



# Tackling Period Poverty and Raising Period Awareness



Photograph provided by Cysters

**A report from Overview & Scrutiny**







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# Preface

By Councillor Rob Pocock



When the City Council meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018 approved a resolution asking Scrutiny to investigate the issue of period poverty in Birmingham, there were still many, myself amongst them, who were largely unaware of the scale and significance of this issue.

In the year that has passed since then, this issue has undoubtedly moved from the margin to the mainstream. It is a shocking fact that despite being one of the richest economies in the world, this report has exposed the scandal that an estimated 32,000 women and young girls in our City are finding it hard to afford to buy period products.

I would like to thank Councillors Kerry Jenkins and Nicky Brennan for bringing forward that resolution. They have made sure we have now all woken up to the issue in this City and at last steps are being taken to tackle it.

We now have the Red Box project, supported by business suppliers of period products, operating actively across significant parts of Birmingham. Unions have added support. Sports clubs are now picking up the issue and making free period products available. Government has weighed in with a welcome level of support through the Period Poverty Taskforce to start addressing period poverty in schools and beyond.

However, a lot remains to be done. While schemes to support women rough sleepers are coming in, we are recommending that these are extended to the much larger pool of women who are at risk of homelessness. Women workers in low pay industries need support in the workplace. This council can do more to ensure the contractors it commissions make explicit provision to support women experiencing period poverty, and we need to ensure our own workforce and that of our partners, get this help too.

Our inquiry has been impressed by the work of local community support agencies such as Our Cysters who gave us an eye-opening package of evidence about period poverty within the minority ethnic communities in the City.

Their evidence also extended our concerns to the existence of a further problem in the stigma that can be attached to the menstrual cycle itself. This can be a no-go subject for some cultures within our City. We were therefore impressed by the bold pledge put to us by Girlguiding Birmingham, the period pledge – “I pledge to tackle period stigma by talking about periods, so that no one feels embarrassed talking about them”. Our committee had no hesitation in stating our own commitment to abide by this pledge, and we would urge members across the City to openly adopt it too.

Responding to this wider concern to promote greater levels of openness about the natural place of menstruation as part of everyday life within all societies, we have expanded the title of our report from ‘period poverty’ towards the wider goal of “tackling period poverty and period awareness”.

Finally, I would like to thank all contributors to this inquiry, and I hope this report and its recommendations will go some way towards improving the quality of life for women and girls of all communities throughout this City.



## Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
<b>R01</b>	That a plan be developed, aimed at supporting schools and teachers in educating and informing students about period poverty and period awareness. This plan should, in particular, deal with stigma and provide information about the range of products, including reusable products available and their use and disposal.	Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture	September 2020
<b>R02</b>	That the City Council should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) declare its support for the pledge promoted by Girlguiding Birmingham to prevent stigma around periods; and</li> <li>(2) initiate a programme to tackle stigma around periods in the workplace centred on the City Council workforce and that ways of developing a wider programme for partner organisations and Small and Medium Enterprises, with special reference to sectors employing significant numbers of female employees in low pay sectors, be pursued.</li> </ol>	Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care	September 2020
<b>R03</b>	That the feasibility of commissioning a research programme aimed at establishing the nature and extent of period poverty in Birmingham be explored. A further focus of this review should be on the impact of cultural attitudes and ways of widening 'period awareness' within a super-diverse city.	Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care	September 2020
<b>R04</b>	That ways of establishing a more collaborative approach to providing co-ordination and support to third sector organisations working to alleviate period poverty across the city be developed, with particular reference to accessing marginalised communities. This should include examining whether: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) a programme to provide free period products to the full spectrum of homeless people and those in temporary or supported accommodation can be developed through the relevant support agencies; and</li> </ol>	Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety & Equalities  Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods	September 2020



	(2) a central location in Birmingham for the storage of donated products by third sector organisations can be provided.		
<b>R05</b>	That where a service is commissioned by the City Council the possibility of including a clause about alleviating period poverty and raising period awareness be considered for inclusion in future contracts wherever appropriate.	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources	September 2020
<b>R06</b>	That an assessment of progress against the recommendations in this report be presented to the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.	Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care	November 2020



# 1 Background

## 1.1 Definition

1.1.1 Period poverty is a complex issue with a variety of causes including uninformed attitudes and stigma around menstruation. The evidence presented to the committee by Birmingham Public Health highlighted that:

*Period poverty is a harsh reflection of poverty and inequality.*

1.1.2 'Period poverty', or menstrual hygiene management (MHM), refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints. The World Health Organisation has defined MHM as:

- Women and adolescent girls being able to use clean materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood and change them in privacy as often as necessary throughout their menstrual period.
- Being able to use soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.
- Women and girls having access to basic information about the menstrual cycle, and how to manage it with dignity without discomfort or fear.

