

	Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 17 September 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Service Reform and Strategy
	Lead Cabinet Member: Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Cllr Mili Patel) Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support & Culture (Cllr Promise Knight)
Period Dignity Brent project	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Angelyn Francis Policy Support Officer Angelyn.francis@brent.gov.uk Tom Pickup Policy & Performance Manager Tom.pickup@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the council's action to tackle period poverty through the Period Dignity Brent project. The project provides free period products to residents as part of the council's commitment to tackle health inequalities and financial hardship. The report outlines the journey to develop the project and next steps which aim to continue delivering sustainable and inclusive approaches that meet the needs of Brent's diverse communities.

- 1.2. This report also provides background information on the issue of period poverty in Brent, including the scale of need and the barriers faced by residents in accessing essential menstrual products.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

The committee is asked to:

- 2.1 Note and comment on the Period Dignity Brent project's approach, impact and journey to date, including the proposed next steps.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 As the Period Dignity Brent project seeks to tackle issues related to health inequalities and financial hardship, it helps to deliver both the 'Prosperity and Stability' and 'A Healthier Brent' strategic priorities within the Borough Plan. Additionally, Period Dignity is a commitment within the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, providing universal access to period products to tackle health inequalities. The work also contributes to delivering the council's EDI Strategy, specifically the commitment to narrow the gap and tackle inequalities.

3.2 Background

Period Dignity: defining the challenge and scale of need in Brent

- 3.2.1 Language is powerful. The challenge of 'period poverty' encompasses three core issues: access to products, stigma and education. The term 'period poverty' exacerbates the issues of stigmatisation and education as it can be attached with negative connotations. Hence the council, like other organisations, has adopted the term 'period dignity'. 'Period dignity' builds a sense of empowerment and respect, helping to challenge stigma around a normal biological process.
- 3.2.2 Period dignity describes a lack of access to proper menstrual products and the education needed to use them effectively. It disproportionately affects people who do not have the resources to access the period products they need and can be exacerbated by other reasons such as shame, embarrassment and community stigma.
- 3.2.3 Nationally, an [ActionAid poll](#) in 2023 found that 21% of people who menstruate are struggling to afford period products, marking an increase of 9% from the previous year. Unfortunately, such data is not available for Brent, however metrics around socioeconomic deprivation, a key driver of period dignity, can provide some indication around the level of need:

- Brent has a poverty rate of 33%, the seventh highest rate in London. This indicator presents the percentage of people living in poverty (Trust for London, 2023/24).
- Brent is the 79th (out of 317) most deprived area in the UK. Specific areas such as Stonebridge and Harlesden are among the most deprived, falling within the top 4% and 7% most deprived neighbourhoods respectively. (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019).
- 12% of households in Brent are experiencing fuel poverty (Brent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)
- 18.2% of Brent residents are on out-of-work benefits, the 5th highest rate in London (Trust for London, Q4 2024).
- Temporary accommodation tenancies have increased by 55% since 2021.

Tackling Period Dignity in Brent

3.2.4 Brent's activity around period dignity emerged from the Poverty Commission in 2020. Among the recommendations put forward by the commission, proposal 9 emphasised the importance of recognising gender-specific dimensions of poverty, particularly the unique barriers faced by women in accessing financial support and welfare services. As a result, 'period poverty' was formally identified as a focus area by Scrutiny in December 2020, reinforcing the council's commitment to addressing health inequalities and ensuring equitable access to essential products and support services.

3.2.5 Brent's action to tackle period dignity can be categorised into three components:

1. The Department for Education Period Products scheme
2. The role of the voluntary sector and local health services
3. The Brent Council offer: Period Dignity Brent

Department for Education's Period Products Scheme

3.2.6 In January 2020 the Department for Education (DfE) launched the Period Products Scheme which aims to remove financial barriers to education and tackle stigma around period dignity by providing free period products to those who menstruate. The scheme is available for state-maintained schools and DfE funded 16 to 19 education organisations.

