

FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS PROVISION

Statement on exercise of functions

FIFE COUNCIL - STATEMENT ON EXERCISE OF FUNCTIONS THE PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2021

COMMUNITY-BASED PROVISION

The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 requires local authorities to ensure period products can be easily obtained free of charge by anyone who needs them.

Period products must be reasonably easy to obtain and provided in a way that respects the dignity of those obtaining the products. There must also be reasonable choice with different products being made available in a wide range of settings.

This Statement is for community-based provision in Fife. It sets out the vision and the intent for Fife's implementation to ensure anyone living in, working in or visiting Fife can access the products they need.

Provision in Fife should be guided by the following principles:

- Protecting people's dignity, avoiding anxiety, embarrassment and stigma
- Making a range of products available in places people use
- Obtaining free period products should neither be complex or bureaucratic – products should be reasonably easy to obtain
- Respecting individual choice by providing a range of products that meet personal preferences
- Promoting gender equality by ensuring anyone who menstruates can access products, including transgender men and non-binary individuals, and that language is gender inclusive
- A response that is reflective of communities' views and needs
- Promoting reusable products to encourage a shift away from single use plastic products and to reduce period plastic waste
- Awareness raising and education to promote the offer and attempt to change norms
- An efficient and effective approach which demonstrates value for money

The provision outlined in this Statement will be monitored and reviewed against the guiding principles. The provision will be updated based on the continuation of Scottish Government funding and any fluctuation in demand for products.

Fife's Successes

Products distributed

- In 2021/22, over 105,000 period products were distributed to the community from Fife's allocation of Scottish Government funding for community-based provision.
- This doesn't include all the other support available locally for free periods.

Shortlisted for Scottish Public Service Awards 2021

- Our partnership work with Hey Girls was recognised at the Scottish Public Service Awards 2021, where we were shortlisted for our work on the take-up of reusable period products.

Promoting reusable products during Climate Change Week 2020

- We posted on the Fife Council Facebook page during Climate Change Week in 2020 to promote reusable products and offer them through our online ordering service.
- The post had a fantastic response - nearly 20,000 engagements and almost 900 shares and reached nearly 120,000 people.
- This resulted in a spike in orders – over 1,300 orders for menstrual cups, compared with 55 when we launched the online service.

Overwhelming response to consultations

- Over 800 people responded to our consultation in January 2021.
- This isn't the first time we've had a great response on the topic of periods... in June 2019, we consulted for the first time on what we should do in Fife to make products free and available, and we received over 600 responses.

Consultation

Methodology

As per the guidance issued by the Scottish Government in relation to the Act, Fife Council carried out a consultation seeking the community's views on how to make free period products easily obtainable in Fife. The consultation also asked for feedback on current provision provided by Fife Council and funded by Scottish Government.

The consultation consisted of an online survey during January 2022. The survey asked for feedback on current provision, particularly the online ordering service we have set up with our supplier, Hey Girls, as well as seeking views on:

- What products should be made available in communities
- What locations should products be obtainable from
- Where in these locations would people be happy to find free period products
- What the barriers are that would stop people from accessing products in physical locations.

Given Fife Council's policy on single use plastics and previous successful campaigns that promoted reusable products, the consultation asked for views on reusable products, particularly how important they are to Fife's communities.

Findings

There was an overwhelming response to the consultation with 830 responses from people across Fife. In terms of demographics, 98% of respondents identified as female and 96% of respondents identified as White. The age breakdown shows the majority of respondents were aged 20 and upwards with 22% aged between 20 and 29, 37% aged between 30 and 39 and 33% aged 40 and over. Younger respondents (19 and under) only made up 6% of the response, but these groups may have taken part in consultations by schools, colleges and universities. The majority of respondents were completing the survey on their own behalf with some saying they had a family member in their household who uses products.

Findings: Current provision

63% of respondents said they were not aware that they could get free period products in Fife. Of those who did know that they could get products for free, approximately 44% said they had seen or found products in buildings, whereas others had heard about them online. 29% said they were aware of the online ordering service.

In terms of satisfaction with the online ordering service, this question was introduced to the survey after it had been published at the request of Endometriosis Fife Group, and therefore does not give a full representation of the survey respondents. However, of those who responded once the question had been added, 25 respondents said they were very satisfied and 7 were very dissatisfied

Findings: Future provision

The most popular products people want to have access to are the single use products – sanitary pads and tampons. However, there was a good response to the reusable products with many people adding in the comments that they would like access to reusable period pants and period pads. When asked how important the reusable products were to people, 73% said they were either very important or fairly important, meaning people are aware of the benefits of using them.

