

Period Dignity Roundtable

Skype meeting

3:00-4:00pm, 21 May 2020

Present:

Organisation
Love Your Period Campaign
Plan International UK
Campaigner
Newport City Council
Cardiff & Vale College
Hygiene Bank Wales
College of Wales
PHS
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
NUS Wales
Welsh Local Government Association
Plan International UK
Wings Wrexham

Welsh Government Officials:

Equality and Human Rights Division

Apologies:

BAWSO
Ethnic Youth Support Team

Agenda item 1 - Welcome and Introductions

The Deputy Minister welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the Period Dignity Roundtable, the first online meeting of the Group. The Deputy Minister highlighted the importance of keeping in touch with stakeholders, particularly at this difficult time, and recognised that their advice and guidance was more important than ever.

The minutes of the last meeting held in February were agreed.

Agenda item 2 - Update on Period Dignity Grants to Schools and Communities 2020-21

The Deputy Minister gave an update on the changes made to the grant conditions for the funding provided to local authorities for 2020-21, to provide period products to schools and communities.

For the 2019-20 grant, one of the main issues raised by local authorities in both the feedback provided to the WLGA and to officials, was that the funding criteria was too strict. Following the first Roundtable meeting last October, officials were asked to consider more flexibility.

As a result, in November, revised guidance was issued to local authorities to confirm the funding could be used to purchase sanitary disposal bags; storage purses & wet bags for use with reusable products; and a limited range of spare clothing for use in schools. This change was received positively and has been retained for the 2020-21 funding programme.

The other change introduced is for both the funding (2020-21) provided to schools and communities, a minimum of 50% of the total amount spent on period products must be used to purchase eco-friendly period products which includes both reusable products and plastic free products. The Deputy Minister recognised that supporting a move away from disposable options towards reusable and plastic free options can have an important environmental impact. There is no set upper limit on the amount which can be spent on eco-friendly products.

The Deputy Minister asked for feedback on the changes made to the grant conditions. During the discussion that followed, the following points were raised:

- A number of local authorities went the extra mile and spent more than 10% of their grant funding on plastic-free products
- The cost of eco-friendly products are too expensive for some people
- Some re-useable and eco-friendly products are not always suitable for everyone, including some disabled people
- Feedback is positive for the changes made to the grant
- Delegates are pleased their views have been listened to, in making the changes

Agenda item 3 - Impact of Covid-19

The Deputy Minister updated the group on the impacts of Covid-19 and the action taken by Welsh Government to mitigate the impacts. She had written to the Roundtable delegates on 8 April about the difficult decision she had to make to halve the Period Dignity Schools Grant 2020-21, in order that funding be reallocated to support essential activity in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. The arrangement will be reassessed at a later to determine whether there is any additional funding available.

Ahead of the schools being closed on 20 March, Welsh Government directed all local authorities in Wales to provide learners with 3 months' supply of period products where needed. While schools remain closed, the distribution for the Period Dignity in Schools Grant 2020-21 will be flexible to ensure that learners can continue to access free period products.

Revised guidance was issued to Local Authorities allowing them to distribute products funded by the Period Dignity in Schools Grant 2020-21 via community mechanisms. Due to leisure centres and libraries closing, this could be via a range of methods including volunteers, community nurses or social care workers visiting homes, foodbanks, and distribution alongside free school meals.

Local Authorities may also, in very limited cases, provide a voucher to individuals where products cannot be distributed to those in need through community mechanisms and on the basis of their knowledge of their communities. Vouchers would be up to £15 in value and cover a 3 month period.

The period dignity funding provided to colleges has also been reduced. Welsh Government encouraged colleges to provide learners with 3 months' supply of products prior to the colleges closing.

The Deputy Minister confirmed that the Period Dignity in Communities Grant 2020-21 will be retained. This will enable local authorities to provide period products to women and girls from low income households.

The Deputy Minister confirmed she had written to the Chief Executive of WLGA to determine how community provisions can be delivered appropriately, to ensure learners could obtain free products and how current structures could be utilised to identify where products are needed.

The Deputy Minister took the opportunity to thank Local Authorities and the WLGA for their support and continuing assistance in this matter, at this difficult time. Officials are holding regular meetings with WLGA colleagues to ensure this demand is coordinated effectively.

The Deputy Minister asked for feedback on the impact of Covid-19 in terms of accessibility of period products. During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- There are some disruptions to deliveries – some products are made in China.
- Communications and messaging need to be strengthened – not always clear that products are still available or how they can be obtained.
- Some community organisations which would normally distribute products are working from home during the lockdown meaning accessibility can be a problem, particularly for some vulnerable people.
- Period dignity remains an issue – it is not just about accessing a product but also the means of accessing it which needs consideration, particularly during lockdown when the usual delivery mechanisms may not be available.

- Examples were given of local authorities, schools and colleges using social media effectively to communicate information about where period products could be accessed, such as community hubs.
- Local authorities are using their local knowledge to establish distribution hubs.
- There are added costs and complications for some people to use reusable options, as some need to be machine washed.

Agenda item 4 - Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan

The Deputy Minister said that at the last meeting in February, the Head of Gender Equality gave a presentation on the development of a Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan. The Plan was being developed as a result of feedback and a workshop held in January with Roundtable members and other stakeholders. The aim was to finalise the Action Plan and share it with Roundtable members in advance of today's meeting. However, the work on the Strategic Action Plan has been paused during the emergency response to Covid-19 but the Deputy Minister clarified that it had not been forgotten and will be progressed and shared with the Roundtable at the earliest opportunity.

The Deputy Minister asked for feedback about possible impacts of Covid-19 on the Action Plan and, if so, in what ways. Welsh Government are working to collate, log and analyse feedback and evidence from stakeholders to ensure we are in a position to ensure that the equality impacts of COVID-19 in Wales are understood, considered and mitigated where necessary.

The Deputy Minister said that she wanted to hear from the Group to help us identify the priorities, barriers, gaps and solutions. She invited everyone to email feedback on these matters to the Equality mailbox: equalitybranch@gov.wales. Delegates should include: **Period Dignity Roundtable** in the subject bar to allow The Equality and Human Rights team to clearly identify and compile all of the comments.

Before ending the meeting, the following **action points** were agreed:

1. Welsh Government officials will arrange a meeting with members of the Roundtable who were interested in developing communications and social media messages to ensure people were aware of how to access products, particularly during the lockdown period.
2. The Strategic Action Plan is to be drafted and updated to reflect any changes as a result of Covid-19 and will be circulated to the Group for comment before the next Roundtable meeting.
3. The Deputy Minister will write to other Welsh Government Ministers to reiterate the importance period dignity and accessibility of products to those who need them most.
4. Officials to write to local authorities to request and provide examples of good practice on promoting and providing access to free period products during lockdown.
5. The Deputy Minister will issue a tweet about the meeting.

Agenda item 5 – Any other business

It was agreed that meetings will continue on a quarterly basis. The next Roundtable meeting should take place in August. Officials will confirm the time and date as soon as possible.