

Briefing Note

Elected Member Briefing – Period Products Provision: Community Access

Elected Member Briefing Note Ref. No. 2025-17

About this Briefing Note

Briefing by: Emma Perring, Team Leader – Community Planning

Date: 11th November 2025

Subject: Period Products Provision: Community Access

Public

if exempt or confidential explain risks and consequences.

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide members with information on:

- the statutory responsibility of the Council to support the free provision of period products to anyone who needs them;
- local provision and learning from this, from autumn 2022; and
- changes to this provision.

It is also an opportunity to update on the provision within Schools and Colleges.

Background

The Legislation

The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 (“the Act”) requires local authorities to ensure period products are provided free of charge to anyone who needs them. Products should be easily accessible in ways that respects the dignity of those obtaining them. There should be a reasonable choice of different types of period product.

Section 1 of the Act places a duty on local authorities to make period products obtainable free of charge to anyone who needs to use them; it is the responsibility of the Community Planning & Development Service. Section 2 places a duty on education providers to make products available free of charge on their premise, for pupils and students during term time; this is the responsibility of Children’s Services.

The legislative Guidance of the Act provides guidance to local authorities, education providers and specified public service bodies¹ about the exercise of their functions, in order to ensure that everyone in Scotland who menstruates can have reasonably convenient access to period products, free of charge, as and when they are required. This includes visitors to Scotland for the duration of their stay. Responsible bodies are not compelled to follow the Guidance, but must have regard to it when putting in place arrangements to exercise their functions.

The Guidance

The Guidance aims to ensure that everyone who needs period products can access them freely and with dignity, addressing period poverty and promoting menstrual health and well-being across Scotland. The Key Points are:

- **Duty to Provide Free Period Products:** Local authorities are required to ensure that free period products are available to anyone who needs them. This includes providing products in a way that is dignified, accessible, and reasonably easy to obtain.
- **Access Points:** Local authorities must establish and maintain locations where period products can be accessed for free. These access points should be distributed throughout the local area to ensure that they are accessible to everyone, including in schools, public buildings, and other community locations.
- **Product Choice and Quality:** A variety of period products should be offered to meet different needs and preferences, including tampons, sanitary pads, and reusable products. The products provided should be of good quality.
- **Awareness and Information:** Local authorities must take steps to raise awareness about the availability of free period products and provide information on where and how they can be accessed. This includes clear and accessible communication strategies to ensure the public is well-informed.
- **Collaboration and Partnership:** Local authorities are encouraged to work with schools, colleges, universities, and third-sector organisations to ensure a broad and effective distribution network. Partnerships can help reach different community groups and ensure widespread access.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** There is an obligation to monitor the implementation and uptake of the provision of free period products. Local

¹ None have currently been specified by Ministers.

authorities must collect data and report on the measures taken and their effectiveness in ensuring access to period products.

- **Equality and Non-discrimination:** Provision must be inclusive and non-discriminatory, ensuring that all individuals who menstruate, regardless of gender, age, or background, can access free period products.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Considerations:** Local authorities should consider the environmental impact of period products and promote sustainable options where possible. This includes encouraging the use of reusable products and ensuring that disposal facilities are available and environmentally friendly.
- **Funding and Resources:** The Scottish Government will provide funding to local authorities to support the implementation of this duty. Local authorities are responsible for using these resources effectively to meet the Act's requirements.

Local Provision of Section 1

In order to prepare for implementation of Section 1 of the Act, the Council held a public consultation during May-June of 2022 and began testing different methods of provision.

In August 2022 a variety of non-reusable products were distributed to around 75 community venues across the length and breadth of Shetland. [Online provision](#) has been available since August 2023, broadening the offer of products to include reusable items.

This provision has been supported by communication materials and campaigns.

The Council's [Statement of Provision](#) states the following:

“Shetland Islands Council is committed to ensuring that everyone in Shetland who may need to access period products can obtain them free of charge as and when they are required. Over the last two years we have been making products freely available in selected venues and via specific services in the community, positively impacting on some of the most vulnerable in the community.

We will:

- Ensure all products are free of charge and easy to obtain
- Consult with those people in our communities who will require the products

- Ensure a reasonable choice of both single use and reusable products are offered
- Ensure due consideration is given to those who may face additional barriers, including those who are BME, LGBTQ, disabled, homeless, victims of domestic abuse etc.
- Engage with organisations working with groups and individuals including those with equalities issues to ensure the broadest range of access is achieved.
- Work with strategic partners in the Community Learning and Development Partnership to identify premises and distribution methods for providing access in a way that maintains the dignity of those seeking access to period products.
- Ensure effective communication of which products are available and where these can be accessed to our citizens.
- Ensure that provision will be regularly monitored and reviewed.”

Local Provision of Section 2

For information, products are available in toilets in schools. For students in further education looking for products, the council’s website lists pick-up points for free products. All schools are re-stocked once a term.

For pupils attending a school in Shetland or pupils who are being Home Educated there is an order form on the council’s website for home delivery of up to 12 free products (for either a one-off trial box or three-month subscription). Reusable products are also available in addition to the 12 one use products. In Quarter 3 of 2025/26, there are 149 pupils using the home delivery service.

Children’s Services continue to explore ways to reduce stigma across schools.

Key points

Having tested these approaches, Community Planning & Development circulated a survey to the general public and to community venues, in January / February 2025, in order to inform ongoing provision of this service.

A summary of the feedback received from individuals was:

- There was praise for the scheme, including the provision of access to reusable products
- There is a lack of awareness of the scheme, particularly the option to order online, including reordering using this option

- There is a value placed on accessing the products from venues within the community, particularly in an emergency; however, feedback is that there isn't sufficient stock in these venues to be able to take supplies home
- Proportionately, more people are accessing products through Public Toilets, Leisure Centres, Health Centres and Islesburgh, than Community Halls, for example.

A summary of the feedback received from venues was:

- Those venues with paid staff generally find the scheme easy to use and implement, although there is a mixed picture, in terms of use of stock;
- Other venues are positive about the scheme, but a number highlighted the low turnover of stock and potential for products to go out of date.

Consideration of different options based on the legislation, having regard for the guidance, available budget, staff time and storage has led to the following changes for long-term implementation:

- Opportunities to order in bulk online, for individuals will become the focus, with increased promotion:
 - This reflects the survey feedback that, at the moment:
 - individuals are finding there is insufficient products at many venues, to be able to take supplies home, whilst home delivery is the most convenient and dignified method of getting products and was the highest preference from respondents, to the survey;
 - there is a lack of awareness of the opportunity to order online.
- A reduction in the number of community venues, to ones that have:
 - Paid staff
 - A high turnover of products
 - Are open for a significant part of any week
 - Geographic coverage.

The venues that will continue to stock products will reflect the feedback from the recent survey: both where venues found it easy to support the scheme, and where the majority of individuals currently access products – namely Health Centres, Leisure Centres, Public Toilets, alongside key Lerwick venues (Library, Islesburgh, the Family Centre, 8 North Ness, Mareel, Youth & Employability Hub, Market House) and through Community Pop-Ins. Those islands and more remote areas, without any of these facilities, will have products through community organisations or NHS nursing clinics.

NB: Impact assessment have been carried out to ensure that potential effects on equalities and island communities have been considered in determining which venues will continue to stock products.

These venues will be able to order, in bulk, online. This will remove the need for storage of products and reduce staff time, currently required to make up and deliver orders, as they come in.

Last modified on: *11/11/2025*

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