

## Period Dignity Roundtable meeting

Date: 28 September 2023

Time: 11:30-13:00

### Attendees:

Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip
Deputy Minister for Social Partnership
Wings Wrexham
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Women Connect First (WCF)
NHS Wales
Padmad Kenya
Fair Treatment of the Women in Wales (FTWW)
Sport Wales
Coleg y Cymoedd
Universities Wales
Keep Wales Tidy

### Welsh Government

Equality and Human Rights
International Relations
Cabinet Office
Special Advisor
Social Partnership

### Guest Speakers

Football Association of Wales
Conwy County Borough Council
British Standards Institute

### Item 1: Welcome and Introduction – Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip (11:30-11:40)

The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for joining. The Minister mentioned that there is a very busy schedule which included speakers from Football Association of Wales (FAW) and The British Standards Institute (BSI). The Minister also welcomed the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership who will be taking forward work on period dignity.

The Minister mentioned the progress that is being made toward the actions in the Period Proud Wales plan (PPW) and explained that we are awaiting the results of the evaluation that's being undertaken by MEL Research for the Period Dignity grant.

The Minister recently visited the Abertillery food bank in Blaenau Gwent and saw first-hand how different parts of the community are working together to make sure products are reaching the right people. This has been especially important during this cost-of-living crisis and the Minister invited attendees to consider other ways for how we can maximise the impact of this funding during this time.

Since the last meeting, a webpage for the work of the Period Dignity Roundtable has been published on the Welsh Government website. All previous and future minutes from the roundtable meetings will be published there.

Members agreed the minutes from the last meeting.

There was one action from the last meeting. This was for the Senior Gender Policy Manager to contact The Welsh Government's tackling poverty team to discuss and work out a forward plan to look at the increase in uptake in community settings. Work on this has started by connecting Period Dignity Leads with their local food partnership co-ordinator to make sure that products are available in foodbanks across Wales.

There have been no comments on the updated terms of reference since the last meeting so these have now been finalised. They will be reviewed again next year.

## **Item 2: Football Association of Wales (FAW) – Head of Women's and Girls' Football (11:40-12:00)**

The Minister introduced the Head of Women's and Girls' Football from the Football Association of Wales to talk about how they are working to achieve period dignity for their players. The Minister met with Cardiff women's football players in May to see how they were supporting women to train around their menstrual cycle.

She met the players at their Ocean Park Arena training facilities, which was created with the intention of being a sports hub to develop women's and youth football in the centre of Cardiff.

The Minister remarked that it was encouraging to see periods being spoken about openly within a sport environment and that she hopes this will help to inspire more women and girls to participate in sport.

FAW explained that they are looking at how periods link to participation and performance in female football. They are trying to normalise the conversation around periods. The FAW's approach is to look at equity over equality. This means that all players are not just treated the same – but that different measures are implemented depending on the needs of different players. As an example of this, women and girls teams need support around period dignity.

### Participation/Facilities

33% of teenage girls don't want to play sport on their period. The FAW are empowering women and girls through their 'Environments for Her' initiative. Their

argument is access V belonging – if women and girls basic needs aren't being met with male led facilities then the risk is that they won't feel that they belong there.

Club licensing must be met to play in Wales' top leagues. They are using the phrase 'You don't know what you don't know' to enable change to accommodate women's needs in footballing facilities. To receive a club licence the facilities must include a certain number of private showers, sanitary bins, and individual cubicles.

Facility grants are set up to tackle the lack of facilities for the girls game. 400 teams have been created for women in the last 3 years but they don't have the correct facilities to accommodate all these teams in the existing infrastructure that is targeted for men. FAW give advice on how these facilities could be improved by ensuring the girls have access to products in the changing rooms, the toilet and physio bag.

### Normalising the topic

FAW are using the word 'period' rather than euphemisms.

They believe that it's important that men and young boys are involved in the education of periods because most coaches in the female game are males.

Their social media channels are sharing more content talking and discussing periods and are using more positive, empowering language when talking about periods.

### Playing and Performing

FAW found that some girls were skipping a period and not telling a coach that they were -need to shift their thinking to use the cycle as a measure of health.

They are providing education to players and coaches on how cycles impact performance.

Players use a daily wellness tracker – this includes cycle tracking so the medical team can support players in the right way- tailoring programme around needs of that individual.

Medical team provide advice on nutrition depending on where players are in their cycle.

There will be education for players on the different types of products they can use – such as period pants They are also trying to educate girls that moving and exercising when having cramps can be a positive.

Members raised the following points in response:

- PadMad Kenya have developed reusable pads which are made from natural materials. This means that you sweat less when you wear them and they cause less cramps than other, synthetic products.
- The pads are used by athletic groups in Kenya and the male coaches receive education on the products so they can get to know them and individuals feel more confident discussing them. Padmad Kenya offered to share learning on this.
- It's important to make periods a normal everyday topic so no one feels embarrassed. However, there is a need to be careful with normalising painful period symptoms which can lead to slow diagnosis for conditions such as

endometriosis adenomyosis / fibroids / PCOS / PMDD etc.. Women and girls with severe period pain could be signposted to <https://endometriosis.cymru/>.