## 1.2 Impact and prevalence

1.2.1 One impact of period poverty is around the increased risk of infections. Not using sanitary products can lead to an increased risk of infections like bacterial vaginosis. There is very limited research available but there is some evidence to suggest that there is a degree of stigma attached and that this could have an impact on access to and participation in education and social activities. The most representative research carried out by Plan International in 2017 suggested that about 1 in 10 girls and women have at some point been unable to afford sanitary wear. There was also a survey undertaken by YouGov for the Greater London Assemblies in 2018 which suggested that 17% of 16-24 year old women struggled to afford sanitary products at some point in their lives.

1.2.2 Members were told by Birmingham Public Health about some more recent evidence from the Department for Education in their 5<sup>th</sup> Wave Omnibus Survey of pupils and their parents which suggests that 6% of secondary school children have been unable to access sanitary hygiene products within the last 12 months. However, it was noted that the sample was incentivised towards those with free school meals, so the survey is not necessarily representative of the wider population.





## 1.3 Affordability

1.3.1 The only current UK-wide quantitative estimate of the extent of period poverty in the UK comes from the girls' rights charity Plan International UK:<sup>1</sup>

- One in ten girls (10%) have been unable to afford sanitary wear.
- One in seven girls (15%) have struggled to afford sanitary wear.
- One in seven girls (14%) have asked to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues.
- More than one in ten girls (12%) have had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues.
- One in five (19%) girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost.

## 1.4 Stigma

1.4.1 It is clear that in addition to affordability, girls and women can also be subject to an experience of stigma and shame which can lead them to feel embarrassed by their periods. Statistics from Plan International UK's research on Period Poverty and Stigma indicates that:

- Nearly half (48%) of girls aged 14-21 in the UK are embarrassed by their periods.
- One in seven (14%) girls admitted that they did not know what was happening when they started their period with more than a quarter (26%) reporting that they did not know what to do when they started their period.
- Only one in five (22%) girls feel comfortable discussing their period with their teacher.
- Almost three quarters (71%) of girls admitted that they have felt embarrassed buying sanitary products.
- One in ten had been asked not to talk about their periods in front of their mother (12%) or father (11%).
- 49% of girls have missed an entire day of school because of their period of which 59% have made up a lie or an alternate excuse.
- 64% of girls have missed a PE or sport lesson because of their period, of which 52% have made up a lie or excuse.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings are based on Opinium Research survey of representative weighted sample of 1,000 girls and young women aged 14-21, carried out online between 22-24 August 2017



## 1.5 Birmingham context

1.5.1 Evidence submitted on behalf of Birmingham Public Health provided some contextual information about the estimated scale of period poverty in Birmingham:

- There are an estimated 324,900 women and girls in Birmingham aged between 10-50 years, just over 56.6% of the total number of women in the city.
- Therefore, based on the 1 in 10 women and girls affected by period poverty (Plan International 2017/GLA 2018), an estimated 32,490 girls and women between 10-50 years may have experienced period poverty at some point during their life.
- In Birmingham 4.6% of women aged 16-64 years are claiming out of work benefits (March 2019), of these approximately two thirds are of reproductive age and are likely to be menstruating.
- Women in Birmingham in full-time work earn on average £2.74 less per hour than men in the city working full time. Although the average weekly gross pay for women in the city is £40 greater than the West Midlands average and £2.40 higher than the UK average (2018); these averages figures hide the inequalities experienced by the lowest earners in the city, those working less than full time and those not in employment.

1.5.2 We would expect period poverty to be closely linked to deprivation and therefore be more prevalent in the areas of the city with the highest numbers of low-income families.

## 2 National interventions

There are some initiatives which are already happening at a national level and some important new national developments have been announced since the Committee decided to carry out this review.

### 2.1 Education and tackling stigma

2.1.1 A range of organisations including **Girlguiding UK**, the UK's leading charity for girls and young women, have been part of the movement to tackle period poverty and address the stigma and shame that can be associated with periods, with a campaign calling for all pupils to be taught about periods and puberty as part of the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum.