The vast majority of respondents wanted to get their products through an online ordering postal service, but there were other popular responses about where they thought the best places were for picking up products. There was a good response to all other multiple-choice questions and other suggestions in the comments about making products available in chemists/pharmacies, public toilets and supermarkets.

The most popular response to where in these venues people would like to find products was in toilets for discretion. The remaining multiple-choice responses indicate that more people want to access products in a place that's discrete but for it to be easily accessible like on a display stand.

The barriers preventing people from obtaining products are not knowing where to get them, not being sure about how many products people can take at any one time and embarrassment.

Recommendations

1. Future consultations should focus on what more can be done to reach a broader range of Fife residents by:
 - a. Carrying out engagement activities with ethnic minority communities
 - b. Carrying out engagement activities with the LGBTQ+ community
 - c. Working with younger age groups to identify how they want to obtain products in the community outside of education settings
2. Design an accessible and inclusive feedback form for the online ordering service to resolve any issues people have when ordering products for postal delivery
3. Promote what is available to people living in, working in and visiting Fife in terms of how to obtain free period products

- a. Develop an inclusive communications plan
 - b. Consider ways of promoting what's available to people who do not have access to the internet
 - c. Make it easier to find out where people can collect products from
 - d. Make it clear that people can take as many products as they need
4. Make a broad range of products obtainable across Fife, focusing on sanitary pads and tampons
 - a. Make reusable products obtainable from certain locations and continue to promote them online as part of a communications plan
 5. Make products obtainable in a range of different ways
 - a. Continuing with the online ordering service, but implement changes based on feedback
 - b. Ensure products are obtainable in the venues listed in the multiple-choice section
 - c. Explore making products obtainable in chemists and pharmacies, public toilets and supermarkets
 6. Produce guidance for venues on where they should put products, for instance, in a place that is discrete but somewhere that is easily accessible. An example could be on a display stand in toilets.

Provision

The plan for provision in Fife has been determined by the response to the consultation and the recommendations, as well as our experience to date of delivering free period products to Fife's communities.

Provision of products

The provision in Fife is for anyone who menstruates and who lives in, works in or is visiting Fife. It is available for anyone to use, no matter their income, and people are welcome to take the products they need, when they need them.

We currently provide a range of products via physical locations and through our online ordering service. Products available through these services include tampons, sanitary pads, menstrual cups, reusable period pads and period pants. Through our online service we offer a range of sizes for cups and pants.

In line with the consultation findings, we will continue to make a range of products available and will focus on making sanitary pads and tampons available in all the locations where products can be found.

Additionally, based on the positive feedback we received through the consultation, we will make reusable products obtainable from some key locations across Fife and will continue to offer them online as part of our ordering service. The reusable products that we will continue to offer will be menstrual cups, reusable period pads and period pants.

We recognise there are varying levels of knowledge about reusable products - from people who are well-informed users to people who have never seen or heard of them. We will provide information and resources about these products at point of delivery and via the webpage to raise awareness about what they are, how they are used, and how they can be washed and reused. We will provide information and resources by leaflet and QR codes at point of delivery.

We want to offer people a range of products that provide choice, whether that be single-use or reusable. It can be a highly personal preference and people may not feel comfortable trying the reusable products, but we want to make it as accessible as possible for those who do want to make the switch and we will continue to promote the benefits of reusable products as widely as we can.

To help us reduce period plastic waste, we will continue to promote reusable products and minimise the amount of plastic in the single-use products we offer through this provision by providing single-use products that are as eco-friendly as possible by exploring products with alternative materials.

Methods of obtaining products: Locations

Products are currently available at a number of local premises, including council buildings, community centres and some community food providers such as food banks.

Feedback we received from the consultation indicated that we could and should do more to raise awareness of free products and the places where they are available.

We need to address the barriers preventing people from obtaining products. This will be partly done through the venues and where they keep the products for public access. The consultation indicated that whilst some people have little issue with getting products from a reception area, embarrassment is still a key barrier for many, and people want to access them in a discrete way. Guidance to venues on where products should be located in their venues will be developed and distributed and will be based on the feedback from the consultation, that products should be available:

- In a discrete place, like toilets
- On a display stand, if possible, so people can easily pick them up; and
- People shouldn't have to ask a member of staff for them.

Methods of obtaining products: Ordering online

Fife Council and Hey Girls has offered products to people living in Fife via an online ordering service since August 2020. The service was set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as our public buildings remained closed to the public well into the pandemic. The intention was to review this service on an ongoing basis and determine whether it was still fit for purpose.

