families. Work is ongoing with the hostels to ensure products are always available.
- 2.15** Approximately 15 young girls (aged 14-17) on the Inspire to Achieve Programme (an education support project) have received products from their key worker.
- 2.16** The Vale Youth Service carried out several outdoor pop up sessions, distributing and consulting on products during the summer holidays.
- Barry pop-up – 12 young people aged 14-17
  - St Athan pop-up – 8 young people aged 11-17
  - Rhoose pop-up – 6 young people aged 11-13
  - Youth Cabinet – 5 young people aged 14-17
- 2.17** The Youth Service working with Llantwit Youth Council provided products to help put 100 x Period Poverty bags together which included a variety of sanitary products, a disposable cleansing pack and a "Period Powerful" compact mirror. Bags have not as yet been distributed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Members have planned to distribute at Llantwit Major pop-up, Town Council offices, the youth centre, and library.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** The work of the review group has direct links to the Council Corporate Plan 2020-25 Well-being Outcome 3 with a particular focus on – ‘All Vale of Glamorgan citizens have opportunities to achieve their full potential’.
- 3.2** The activities set out in this report also contribute to the national wellbeing goals and help ensure we have a resilient Wales. The five ways of working are embedded throughout the period dignity work as we work collaboratively with Welsh Government, schools, public health, school nursing, community groups, children, young people and families to shape our activities and understand the need for change and development. It is recognised that this is a long term project but action is required now to ensure sustainability. There is also a clear focus on the benefits to girls and woman of providing free access to products in the most dignified way possible and promoting the environmental benefits of using eco-friendly, reusable products and increasing the use of plastic free products.
- 3.3** The implementation of the project has focussed on an integrated approach working with various partners for a wide distribution of products and some targeted work focussed on those most at risk of period poverty such as those on free school meals and those in various unsecure housing projects.

### **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1** Grant terms state that we will lose any funds not spent – this is a challenge for many schools in the spending allocation.
- 4.2** There are no wider financial implications in respect of this report.

#### **Employment**

- 4.3** There are no employment implications in respect of this report.

#### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.4** There are no direct legal implications in respect of this report.

### **5. Background Papers**

None.