2.1.2 The campaign called for all pupils to receive the same information about periods in schools and that information about what to expect in puberty needed to be part of the new comprehensive Relationships and Sex Education school curriculum in England. This has been incorporated into the new curriculum and is included in the statutory guidance which was published in June 2019 which will be mandatory in schools from September 2020. (See para 2.1.5 below)



2.1.3 As part of the campaign the first ever Period Poverty badge was designed for girls and leaders to wear to show their support for the campaign and encourage others not to be ashamed or embarrassed about periods. **Girlguiding worked with the charity WaterAid** to produce an educational resource pack which can be delivered to all age groups (from 5-18 years old). Many Girlguiding groups all over Birmingham have already completed this badge curriculum designed to raise awareness of period poverty as an issue and have already been awarded their badge.

2.1.4 Language is very important in contributing to and tackling stigma and shame around periods. Girlguiding members across the country are being asked to take a pledge to always talk openly about periods and to help make sure that no one feels embarrassed or ashamed about periods. Members of the Committee were invited by **Girlguiding Birmingham** to take the pledge to end stigma around periods and were pleased to do so to demonstrate support for the work being done to tackle stigma and to be advocates alongside Girlguiding Birmingham for young women in the city. **(Link to R02)**

*I pledge to tackle period stigma by talking openly about periods, so that so no one feels embarrassed talking about them.*

2.1.5 In June 2019 the new curriculum and new statutory guidance was published in relation to Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education which schools are encouraged to adopt from as early as September 2019, but which will be mandatory from September 2020. There are approximately 20 Birmingham schools which have chosen to adopt the new curriculum in September 2019 and these early adopters will receive support from the Children and Young People Directorate through a RSE working group. The section dealing with physical health and mental wellbeing includes the following:

*Puberty including menstruation should be covered in Health Education and should, as far as possible, be addressed before onset. This should ensure male and female pupils are prepared for changes they and their peers will experience.*

The new statutory guidance also includes the following paragraph on menstruation:

*The onset of menstruation can be confusing or even alarming for girls if they are not prepared. Pupils should be taught key facts about the menstrual cycle including what is an average period, range of menstrual products and the implications for emotional and physical health. In addition to curriculum content, schools should also make adequate and sensitive arrangements to help girls prepare for and manage menstruation including with requests for menstrual products. Schools will need to consider the needs of their cohort of pupils in designing content.*

## 2.2 Providing access to free sanitary products – Schools

2.2.1 In the government's Spring Statement in March 2019, there was a commitment to fund provision of free sanitary products in all secondary schools and colleges in England.



- 2.2.2 Subsequently in April, following feedback from teachers, students and parents, it was confirmed that the programme would be extended to all primary schools and that access to the free products would be fully-funded by the Department for Education in all primary schools across the country.
- 2.2.3 The intention is to roll-out the scheme nationwide in early 2020.
- 2.2.4 **The Red Box Project** is a national charity providing free menstrual products for young people in schools ([www.redboxproject.org](http://www.redboxproject.org)). The Red Box Project is currently active in Birmingham Central, Birmingham South West, Great Barr and Sutton Coldfield.

## 2.3 Providing access to free sanitary products – NHS

- 2.3.1 An announcement was made in March 2019 by NHS England and supported by the BMA, that from Summer 2019, all women and girls being cared for by the NHS will be given, on request, appropriate sanitary products free of charge. Many hospitals already provide them, but this will be mandated in the new standard contract with hospitals for 2019-20.
- 2.3.2 Simon Stevens, Chief Executive for NHS England said:

*It is absolutely right that everyone has access to the essentials of daily life during their time in hospital, and that should include sanitary products.*

*It's fundamental that we give patients the best experience possible during what can be a stressful time of their life, and by providing sanitary products the NHS can prevent unnecessary embarrassment and leave people to focus on their recovery.*

## 2.4 Providing access to free sanitary products – Women in custody

- 2.4.1 The Home Office has announced that it is set to change the law to ensure that all menstruating women and others with personal health and hygiene needs, are treated with dignity while in custody. Police forces will provide menstrual products to female detainees if required, free of charge.
- 2.4.2 The intended changes will be brought into effect when the revised Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Codes of Practice have been laid in Parliament.

## 2.5 Period Poverty Taskforce

- 2.5.1 Following on from the announcements that period products in schools, hospitals and police custody will be free for women and girls, the government announced a Period Poverty Taskforce to be co-chaired by Plan International UK, Procter & Gamble and the Minister for Women and Equalities.