3.2.7 The table below presents uptake of the scheme in Brent. The data indicates that, on average, 50% of eligible organisations in the borough have ordered through the scheme and the proportion of organisations meeting the spend cap spent has increased over time, almost maximising the cap in 2023-24 (i.e. 98% of organisations claiming products spent the maximum amount available). The average spend per organisation is £640.

DfE Period Product Scheme management data for Brent Schools and colleges				
Academic year	Number of Eligible organisations	Percentage who ordered	Average Spend	Percentage of spend cap spent

2023-24	77	49%	£767	98%
2022-23	76	51%	£656	83%
Jan-Jul 2022	76	45%	£376	76%
2021	77	49%	£490	71%
2020	74	54%	£379	73%

N.b. the scheme initially operated based on the calendar year and was subsequently adapted to the academic year, hence the varied date ranges.

- 3.2.8 It has not been possible to gather further insights from eligible Brent organisations around the scheme because the council does not monitor or collect this data.

The role of voluntary sector and local health services

- 3.2.9 Brent Food Bank and Sufra NW London have played a key role in supporting period dignity for residents facing financial hardship. In 2024, Brent Food Bank received a grant from the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation to purchase period products and train volunteers distributing emergency food parcels. Sufra also distributes period products when available, but demand regularly exceeds supply.
- 3.2.10 Period dignity remains a key consideration within the wider approach to staff and patient wellbeing at London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust. Significant work has already been undertaken to strengthen menopause support, and it is anticipated that LNWH will be successful in securing [menopause friendly accreditation](#) at a forthcoming panel review. Following this, their focus will extend to pursuing [menstruation friendly accreditation](#). In parallel, they intend to broaden the scope of internal webinar series to encompass a wider range of women's health topics, including menstruation.

Period Dignity Brent project – initial pilot

- 3.2.11 The council's first period dignity project initiated in October 2021, following the Poverty Commission recommendations. The council implemented a pilot project which provided free period products in public toilets across six council sites: Brent Civic Centre, Ealing Road Library, Harlesden Library, Kilburn Library, Willesden Green Library, Kingsbury Library. PHS provided Free Flow Wall vending machines which dispensed disposable period pads and tampons.
- 3.2.12 Initially, uptake was good at the start of the pilot, however it quickly became difficult to understand the level of uptake over time due to challenges and inconsistency with data collection from the respective sites, hence reliable data was not available after 6 months. Overall, data shows usage of period pads was higher compared to tampons. Brent Civic Centre and Willesden

Green library had the highest usage of pads, with approximately 400 products over the 6-month.

Site	Product	6 Month Usage
Brent Civic Centre	Tampons	209
	Disposable Pads	395
Ealing Road Library	Tampons	92
	Disposable Pads	302
Harlesden Library (usage low due to dispenser being placed in an inaccessible location)	Tampons	28
	Disposable Pads	34
Kilburn Library	Tampons	218
	Disposable Pads	198
Willesden Green Library	Tampons	300
	Disposable Pads	411
Kingsbury Library	Tampons	76
	Disposable Pads	70

3.2.13 In addition to data collection issues, there were other learnings from the initial pilot:

- Dispensers: they were not strategically placed, for example there were no dispensers in sites such as Family Wellbeing Centres or Hubs that are more likely to support and deliver services to those experiencing period dignity challenges.
- Communication: signage in sites communicating the purpose of the dispensers was not clear and attracted misuse of products. Dispensers were also vandalised.
- Training and education: training was not provided to staff delivering the pilot or to those on sites that had dispensers, limiting their ability to support residents in needs. Additionally, linked to communication, sites did not have any educational tools available to residents that will help build understanding and tackle stigma.

