

Report of: Director of Children & Families

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 19th December 2018

Subject: Tackling Period Poverty in Leeds



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Poverty can have a life-long impact for those that experience it. Both within the council and across the city, there is fantastic practice being carried out by individuals, communities and provisions to improve the lives of people who live in poverty. However, due to national changes and local pressures, the percentage of people who are living in poverty continues to rise, and experiencing poverty continues to have a drastic impact on detrimental outcomes across all areas of life.
2. Children who grow up in poverty face a range of disadvantages throughout childhood and their entire life course. One of the impacts of experiencing poverty is social exclusion, which can be defined as the 'inability to participate effectively in economic, social, and cultural life and, in some characteristics, alienation and distance from mainstream society (Duffy, 1995).
3. Exclusion can impact on every area of a child's life, from not being able to do homework to not feeling welcomed in the city centre. It can be exclusion from friendship groups, for not having the right trainers, for not having the right food, for not wanting to have people round your house. It is a subjective experience that is difficult to quantify, but the feeling of being excluded can impact someone for the rest of their life.

4. Period poverty is one area of poverty led social exclusion which has had raised national attention over the last two years. Period poverty refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints.
5. Alongside the problems that individuals who can't afford sanitary protection face, there are also issues of stigma and embarrassment around discussing menstruation. This can lead to a situation where individuals can't afford sanitary protection, and are too embarrassed to discuss the problem- so there is a lack of data and research around this topic. There have been links, however, with period poverty and a lower school attendance.
6. In Leeds, underneath the wider child poverty work, a city wide approach is being developed that aims to eradicate period poverty. This partnership approach will tackle the stigma around poverty and menstruation, and provide free sanitary protection to all schools, community hubs, one stop shops and libraries in Leeds, to ensure that no-one will face the barrier of exclusion due to a lack of sanitary products. This core of this approach is working with young people to develop a scheme, to guarantee that any work will be effective and sensitive.
7. Period poverty is a circumstance that no-one should experience. This collaborative approach will provide a sustainable, needs led solution that tackles the stigma around periods, and ensures that no-one is excluded due to lack of sanitary products. This paper complements the strategic approaches outlined in the two related reports on today's Executive Board agenda on, 'Tackling poverty and inequality' and 'Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy- Delivery'.

Recommendations

8. The Executive Board is recommended to:
 - 8.1 Comment on the proposed approach to tackle period poverty in Leeds
 - 8.2 Endorse the approach proposed in the report to working with partners to address period poverty in the city
 - 8.3 Support the intention to lobby the government to remove VAT on sanitary products
 - 8.4 That it be noted that the responsible officer for the implementation of such matters is the Chief Officer Partnerships and Health

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the partnership approach that Leeds is developing to both tackle the stigma around periods and provide free sanitary products for those who have difficulty accessing them.
- 1.2 The approach encompasses Leeds City Council's ambition to create a strong economy within a compassionate city. It will deliver better outcomes in Leeds through working in partnership, incorporating all of our city wide priorities.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Both in Leeds and across the UK, child poverty is increasing- a trend that has been evident since 2010. We believe that every child and young person deserves equitable opportunities, a happy childhood and an optimistic future. Thriving, Leeds' child poverty approach, is being developed by all partners in the city. It aims to mitigate the impact of child poverty through working together to break down barriers, so that every child has equal opportunities to shape their future.
- 2.2 The work is being carried out in collaboration with Communities & Environments work on Locality Neighbourhoods, to ensure that there is one, joined up approach across the city. It interacts with multiple areas of existing work that demonstrate fantastic practice from individuals and organisations across the city.
- 2.3 Under the Readiness for Learning and School Aged Education Impact Workstream, a partnership has been created that aims to investigate, and then minimise, the potential negative effects of poverty on educational attendance. A large area of this work is an approach to tackle period poverty in Leeds.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 There isn't any agreed data around the extent of period poverty either in Leeds or the UK, and the data is often contested. Research from other sources quote:
 - The average cost of a period is around £128 a year, or £10 a month (Bloody Good Poverty)
 - Nearly one in five women in Scotland had experienced period poverty (Women for Independence)
 - One in seven girls (15 per cent) have also struggled to afford sanitary wear (Plan International)
 - One in seven girls (14 per cent) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues (Plan International)

- More than one in ten girls (12%) has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues (Plan International)
- One in five (19%) of girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost (Plan International)

3.2 To tackle period poverty, we need to work with a wide variety of partners to understand the practicalities and stigma around periods and poverty. Leeds City Council is conducting a pilot study with Carr Manor Community School to work with the school, and pupils within the school, to design a scheme that tackles the stigma around periods, and then to work with women and pupils to understand what the best approach to mitigate period poverty is. There will also be pilots in two other areas of the city.