- 2.5.2 The group will seek to work together with a range of different organisations already working on period poverty from across the public, private and third sectors. It will bring together a range of charities and businesses to tackle stigma and education around periods, alongside accessibility of period products and to develop a comprehensive and sustainable response to period poverty in the UK.
- 2.5.3 The remit for the Taskforce will include:
- looking at the evidence and data about how period poverty affects different groups in our society;
  - addressing stigma will be another area of focus; and
  - considering the role of education, access, costs, communications and role models in shifting social attitudes.
- 2.5.4 Alongside Plan International UK and Procter & Gamble, the Taskforce will include members from grass-root organisations, businesses, public bodies and consult with academics, social enterprises, retailers and manufacturers, using their expertise to drive this vital work.

## 3 Examples of initiatives happening elsewhere

### 3.1 Other Local Authorities

- Leeds City Council has entered into partnership with the University of Leeds and The Children's Society to work with children, young people, schools and other settings to conduct research to investigate the impact of poverty on attendance and is working with a Community School to discuss the prevalence of period poverty and explore the best ways to mitigate it.
- In Sheffield, there is a #periodpositive Schools Charter pilot project inviting local primary and secondary schools to join a free pilot project from #period positive, supported by Learn Sheffield and Sheffield City Council. It is aiming to turn Sheffield into Britain's first #period positive city through a new school charter to support the city to become the first place in the UK to formally develop a strategy to challenge harmful menstrual taboos and change the way young people think about periods as part of a long-term education solution.
- Bristol City Council made a unanimous decision in November 2018 to be the first English city to attempt to eradicate period poverty, with the first action being to ensure that all Bristol schools are supplied with products accessible to all children from school year 5 to year 13. Subsequently a summit was held to share ideas about accessing period products,



improving education around the availability and environmental sustainability of products and how to build closer ties between those working on period poverty.

- Nottingham City Council approved a new scheme to fight period poverty by making sanitary items more accessible to those on low incomes by placing free pads and tampons in schools and encouraging local businesses to provide free products to their staff.

## **3.2 Football Clubs**

3.2.1 In March 2018 three lifelong Celtic fans and season ticket holders set up the “On the Ball” campaign to get free sanitary products in football grounds in the UK. They decided to launch their campaign after learning that not all toilets had sanitary bins and sanitary products were locked away in machines which required exact change.

3.2.2 They have had considerable success with their campaign and managed to get a substantial number of teams, on board and at the time of writing, a total of 91 clubs had signed up for the campaign, including locally Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion.

# **4 Local interventions in Birmingham**

## **4.1 Addressing women and girls living in poverty**

4.1.1 It should be said that the most important step to address period poverty would be to address wider poverty in the city, especially affecting women. This could include focused work to address the employment gap affecting women and the gender pay gap affecting women working in the city.

4.1.2 The evidence provided by Birmingham Public Health highlighted that in 2006 Birmingham City Council jointly published a report with Sheffield Hallam University on addressing poverty affecting women which made a series of policy recommendations for action; however, there has not been any recent work to reflect on progress against these actions. Currently there is a lack of data or detailed evidence about the scale and impact of period poverty in the city and more research in this area is needed to fully understand what is happening.

## **4.2 Providing targeted access to free sanitary products**

4.2.1 Everybody deserves access to safe and hygienic menstrual products and the dignity that this affords. There is potential for targeted access to free sanitary wear and some organisations are already providing direct interventions which are focused on the provision of free sanitary products at venues and spaces that are most accessed by women and girls living in poverty, such as



homeless shelters, drug and alcohol services, food banks and job centres. It was suggested that GP surgeries might also provide ideal distribution centres for free sanitary products.

4.2.2 Several Councils in England have put period poverty schemes in place (see paragraph 3.1). The most common method has been the strategic placement of free sanitary product supplies in key locations, such as schools, youth services, voluntary sector settings and food banks. Significant learning has already emerged from programmes aimed at addressing period poverty. For example, successful schemes tend to be those that make sanitary products available in a range of areas without the need for them to be requested via a teacher or other adult.