Period Dignity Brent project – adopting a new approach

3.2.14 In 2024, the Corporate Policy Team initiated a review of the existing period dignity offer with the view of updating the approach, particularly recognising the increasing socioeconomic challenges emerging from the cost-of-living crisis. The Policy Team established and coordinated a working group

comprised of Public Health, Libraries, Family Wellbeing Centres, Brent Hubs and Facilities. The aim of the review and new approach is:

- Change and improve Brent's current model around period dignity, namely by increasing the availability of period products across Brent.
- Provide temporary and immediate support to residents who are struggling and in need of help to access free period products.
- Raise awareness around period dignity and tackle stigma that surrounds periods and menstrual health through communication, education, and training. This includes improve staff understanding of period dignity and how to support people in need.

3.2.15 To realise our aims, the council recognised that working with an expert will be vital and, therefore, sought to identify a new partner who could support the council to deliver the new approach. We engaged with the following prospective providers: PHS, Binti Period Charity, Hey Girls and Bloody Good Period. As part of this process, we also engaged with several local authorities to understand their approach, including how they targeted specific communities, success measures, monitoring procedures, funding arrangement and approach to raising awareness and educating.

3.2.16 Hey Girls emerged as the preferred option, with an approach and offer that most aligned with our aims. Hey Girls provide a universal offer developed to ensure all people who menstruate have access to free, eco-friendly period products and menstrual health education. They also work with numerous local authorities in London and across the country. As part of our partnership, Hey Girls provide the council with products, communication and educational materials and training.

Period Dignity Brent project – the new approach and pilot

3.2.17 With Hey Girls, the council has been piloting a new Period Dignity approach since November 2024. The pilot provides free disposable pads, tampons and reusable period cups across 17 council owned sites: Brent Libraries, Family Wellbeing Centres, Kilburn Hub, The Living Room and New Horizon Centre. These sites encompass some of the council's core resident facing services including those already set up to support and provide a range of services for residents experiencing financial hardship.

3.2.18 The projects operational delivery process entails a model in which individual sites are responsible for requesting and distributing period products. The 17 sites are provided with an initial starter pack of products and posters. When products are running low, the sites place orders as needed through a central ordering process coordinated by the Corporate Policy Team. All sites have a designated point of contact responsible for overseeing stock management, receiving delivery updates and liaising with the Corporate Policy Team as required. They are also responsible for providing feedback around the project, both from an operational perspective and around resident experience. The Corporate Policy Team monitors product usage based on site orders.

3.2.19 The following table summarises the product distribution data collected during the pilot phase from November 2024 to August 2025. It details the number of sites involved, the frequency of restock requests after the initial starter pack, and the quantities of disposable pads, disposable tampons, and reusable cups ordered. This data highlights the varying levels of demand across different types of sites, with libraries showing the highest frequency of restock requests and overall product distribution. Overall, the data demonstrates that there is a need in Brent and that the council is making progress to meet this need.

Product distribution data

November 2024-August 2025					
	Number of sites	Requests of restock	Disposable Pads	Disposable Tampons	Reusable Period Cups
Libraries	6	27	11200	3264	288
FWC	8	18	6820	2688	120
Hubs (inc . New Horizons Centre)	3	4	2660	1920	84
Total	17	49	20680	7872	492

3.2.20 The pilot currently has a budget of £10,000, funded through the Public Health grant and there are confirmed plans to extend this funding once the initial allotment has been used. Since November 2024, £8,500 of the allocated funding has been used. This funding has primarily been used to purchase products but has also covered promotional activity.

3.2.21 As part of the partnership, Hey Girls deliver training to staff located at the sites. The training aims to help staff to understand the Period Dignity Project, covering the follow topics: period equality, menstrual education, period products and product sustainability. The training is also delivered in a 'train-the-trainer' style webinar so that staff attending the training can pass the information on to other teams or those who were unable to attend.

3.2.22 Each site also has a range of promotional materials which have been provided by Hey Girls and are displayed at all sites, such as posters and leaflets. The Brent website also has a [dedicated page](#) around period dignity which shares information about the project, including the sites and educational materials. When distributing products, services provide both open and discrete options, ensuring that:

- Products are displayed in the open and available to take on demand. The open displays are also part of the educational component of the project.
- Products can be requested on site.
- Products can be distributed discretely by staff to residents based on identified need.



