

Period Dignity Roundtable
10.45 – 11.45, Wednesday 22 September 2021
Teams meeting (virtual)

Attendees

Minister for Social Justice
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Colleges Wales
PHS
Love your Period campaign
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Plan International UK
WINGS Wrexham
Cardiff and Vale College (CAVC)
Gwynedd Council

Welsh Government:

Welsh Government Equality Officials

Apologies

Bawso
Keep Wales Tidy
Llamau
Environmental campaigner
Colleges Wales
Trussell Trust
The Hygiene Bank Wales
Newport City Council
Universities Wales

1. Welcome

The Minister for Social Justice (MSJ) welcomed the attendees to the fifth Period Dignity Roundtable meeting. The MSJ highlighted that the advice and guidance of the group was more important than ever and thanked members for their commitment to period dignity.

2. Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan

The MSJ explained that her original intention had been to publish the Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan in the early part of this year. However, Welsh Government's response to the pandemic had resulted in resources being stretched and difficult decisions having to be taken. The MSJ had written to Roundtable members in March

to inform them that publication of the Plan would not take place until the early part of the new Senedd term.

The MSJ explained that, over the summer, the plan had been revised and refreshed to take account of stakeholder feedback and she asked members for feedback on the draft plan which had been shared with the group in advance of the meeting.

Members of the group highlighted the following:

- The Plan is comprehensive and ambitious and it is positive that health issues are addressed.
- The proposed communication strategy needs to have a much greater focus at school level and empower schoolchildren.
- Inclusive language is welcomed – having the Welsh Government use it will encourage schools to use appropriate language.
- The inclusion of workplaces in the plan is welcome – needs to link with their wellbeing approaches.
- The education section has an emphasis on resources but it is critical to share good practice as practice varies widely across Wales.
- The use of ‘taught’ could be replaced with ‘engaged’ in the plan as this is not something which should be taught – it should be engagement through conversation.
- School nurses could be utilised in this work.
- Engagement with women’s conversation groups would be useful to provide powerful lived experiences.
- The language in the plan needs to be balanced when addressing climate change and environmental impacts so as not to induce feelings of guilt, particularly amongst young people.
- Funding for FE institutions needs to be included.
- The design of toilet facilities could impact use of reusable products in future. Provision of appropriate facilities is as important as the provision of products.
- Gender-neutral toilets are a concern for young people who are menstruating – open plan sinks offer no privacy if cleaning a menstrual cup. Could lead to health impacts if products are not changed or cleaned regularly.
- Period poverty remains a real and very important issue – accessing products rather than the type of product.
- May need to focus this plan on young people and getting things right in educational settings with other linked plans to address some of the other issues.
- New curriculum and Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools will have a role in this work.
- Must ensure appropriate support for teachers. Alongside resources, they must be equipped with the skills, confidence and knowledge to address the issue without embarrassment.
- Concern amongst pupils that a new curriculum will not change how teachers feel when talking about this. They have said that specialist work/providers (such as Brook etc) can make a much more positive impact upon this within the learning environment

- Important to involve parents in the conversations at an early stage as some parents are still uncomfortable broaching the subject with their children.
- Must be a strategy for all, including parents and teachers.
- Young people need to have their voices heard and feed their lived experiences into the Plan.
- Positive that there will be a Young People's version of the Plan.
- Language is a very important issue amongst young people.
- Essential to find out how the funding is used in schools and what the most effective ways are as it is not working as it should in some areas.
- A positive step that the link between sexual harassment in schools and RSE/Menstrual wellbeing is being made.
- PHS carried out research prior to pandemic to find out how period dignity impacted on girls in schools. Follow up research is planned to assess what has changed due to the impact of the pandemic. Results of the research will be shared with the group.

3. Consultation and communication planning

The intention is to launch a formal consultation on the plan in October that will run for 3 months. Alongside the main consultation document, there will be an Easy Read version, a young person's version and a BSL version. The MSJ confirmed that she would also issue a written statement to launch the consultation.