4.2.3 Neelam Heera, founder of the charitable organisation **Cysters** which works to spread awareness of reproductive health in particular among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Women, presented a comprehensive submission to the inquiry which gave an overview of Cysters and set out the work being undertaken to tackle period poverty through their project '**Our Cysters**'. The project works with ethnic, marginalised communities and those living under the poverty line to tackle period poverty in Birmingham by asking for donations of menstrual products and providing them to those who need them. They collect menstrual products from companies and distribute items between charities working with homeless women and schools within the Handsworth Association of Schools. They have recently expanded and been asked to support the Food Bank in Redditch by providing these products.

4.2.4 They source products in a variety of ways by:

- engaging with local businesses and organisations and asking them to collect a box of monthly donations which are collected, and the items are then given direct to the schools or organisations working directly with homeless individuals.
- Collaborating with Chambers of Commerce who have held period poverty donations drives for Cysters.
- Working with corporate organisations to utilise their Corporate Social Responsibility policies to collect products for Cysters.
- Working with various sectors within the community and working with local temples and Gurdwaras both as a donation station and to have a box of products in the temple for the community.
- Creating a partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust to promote the availability of free sanitary products for patients and staff as their period poverty drive.
- Cysters have now been invited to join the government's Period Poverty Taskforce (previously referred to in paragraph 2.6.1) which is co-chaired by Plan International UK, Procter and Gamble and the Minister for Women and Equalities, to work with other members of the Taskforce to tackle the issue around period poverty and wider stigma around menstruation.



- 4.2.5 There was also evidence from **Girlguiding Birmingham** that individual groups and volunteers have worked to ensure that their members have easy and free access to period products in their weekly meeting places and during camps, residential events and other trips, but that this is not yet consistent in every group across the city.
- 4.2.6 **Change, Grow, Live**, which provides services for adults experiencing difficulties with drugs or alcohol in Birmingham, has a specialist Women's Team based in Ladywood who offer free sanitary products to the females who access this service and they also signpost families to various organisations who can support them with ongoing issues such as access to foodbanks.
- 4.2.7 Change, Grow, Live also has a dedicated Homeless Team who offer free sanitary products to women who are rough sleeping across the city and also signpost to various organisations for ongoing provision and support where needed. Their community venues and base at Scala House also provide food bank vouchers to service users which includes providing products for themselves and their families. **(Link to R04)**
- 4.2.8 Evidence was provided to the Committee by the Joint Head of **Birmingham Youth Service** that there are 15 Youth Centres throughout Birmingham which are frequented by, predominantly, 11-19 year olds of which 40% are females. Most, if not all, of the Youth Centres are located in deprived areas and are therefore within reach of people who may have an issue with period poverty. Free sanitary products have always been available in Youth Centres but, until recently, a young woman or girl would have to ask a female member of staff for a sanitary item. In response to the recent campaign around period poverty which has heightened awareness of the issue, a pilot project has been set up to provide free sanitary products more discreetly in boxes in the ladies toilet for all women using the centre. However, this is currently a pilot project and may not be sustainable if they cannot access free sanitary products. The service is continuing to explore opportunities to access free products to sustain the initiative.

### 4.3 Education and Awareness of Menstruation

- 4.3.1 Lack of education around menstrual health and wellbeing is an issue which can have a huge impact on women's health as well as their schooling. With this in mind, the '**Our Cysters**' project has also expanded into attending schools and delivering classes on menstrual wellbeing and reproductive health classes as part of the PHSE curriculum. This is important to address a number of issues around period poverty with evidence of girls missing school due to lack of affordable and available menstrual products and:
- 71% of girls reported that they felt embarrassed while buying these products.
  - 1 in 7 girls admitted that they do not actually know what's happening when having to buy and use products.





- 27% of girls have overused sanitary towels because they cannot afford fresh ones.<sup>2</sup>

## 4.4 Cultural and social attitudes towards menstruation

- 4.4.1 Amongst some faiths, traditions and cultures, people may find it difficult to talk about the menstrual cycle and, therefore, the true extent and nature of the issue in Birmingham may be invisible. Some beliefs are taught from an early age that menstruation is dirty and that blood spoils food with women being told to stay away from the kitchen when on a menstrual cycle. There are also religious beliefs around purity and women during their menstrual cycles. This can sometimes mean that a conversation around menstrual hygiene and menstrual wellbeing can be felt to be inappropriate or embarrassing.
- 4.4.2 Members received evidence from Neelam Heera from the **'Our Cysters'** project about feedback from a focus group which they held with a group of women from Black and Minority Ethnic communities on their thoughts around period poverty. A number of women reported that as children they had to use tissues etc. in place of menstrual products, but that this was not seen as poverty, rather that menstrual products were not important in the home compared with other expenses. It was said in the focus group "buying dad the good meat for the week was more essential than pads." It was felt that these are indicators that women's menstrual needs are traditionally seen as unimportant compared to the needs of the males within the family which stems from cultural attitudes towards menstruation generally within some communities.