The image above presents how products and materials are displayed openly at sites.

3.2.23 The pilot has been promoted through Brent channels, including LinkedIn and Your Brent magazine. It has also received positive local and regional media coverage which have amplified the pilot's aims and the council's broader mission to tackle challenges around period dignity.

Period Dignity Brent project – learning to date

3.2.24 Feedback around the project, from staff and residents, has been positive:

- Harlesden Library and Willow Family Wellbeing Centre reported receiving positive feedback from residents and officers also noted that the online information provided was extremely informative.
- New Horizons Centre and Ealing Road Library noted that reusable period cups were quickly taken, reflecting strong interest. However, some staff expressed uncertainty about whether the products were being accessed exclusively by those in need.
- Operational delivery has been mostly smooth, with only minor issues reported, such as occasional delays in restocking popular products (disposable pads) or delivery delays.

3.2.25 Overall, the data and feedback demonstrate a sustained interest and need in the initiative, reinforcing the value of continued provision and refinement. The feedback from residents and services will be used to inform the next steps, set out below.

3.3 Next Steps

- 3.3.1 The pilot phase of the Period Dignity Brent project has provided a strong foundation for developing a sustainable, borough wide offer. It confirmed the value of providing free period products in community settings and highlighted ongoing demand to continue delivering this service. As such, we are in the process of consolidating this as a business-as-usual service. Working with the working group, future funding arrangements has been confirmed, and we are determining updates to the operational process to improve efficiency and adopt a more self-serving model for sites. We are hoping to confirm updated arrangements this year.
- 3.3.2 In the meantime, given the scale of need demonstrated through the pilot, we plan to continue delivering and expanding our offer to support as many residents as possible. For example, in May 2025, the New Horizons Centre was added as a new site. Although newly established within the last 3–4 months, the initial request for products from the site suggests it may have one of the highest levels of need or demand.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 A range of stakeholder engagement activities were undertaken to support and promote the Period Dignity Brent pilot. Online workshops were delivered for council officers to raise awareness and build internal understanding of the initiative. A dedicated briefing was produced for Member and key stakeholders to ensure alignment and support across the borough. Discussions were also held with local partners, including Sufra and Brent Food Bank, to explore collaborative opportunities and strengthen community outreach. Additionally, benchmarking conversations were held with other London councils that have partnered with Hey Girls, helping to inform Brent's approach and align with best practices.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 The estimated value of the project is £10,000.
- 5.2 Funding for this project has been secured from existing resource in the Public Health Reserve for 25/26. Funding has been earmarked for future years, confirmed by the Director of Public Health.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 The Period Dignity Brent project supports Brent's duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty by promoting gender equality

and tackling barriers faced by those who menstruate, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- 7.2 The project directly supports those in need by providing free products, advice and education around period dignity. A key aim of the project is to raise awareness and amplify challenges and support available around period dignity, hence the promotional activities and materials are contributing to efforts to tackle stigma and break down barriers.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 The Period Dignity Brent project supports the Council's environmental objectives and climate emergency strategy by promoting access to sustainable menstrual products. Through partnership with Hey Girls, a social enterprise committed to reducing environmental harm, the project offers reusable and biodegradable period products made from responsibly sourced materials such as bamboo, organic cotton, and medical-grade silicone. These products help reduce single-use plastic waste and landfill impact, aligning with Brent's commitment to sustainability.

9.0 Communication Considerations

- 9.1 Key considerations include continuing to raise awareness of the initiative, promoting access to free and sustainable menstrual products, and engaging target audiences effectively. Communications have already been delivered across council channels, community networks, and local media, with support from the Brent Communications Team. These efforts will remain ongoing, as awareness-raising and education are vital components of the project's success ensuring residents not only know about the initiative but also understand its purpose and how to access products appropriately.

Report sign off:

Rachel Crossley

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