In 2021/22, the online ordering service was responsible for distributing 55% of the products distributed by Fife Council for community-based provision. The vast majority of consultation respondents wanted to get their products through an online ordering postal service,

however, the consultation raised some issues, for instance, the lack of awareness that people can order products online and reports that some individuals didn't receive products after ordering them. Moving forward, we will put mechanisms in place that will allow individuals to provide feedback regarding any issues, particularly with their orders, and we will continue to promote the service to ensure everyone who wants to access it knows where to go.

Working with other organisations

We believe that providing this service in partnership with a range of local stakeholders will deliver the best possible service to the people of Fife. We have worked with worked with local partners in Fife to implement a range of provision and will continue to do so moving forward.

During our consultation, we didn't receive a big response from communities with specific protected characteristics and we want to do more to engage with these communities and make sure the service meets their needs. To do this we will work with local organisations such as **Fife Centre for Equalities**. We will also engage with colleagues in education settings, such as **Fife Council Education Service**, **Fife College** and the **University of St Andrews** to ensure young people know there are other places in Fife where they can get period products if they need them.

Maintaining a good relationship with our suppliers is important in ensuring the products we are procuring are right for the provision in Fife. We will continue to work with our suppliers, **Alliance UK** and **Hey Girls**, to ensure the provision in Fife is meeting the needs of our communities.

We have received valued feedback from community groups - **Endometriosis Fife Group** and **Plastic Free Fife** – on different aspects of the provision. We want to continue to discuss with these groups the issues that matter to them and open dialogue with other community groups in Fife that want to engage with us on periods.

A key element of this provision has always been to address period poverty. Particularly with the cost of living crisis, people are seeing costs rise and some may face the difficult decision to not buy period products if it means they can have more money for food or fuel. We are working with **FareShare** to ensure that Fife's foodbanks and other community organisations can get the period products they need to support those accessing their services.

Since 2019, we have worked with colleagues in Fife Health & Social Care Partnership – **Health Promotion Service** to provide products through the Family Nurse Partnership, Midwives, and Sexual Health Clinics, as well as in hospital settings for patients and staff to access. **Fife Council's Housing Service** has also accessed products for people who are homeless and the gypsy/traveller community. We will continue to work with colleagues to ensure those accessing these services have access to a reliable supply of period products.

Communications

Developing a communications plan will allow us to promote the service more often to a wider group of people. Through a communications plan, we intend to promote:

- The service offering - to raise awareness of the provision, including the online service, amongst various communities to ensure people know that the service is for everyone
 - Designing a feedback form that is accessible and inclusive of Fife's diverse communities.
- Community-based provision to young people going to school and studying in Fife by engaging with Fife Council Education Service, Fife College and the University of St Andrews
- Local support
- Reusable products
 - Highlighting the benefits of making the switch by communicating the benefits related to cost savings and convenience, such as providing scenarios of the cost savings to different family groups
 - Promoting environmentally friendly alternatives to single-use period waste, and what not to do with single-use waste (i.e. "do not flush")
 - Providing resources and information on what reusable products are, how to use them and how to wash and reuse them.
 - Engage with community groups, such as the Plastic Free Fife network, to promote eco-friendly periods.

In addition, we will explore maintaining dialogue with Fife communities about the design and review of the provision.

In terms of promoting the service offering, Fife already has locations listed on the [PickUpMyPeriod app](#), but we need to ensure all locations that have free period products are listed and the information on the app is up to date. We will also explore further developing our [Food Map](#) to show what locations have free period products.

Reporting and Evaluating

We will continue to record and report on the total costs of delivering the policy and the total number of period products purchased as per the reporting requirements outlined by Scottish Government in its grant letter for 2022/23. This data collection is used to inform appropriate resourcing for local authorities, and it allows us to monitor the distribution of products by Fife Council and highlight any good news related to the number of products we have distributed.

Data collection may also be used in the event of budget overspend in order to present a case to Scottish Government for its evidence-based 'bid in' fund, which will be available from 2022/23-2025/26. This will be made available to local authorities to support delivery only where evidence shows full funding allocations have been used as a result of increased uptake.

The provision will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis and will be based on the continuation of Scottish Government funding and any fluctuation in demand for products. It will be reviewed against the guiding principles as set out at the beginning of this Statement and will use feedback from Fife's communities to test whether it is meeting their needs.

This Statement will be reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect changes in provision.

Version control

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