## 4.5 Environmental issues

- 4.5.1 Environmental issues, and in particular issues around plastics, are an increasingly high profile and urgent concern. Disposable sanitary towels can take up to 5,000 years to bio-degrade. There are reusable products which could potentially help to both alleviate some issues arising from poverty and also contribute towards reducing avoidable waste. The products are inexpensive, long-term and environmentally friendly so it is important that children are taught about them. On average these reusable products actually last around 4 years. At the moment, many young people have not been taught about them and so don't engage with them.
- 4.5.2 In relation to reusable products, the evidence from Cysters was that in the next educational programme they will be going into schools to teach about what a reusable product is, how to use it and what you need to do to look after it. Members were also told that they use social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to engage with a young audience about the work of the project and to promote reusable products.

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<sup>2</sup> Plan International UK



## 5 What can Birmingham City Council do?

### 5.1 Education – Work closely with schools and teachers

5.1.1 Birmingham City Council needs to work more closely with schools and teachers to educate students about period poverty and specifically in relation to:

- raising awareness/dealing with stigma and shame;
- information about the products available and disposal of sanitary items; and
- the environmental aspects. Schools need to provide more information about reusable products which are already available and also to encourage companies to make products that are more environmentally friendly.

5.1.2 There was an offer on behalf of 'Our Cysters' to work with the Council to develop a plan to take this work forward. **(Link to R1)**

### 5.2 Working with communities on cultural attitudes to menstruation

5.2.1 It was highlighted in the evidence that some religious and cultural attitudes to menstruation found within the City may make conversations about the menstrual cycle difficult or be perceived to be inappropriate and, therefore, the true nature and extent of the issue in Birmingham may be invisible.

5.2.2 Concern was raised during the evidence from Birmingham Public Health that, so far, there is no in-depth research where conclusions can be drawn about the prevalence of period poverty or the physical or mental health impacts of low period awareness, amongst specific groups or different population groups. Much of the generic research carried out nationally does not focus sufficiently on specific communities where this issue may arise to pick up the nature and extent of this issue. Consideration needs to be given to ways of widening 'period awareness' within a super-diverse city and to the possibility of commissioning a research programme aimed at establishing the extent and nature of this issue in Birmingham. **(Link to R3)**

### 5.3 Co-ordination with and support for third sector

5.3.1 There are a large number of small third sector organisations working on period poverty doing similar work across the city. There is a need for a collaborative approach to providing co-ordination and support to these organisations which the City Council would be well-placed to provide. This was highlighted in the evidence about the 'Our Cysters' project – where collaboration and co-



ordination between the Council and the third sector would help, especially in relation to accessing marginalised communities and facilitating the upscaling of projects across Birmingham. 'Our Cysters' have a large network of volunteers and could potentially extend the project to more centres. Advice, facilitation and support with applications for grant funding by third sector organisations would be another aspect which should be examined. **(Link to R4)**

- 5.3.2 Members were told that currently Cysters volunteers store products in their own homes. Really, they require a central hub in Birmingham to store donated products where they could then be collected and distributed as needed, but that they are not in a position to pay the high fees charged by corporate organisations. They have had conversations with various corporate organisations who would charge a high fee to store and hold products which the charities cannot afford. **(Link to R4)**

## 6 Conclusion

The evidence highlighted that in spite of work being done and support being provided across the city, especially by a number of third sector organisations, there are still significant social restrictions that influence the management of menstruation. Some girls do not understand what is happening when they start menstruating, and they have limited knowledge of biological processes. Using education and working closely with schools and teachers to inform and improve understanding about menstruation as a natural and normal part of the reproductive cycle and that sanitary products are an important part of supporting women's health is important in tackling some of these barriers. In addition, the evidence from Birmingham Public Health also emphasised that currently there is no in-depth research where conclusions can be drawn about specific groups or different population groups and that further research is needed to explore the experiences and needs of various populations. As a City Council, there is a need to explore what can be done to facilitate a more collaborative approach to providing co-ordination and support to those organisations already working to raise awareness and open communication to avoid any stigma about menstruation, and address period poverty in the city.

### Motion

That the recommendations R01 to R06 be approved, and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation.