

Access to Period Products Consultation

Shetland Islands Council is part of the Scottish Government scheme to make period products freely available to anyone that needs them. Approaches in Shetland have been tested over the last couple of years.

This short paper sets out the findings.

General Public

A survey was circulated via the media and social media between 24th January and 14th February, seeking feedback from people, on the approaches. Hard copies and support to complete, were available on request.

There were 236 responses, all online.

Of the 236 who responded, 173 (73%) had accessed products (either through community venues or by ordering online).

Those Not Accessed

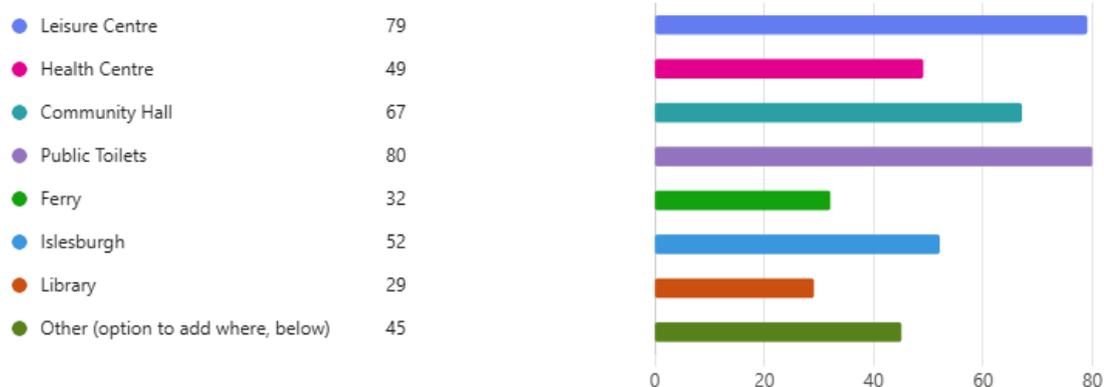
Of the 63 (27%) who hadn't accessed, to date, 25 stated it was because they didn't need them and 2 because they didn't want to. 18 said that they didn't know they were available and 10 said that they didn't know how to access them. 4 didn't like the choice of products. There were 2 comments questioning the use of public funds to make products free to anyone.

Access through Community Venues

Of those who had accessed products, 151 (87%) had accessed them from community venues. The venues with the greatest access were Leisure Centres (79) and Public Toilets (80), followed by Halls (67), Islesburgh (52) and Health Centres (49). Less had accessed on Ferries (32) or through the Lerwick Library (29).

Of those who mentioned 'Other', 14 stated at school / college setting; 4 at the Gilbert Bain Hospital and 5 at Mareel. The remainder were workplaces mentioned in the list of options (e.g. care centre), Council offices or community venues.

When using these findings, the number of venues within the categories, should be considered.

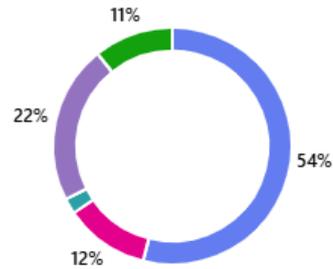


Online Access

Of those who had accessed products, 53 (31%) had accessed online, whilst 120 (69%) had not.

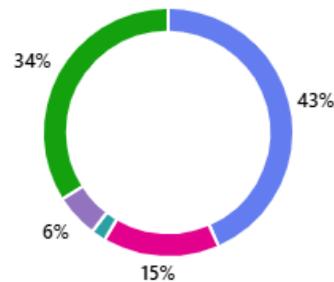
Of those 120 who stated they had not accessed online, the main reason given was that they didn't know they were available (75). 30 stated that they were able to access in the community, whilst 16 didn't know how and 3 didn't like the choice of product. Of those who selected 'other', no one provided additional information.

● I didn't know they were available	75
● I didn't know how	16
● I didn't like the choice of products	3
● I can access products in my community	30
● Other (space to write why, below)	15



Of those who have ordered online in the past, but no longer do, 8 access conveniently in their local area, 3 didn't like the choice of products, 1 stated the delivery time, whilst 18 selected 'other'. Of these, the main reasons were that people had ordered reusable products (7) or they didn't realise they could re-order (4). Other comments included: 'they stopped being sent'; 'I can't remember how to order online'; 'I didn't receive my order after 2 months...much longer than mentioned on the site'

● I still order online	23
● I can access in my local area conveniently	8
● Delivery time	1
● I didn't like the choice of products	3
● Other (space to write why, below)	18



Other Comments

85 people chose to add additional comments.

Of these, the majority of comments praised the service, highlighting the support provided to low income households, making them available for an emergency, reducing any stigma associated with periods. Comments included:

An utterly fantastic service, and one that is very much appreciated.

I think free products is such an essential policy, and I love how accessible they have become.