3.3 Leeds City Council is also entering into partnership with the University of Leeds to work with children, young people, schools and settings in conducting research to investigate the impact of poverty on attendance. This research aims to provide a comprehensive, transparent and Leeds-specific understanding of children's experiences and priorities to deliver Leeds-specific solutions.

3.4 The pilot scheme and the findings from the research will be used to generate ideas to tackling period poverty in Leeds that are informed by young peoples' perspectives on sustainable, long term solutions that both reduce the stigma around period poverty and to ensure that those who are in need can access free sanitary protection.

3.5 The aims of this project are:

- To understand the impact of poverty on attendance from the perspective of children and young people, and then work with young people to mitigate the impact of poverty on attendance
- To improve attendance across the city through mitigating the impact of poverty
- To create a city-wide conversation around period poverty, and raise awareness of both periods and poverty
- To provide free sanitary products to those who may need them at key points across Leeds (including schools, one stop shops, community hubs and libraries)
- To minimise the stigma around poverty and periods, so that people feel comfortable discussing their needs and experiences.
- To train key workers in the impact and effect of poverty, so that we show compassion without judgement or pity.

3.6 The impact of this project will be evaluated every six months, with both 'soft' impacts (the perspectives and perceptions of those who experience period poverty) and 'hard' impacts (attendance data, take-up of products) assessed.

- 3.7 The scheme to tackle period poverty will also include lobbying the government to declassify sanitary products as 'luxury items', and to remove the 5% VAT on these products.
- 3.8 The work is being carried out in collaboration with a number of stakeholders across the city to ensure there is one joined up approach. This includes cross-Council work, community hubs, libraries, one stop shops, the University of Leeds, Community Committees, third sector and private sector organisations.
- 3.9 There is a strong and ongoing collaborative approach with Communities & Environments to develop this approach, and models of distribution are being trialled in community hubs across the city. These conversations are being tied in with discussions with schools, to ensure that the most effective, sustainable and responsive approach is implemented.
- 3.10 Freedom4Girls have been developing this work for the last year, and are providing sanitary products in community hubs across Leeds. Leeds City Council has been in discussion with Freedom4Girls and other third sector groups around expanding this work across the city.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is being established through work with the University of Leeds, Leeds City Council and Child Poverty Action Group. In addition to this, an Outcomes Based Accountability Event was held in October 2018 which gained the views and opinions of a wide range of partners.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 Equality Improvement Priorities have been developed to ensure our legal duties are met under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to achieve its ambition to be the best city in the UK and ensure that as a city work takes place to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity. The council's equality improvement priorities have taken into account the protected characteristics as required under the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.2.2 These priorities also recognise poverty as a barrier that limits what people can do and can be. We have, therefore, included priorities that address poverty as we recognise that a number of the protected characteristics are disproportionately represented in those living in poverty. Equality considerations are, therefore, an integral part of the approach to addressing period poverty in Leeds and further equality considerations will be given to all aspects of work as they are developed

further. In addition an equality screening has been undertaken to support the development of the proposed strategic approach to addressing period poverty.

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

4.3.1 This report provides information on poverty, which is a key city regional and national challenge. This priority is reflected in all city strategies contributing to the strong economy compassionate city including the Best Council Plan 2018/19-2020/21 and the Joint Health and Well Being Plan. Equality Improvement Priorities 2016 – 2020 have been developed to ensure that the council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

4.3.2 The work fulfils some of the best council objectives and priorities as defined in the Best Council Plan 2018/19-2020/21. These include improving educational achievement gaps and improving school attendance.

4.3.3 The child poverty approach collaborates with local and city wide strategies such as the Locality Neighbourhoods work, the Children and Young People's Plan, Child Friendly Leeds, Future in Mind Strategy, and the Best City for Learning

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Any approach that is implemented will need to be sustainable. To ensure work is both needs led and sustainable, partnerships with private sector, third sector, and public sector providers are being established which will ensure that any approach is well resourced.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 None

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 None

5 Conclusions

5.1 We want to ensure that poverty presents no barriers for our children and young people, and we want all people to have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances. We believe that all children and young people should have the freedom to choose their pathway, and that Leeds can work together to tackle any limitations that poverty places on these pathways.

5.2 For this reason, we need to work as a city, to share our understandings, knowledge and practice, to learn about the day to day impact of poverty for children and young people- and then to work with children and young people to tackle this impact. The work on period poverty encompasses this, as it will be a

young people led approach that will both tackle the stigma around periods and period poverty, and create a scheme that provides free sanitary products to those who are in need in Leeds, distributed throughout a variety of locations and provisions.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Executive Board is recommended to:
- 6.2 Comment on the proposed approach to tackle period poverty in Leeds
- 6.3 Endorse the approach proposed in the report to working with partners to address period poverty in the city
- 6.4 Support the intention to lobby the government to remove VAT on sanitary products
- 6.5 That it be noted that the responsible officer for the implementation of such matters is the Chief Officer Partnerships and Health

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.