- Grassroots football coaches often don't have a lot of time to offer period education to players during training sessions – there was a suggestion that a separate session would be useful to provide information on period products that are available and some specific training for coaches too. Grassroots club facilities need a particular focus to meet girls' needs.
- Sport Wales are developing [online education for coaches](#), menstrual cycle 101 has been released and openness of conversations is due out in 2 weeks with further 2 modules being developed.

The Minister invited the Head of Women's and Girls' Football to comment:

- They are using high profile players to raise awareness about the symptoms of endometriosis. For elite athletes their wellness tracker is helping to identify any concerning symptoms and that informs the support given to players.
- For grassroots facilities – difficult to control what the facilities are like at an away game so important to pack toilet roll and cleaning wipes just to cover all bases when travelling away to different football clubs. Coaches don't necessarily have to provide period education during coaching sessions – but reminding players where they can access products and where the toilets are etc is a start.
- FAW have found that it can be easier to have a female lead the period conversation but as the majority of coaches are male they need to be educated too.
- All coaches must re-validate their training every few years. The training includes a session on 'Environments for Her' which includes information about the menstrual cycle and periods.
- Grassroots facilities are the biggest focus for them now.

The Minister recommended FTWW to contact The Head of Women's and Girls' Football to discuss the Severe Period Pain is not Normal (SPINN) project and thanked for her input.

### **Item 3: The British Standards Institute - Director of Sectors (12:00-12:20)**

The Minister introduced the Director of Sectors from the British Standards Institute, to tell us about their new menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace' standard.

In 2018, Welsh Government introduced our own menopause guidance and with the provision of supportive HR policies such as the Wellbeing Hour, Smart Working, Occupational Health referrals, workplace adjustments and more recently the increasing availability of peer support (e.g. the Menopause Coffee Club) and the wider work that the Women Together Menopause Steering Group have been doing to raise awareness of menopause issues across the Welsh Government, including a new intranet hub linking to internal and external sources of support. BSI said that Wales is an inclusive and welcoming country that includes everyone.

The Director of Sectors thanked the Minister for inviting BSI to the roundtable and recognised Wales as an inclusive and welcoming country who are leading the way on these topics. It was explained that BSI is a world-leading national standards body that helps their clients operate in a way that is safer, more secure and more sustainable by giving them the tools to be successful.

Over 50% of the world's population are impacted by periods and yet it is a subject that isn't openly discussed. Research suggests that women are using their annual leave when having an issue with their period and that comments made in jest by other colleagues can cause anxiety and stress. Greater numbers of women want to remain in the workforce for longer and estimates suggest that by 2025, there could be more than 1 billion people experiencing menopause globally - 12% of the world population. Similarly, it is estimated that endometriosis affects 10% of women who menstruate, leading to excessive cramping, pain or heavy menstrual flow.

Businesses need to pay attention and support their employees if they want to retain talented people whatever stage of life they are in – which is what the standard aims to support them to do.

Simple things like having sanitary bins can make a difference as well as having some toilets with a hand basin in the cubicle to deal with flooding or hot flushes etc.

It's important to include women in the decisions around how they can be supported with their periods.

The Director of Sectors referred the roundtable to some webpages that they have that are free to use such as the ['Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling'](#) webpage. Their research looks at why women are leaving the workforce early due to factors outside of their control. More women will leave work because of the challenges they face and that fall predominantly to women to address- such as caring responsibility through to health. And the biggest health problem is menstruation and menopause.

The standard includes using an inclusive approach – practical actions - evaluation and metrics. BSI focuses on practical actions and encourages managers to make people to feel comfortable about raising issues.

Practical actions include:

- Breaking down period-stigma by opening up conversations around periods.
- Support period comfort i.e temperature control, uniforms, infrastructure.
- Foster a period positive workplace.
- Train or provide resources to line managers so they can provide support and understand how to redesign work appropriately.
- Assess what policies and adjustments can be made in the workplace.

BSI suggested to roundtable members that they should track policies to see if they are out of date and update the ones that need modernising. Anne asked roundtable members to support them to roll out the standard.

The Director of Sectors invited the Minister to consider if Welsh Government could highlight the tool to organisations – could it be mandated to businesses we work with? And to also share any good practice that could be used as a case study if Welsh Government does re-evaluate their policies in line with the standard.

The Minister thanked BSI for the presentation and for her recognition of what has been achieved in Wales.

#### **Item 4: Progress report on the Period Proud Wales Plan – Discussion (12:20-12:40)**

The Minister invited discussion on the progress report of the Period Proud Wales Plan and introduced The Senior Gender Policy manager, to briefly highlight some of the key points. The following points were raised:

- This is the first update for the roundtable members since the plan was published in February.
- The Period Dignity team have been working to determine relevant groups of officials from across Welsh Government.
- Progress has been made on each of the 10 areas.
- The Period Dignity team have met with the tackling poverty team to discuss how to work collaboratively with other organisations and charities who offer support for wider hygiene products in communities and how to link these to the Period Dignity Grant. Regular meetings about their policies and grants.
- The Senior Gender Policy Manager attended the Welsh Local Government Association Equality Leads meeting and gave an update on the Period Proud Wales plan and Period Dignity Grant. She has linked Period Dignity leads and Equality Leads from the same local authorities together.
- Priorities moving forward are to share the new BSI standard more widely and to work with Business Wales to support Welsh employers.
- Work to increase the number of eco-friendly products purchased through the Period Dignity Grant has been going well. The current target for spend is 70% and aiming for this to increase to 90%-100%. The current average is of 84% eco-friendly products across all local authorities.
- The evaluation has found that some people find eco-friendly products not as absorbent as non eco-friendly products and there may need some education around this.