The MSJ reinforced the need to reach out to young people, in particular, during the consultation to ensure their voices are heard. She suggested that youth services and school councils may be able to assist in this process. She also highlighted that virtual meetings offered opportunities to achieve this.

The MSJ invited the group to share their ideas and suggestions as to how Welsh Government could ensure the consultation reaches as many stakeholders as possible. She reinforced the importance of intersectionality and reaching out to those with protected characteristics.

The group identified the following:

- Youth services could also play an important role alongside schools and FE colleges.
- Third Sector agencies are important to engage with as they are often supporting young people who have left schools - many in poverty.
- Need to think about how to reach young people studying apprenticeships or in work based learning.
- Link with those with a large social media presence and influencers, including members of the group.

The MSJ invited the group to provide any additional feedback on the Plan or suggestions for communication and consultation to her officials.

4. Welsh Government update

Combining the Period Dignity funding for Schools and Communities into a single grant

The MSJ informed the group that, for the current financial year, the funding to local authorities to provide period dignity in schools and communities had been combined into a single allocation. The purpose of the funding is unchanged. The provision of free and accessible period products remains central to the funding as is the requirement for 50% of the period products purchased to be eco-friendly (reusable and/or plastic free). The aim of this change is to provide local authorities with more flexibility and allow them to target the funding to where it is most needed in the quickest and easiest way possible.

Flexing of the Period Dignity in Schools and Communities Grant

The MSJ also informed the group that the conditions of the grant had previously been flexed to allow the purchase of a small number of items including sanitary disposal bags; storage purses / wet bags for use with reusable products; spare clothing – limited to underwear, trousers, skirts, tights (in schools); and period product dispensers in schools.

During the pandemic the conditions associated with the grant were amended to allow for additional distribution mechanisms via community settings, voucher schemes and to include any costs associated with the distribution of products to learners.

The MSJ explained that there have also been requests to allow the grant to be used for the purposes of training and education, improve the uptake of reusable products and to offer enhanced support to homeless people. She confirmed that she had decided to allow a small percentage of the 2021-22 grant to be used for training and education and to extend provision to homeless people for the provision of clothing. Officials will issue letters to local authorities by the end of the week to confirm the details.

The MSJ said that the aim of these changes was to maximise the impact of the grant on those most in need and fits well with the aims in the Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan. Through the training and education, discussions can be opened up and she hoped that by offering young people and community members the chance to learn more about reusable products, the uptake will increase further.

5. Any other business

Membership of the group

The MSJ thanked the group for their advice, support and co-operation in helping the Welsh Government to develop the Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan. She

explained that, as the Plan moves into the next stages, the role of this group is likely to change with monitoring and implementation of the Plan likely to become the group's main activity.

The MSJ highlighted the need to widen representation of the group from across Wales, particularly North, West and Mid Wales and to include more young people.

She asked the group for their initial thoughts on what changes are needed, how this might happen and any suggestions for potential new members.

The Girls' Rights Network (Plan International) has approximately 70 members with wide representation so was suggested as a potential member of the group.

It was impossible to accommodate 22 local authorities on the group but it was recognised that the local authorities needed greater representation as only a few attend the meetings. It was suggested that the WLGA could have a pivotal role in bringing together local authorities from across Wales independently of the Roundtable to allow them to share good practice, discuss common problems/issues, identify solutions etc. It would also help assist consistency in terms of message and process across local authorities. A representative of this group, along with the WLGA, could then provide the local authority feedback to the Roundtable.

The MSJ had to leave the meeting due to other commitments. She thanked everyone for attending, encouraged the group to continue their productive discussion and handed the chair to an Equalities official.

Funding

Supply and distribution of products was mentioned as an issue for some local authorities.

It was highlighted that some colleges may struggle to spend their current grant this year due to the terms of the grant being changed. A lack of storage for products was also identified as an issue.

The forum was updated that the Welsh Government is looking to undertake an evaluation of the grant funding to ensure that it is meeting its aims.

Next meeting

Officials will send details of the next meeting in due course.

ACTIONS

- The MSJ will share the draft Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan with the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education and the Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing.
- WLGA to explore the setting up of a separate forum to bring together the period dignity leads from all local authorities.