It demonstrates that the SIC are realising what a huge impact access to period products have on participation in various areas of society. It can really make a positive impact on well-being, feeling confident that you can take care of your needs during your period, a time where you often feel more vulnerable.

Made a big difference as I am in a low income so can access the products for free as well as for my daughters. Health visitor also brought some along which I appreciated and still offers them.

This has been the best thing ever. Especially when a period catches me out.

I'm always pleasantly surprised to see when there are period products available, I've used them all over Shetland e.g. Bressay Ferry, Islesburgh, Walls public toilets!! Such a super initiative and so glad to see them readily available and people respecting it and not abusing the system.

This is an essential service. Not only for people who can't afford to buy it, but for all our girls and young women. It will help our young people to see free products as a right.

My preteen daughter is anxious about finding herself unprepared if her period starts unexpectedly. She is reassured by there being period products available in public toilets.

Like how free products everywhere normalises the conversation of periods (for both women and men!). It is easier to talk about now with free products being so visible!

There were some comments about whether they should be available to everyone, whilst others felt there was some stigma about everyone being able to benefit from them being freely available.

A small number of respondents highlighted the value of reusable products, and that this scheme was promoting them and encouraging more people to start using them.

Some respondents didn't know about the scheme, or that they could access free period products, with a few wasn't aware that there was access to reusable products or online access.

How do I access them online? Could there be a QR code in public places to order them?

There were some comments about the quality and type of product available, stating they could be uncomfortable, with a preference for better quality brands. There was also a request for more pads than tampons to be available, and with heavier absorbing types. However, one respondent highlighted the value of Hey Girls, as they don't use carcinogens and endocrine disrupters.

In terms of stock available, several respondents mentioned that there is insufficient stock in venues to take home a supply.

Two respondents requested products to be available in Council workplaces, whilst another two highlighted that the scheme had resulted in littering as a result of young people taking the products outside of venues.

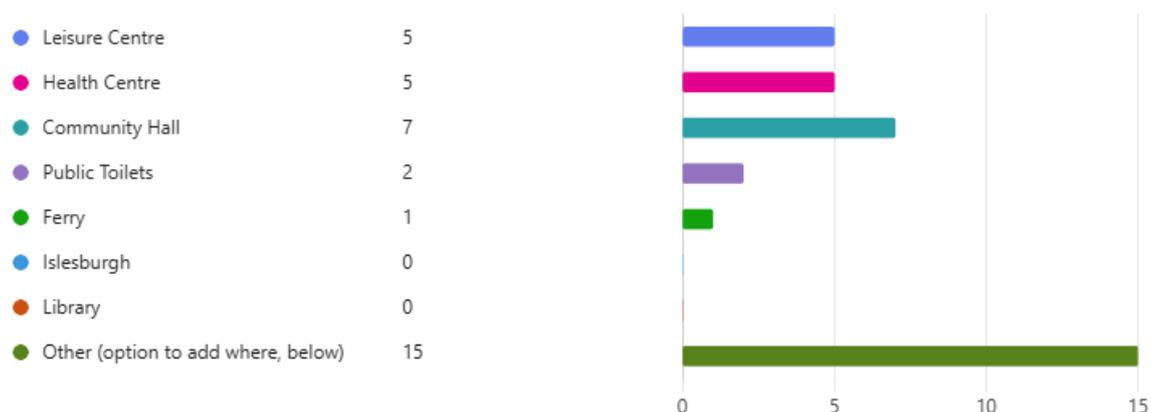
In summary, taking into account the number of venues, and that some responses related to the provision through schools and colleges:

- There was praise for the scheme, including the provision of access to re-usable 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.

Community Venues

A survey was circulated via email, open between 24th January and 14th February, seeking feedback from all those Community Venues known to stock products.

There were 35 responses, all online.



Within Leisure Centres and Health Centres, who responded to the survey, there is mixed up take – with some stating that products go relatively quickly, and others stating that they go slowly, with the potential for some stock to go out of date. One explanation for this is that other places, close by, also stock products. Feedback from these venues is that restocking and stock control is easy to do.

The Council's public toilets and ferries both also provided feedback that stocking products is straightforward.

The Community Halls and those 'Other' venues in local communities, who responded to the survey were generally positive. Of these 14, 5 highlighted the low turn-over of stock and potential for products to go out of date, with one suggestion about providing venues with a budget, to allow groups to buy, as and when needed. In general, feedback about the ease to restock is positive, with suggestions to provide less stock, that pads tend to go more quickly, and that the whole bags were confusing.

Three of the 'Other' venues were private businesses / community shop, whilst two were museums that stated they had low use of stock.

There were other comments from Lerwick venues:

- The Family Centre find the re-ordering straight forward, with steady use of products
- Market House find re-ordering fine, but low use of products
- Town Hall find re-ordering fine, with low use of products, except on 'really busy cruise liner days as they get emptied' so they are taken away.

In summary:

- **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.**