#### **Action: To add the evaluation of the grant as an agenda item for the next roundtable.**

- The Period Dignity team is communicating with the LGBTQ+ team and meeting with Sport Wales. They are looking to set up a workshop for all national sporting bodies on how they can promote period dignity.
- An annual progress reports on the Period Proud Wales plan will be published every February.

They invited any questions or issues. The following points were raised:

- To ensure that the specification for the menstrual well-being resources is co-produced and that it puts forward the benefits of the co production of resources. Staff training as well as resources needs to be considered.

-Getting The Period Proud Wales message heard across each policy area in Welsh Government is important. There have been consultations recently, such as the one on school attendance which does not mention period related absences. Long term menstrual issues do constitute an absence.

Minister added that the progress report should be shared with all Ministers.

**Action: The minister invited FTWW to meet with the Gender Policy Manager and discuss the issues raised.**

**Item 5: Update from Local Authority Period Dignity Leads – The Period Dignity Lead from Conwy and the Period Dignity Manager Welsh Government (12:40-12:50)**

The Period Dignity Leads from every local authority met on the 19 September to discuss issues and share best practice about how they are administering the Period Dignity Grant.

These meetings always take place a week or so before the roundtable meetings so that the leads can feedback to roundtable members on what was discussed.

The nominated period dignity lead providing feedback for today's meeting was The Period Dignity Lead from Conwy County Borough Council and gave an overview of how the grant is working in Conwy. A second Period Dignity Lead was unavailable to attend today and so the Period Dignity Manager instead provided the update for what was discussed at the Leads meeting.

The Period Dignity Lead for Conwy thanked the Welsh Government for raising awareness of Period Dignity.

In Conwy they work across different department in the local authority to decide on how the grant is spent. There has always been a will to promote reusable products.

At the beginning of the grant a review of stock was undertaken at schools. There was an issue that products had been left in schools from 2008/2009 for years without being used. The issue was that people were not comfortable discussing periods and the products were not openly available.

Training has been given to teachers and wellbeing leads to support open conversations about menstruation and periods with students.

They then looked into the most appropriate products for schools and arranged for a supplier to contact schools directly and to deliver products as and when needed to avoid stockpiling.

They had a contract with Femme Tasse and offered all year 5 and 6 pupils with a reusable pack which included pads, pants and a wetbag and have done something similar with secondary schools.

In the community they provide free products in libraries and youth groups and family centres and have adapted what they are supplying having consulted with the youth council.

Products are available in all schools and they are supplying them in toilets and are avoiding gatekeeping products.

The aim is to bring discussions around periods into normal conversation.

The minister thanked the Period Dignity Lead for Conwy and asked if there was anything the Period Dignity Manager wanted to add.

Welsh Government officials attended the leads meeting and the following was discussed.

- 20% of the grant can be spent on education and training – local authorities shared how they have been using this aspect of the grant.
- Some local authorities are working with the charity Brook who are speaking to students, teachers and parents.
- Another local authority requires any community organisation who want to be a distribution point to sign up to a workshop – they are then able to provide information and advice to users on how to use products.
- Local Authorities' have been updating their websites to make it clearer as to how products can be accessed. We'll be following this up in the mid-year monitoring meeting to see how this is progressing.
- Some local authorities shared learning on the subscription service they are running and sharing evaluation information.
- Denbighshire are working with SportWales on a 'Pants for PE' project.
- Pembrokeshire will be piloting a menopause-friendly option for their subscription service, which includes a spotlight on different menopause issues each month e.g. one month, focus on diet. They are trying to think beyond products and look at a more holistic way of managing periods. Pilot starts October.
- Interest in reusable products has increased – especially the period pants.
- Demand in community is increasing and products are being made available to wide variety of setting – leisure centres, youth clubs, food banks etc.

The Minister thanked the Period Dignity Manager for their input and outlined the cross working that local authorities are undertaking. Positively, what the Minister heard from schools and children from Blaenau Gwent when she visited had outlined the positive action that has come from work on the grant.

#### **Item 6: Any other Business (12:50-End)**

Minister re iterated that she is happy that the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership is taking on work for period dignity.

The Minister asked if there was any other business that needed attending to.

PadMad Kenya shared the idea of using a qr code for information on washing reusables such as period pants.

A university made a machine had been commissioned for the storage of products to avoid gatekeeping them. Educational content has also been developed to help women understand menstruation.



The Minister thanked Padmad Kenya for the information that is always helpful to hear internationally from Kenya.

The Minister thanked all for joining and sharing learning and closed the meeting.