

23 December 2021

Aoibhinn Treanor  
Clerk of the Education Committee

By email c/o: [aoibhinn.treanor@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:aoibhinn.treanor@niassembly.gov.uk)

Dear Aoibhinn

### **PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) BILL**

I was contacted by the Local Government & Housing Regulation Division Secretariat of the Department for Communities (DfC) on 15 December 2021 with a request that Council provides its view on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill by 23 December 2021. The first opportunity the Council had to consider this request was at its meeting on 22 December 2021. Council welcomed the invitation to provide its views but given the limited timeframe has not had the opportunity for a detailed consideration and discussion of the proposals. We would in future welcome earlier engagement on such issues that potentially affect Council.

The Council is fully supportive of Clause 1 which places a duty on the Department of Health to make period products free of charge within Northern Ireland by all persons who need to use them. Council is very aware of this issue and indeed has itself operated a pilot whereby supplies of sanitary items were placed in seven community centres across the Borough where, it was believed, there would be the highest level of demand. The centres selected hosted summer schemes, youth clubs and other events which attracted girls and young women. While the items were only used occasionally, the total cost was low - £450 was spent on supplying the items to service the seven centres for six months, and there remained a considerable amount of leftover products at the end of six months.

The Council also wrote to the Department of Education in 2018 to ask that they consider providing sanitary products within local schools and colleges, free of charge, given the impact period poverty can have on the lives of girls and young women.

Clause 2 of the Bill provides Departments with the power to specify which of its public bodies the requirement to provide products would apply to – so the DfC could opt to apply or not apply it to Councils – but there doesn't appear to be scope for Departments to limit the extent of the locations and people to whom the selected public bodies must provide the products. Therefore if Councils were required to supply the products in all its premises this would apply to its 9 staffed office buildings, 6 leisure facilities, 27 pavilions, 20 community centres, 22 public conveniences, 8 household recycling centres, 3 cemeteries with offices and a range of other council buildings and facilities used by third parties. We have been asked to provide as full a response as

possible on the logistical, financial and legal impacts, but given the vast number of Council premises, and many unknown factors such as the uptake rate, requirements as to which products must be supplied and how (e.g. could they be placed in a basket within toilet facilities or would we have to install and provide dispensing machines), it is impossible for us to estimate the logistical, financial or legal impacts at this stage. It is not clear who would cover the costs, but the Council would request that they would be covered by the Department if the duty was extended to local government.

A further point Council would make in relation to the blanket application to all premises owned by a public body would be that more targeted placement would arguably be more effective at reaching those in need, for example, a young person may feel more comfortable accessing the products from their local youth club, which might be run by a non-public body such as a church, rather than from their local town hall. The community and voluntary sector would be key stakeholders to engage with when rolling the legislation out.

Council believes the principles set out in the Bill of easy access, dignity, choice and publicised arrangements are relevant, proportionate and comprehensive. Council would also welcome the publication of guidance and the duty to publish information imposed on each Department.

Overall, the Council is supportive of the Bill and is willing to work with the DfC to explore how best Councils can play their part in ensuring that period products are free of charge to all those who need them.

Yours sincerely,



**STEPHEN REID**  
**Chief Executive**