

## Environment Committee – 23 May 2018

### Transcript of Item 9 – Plastics – Nappies and Period Products

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** This brings us to today's main discussion item on environmental issues related to single-use plastics. We are focusing on reusable period products and nappies. Can I welcome our guests? We have Mandu Reid from The Cup Effect; Alice Walker from Real Nappies for London; Kate Metcalf who is Co-Director of the Women's Environmental Network; Tracy Stewart who is the Director General of Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association; and we have Martin Capstick, Managing Director of the North London Waste Authority. Welcome to you all.

As a Committee we have been looking at the impact of single-use plastics on things like disposable water bottles and the problems that plastics in everyday items, like wipes, are causing to Thames Water. We are extending that work now to look at single-use plastics in period products, in disposable nappies and incontinence products as well. We have just had a very helpful practical session looking at some alternatives, therefore hopefully Members are well briefed on these items we are talking about.

I would like to start by coming to Tracy, why is plastic used in nappies, incontinence and period products?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** The type of plastics that are used in those products are very specifically chosen. They are very high-tech textiles. They are chosen primarily for their safety, also so that they work and do the job they are supposed to do and therefore the supply is consistent and ethical. There are many, many considerations as to what type of plastic is chosen. An example I gave to you, Caroline, if I may, was the back sheet on a nappy. It has to allow air and water vapour to pass through to allow a baby's bottom to stay dry while keeping the liquid in.

Another factor that is very important to us - and has really brought the carbon numbers down on disposable nappies - is the way in which we are able to really tightly pack them now. Years and years ago the packs would be big, wide and high. I used to push two trolleys around the supermarket with my two children, nappies in one and groceries in another. We have managed to get those packs down to a really compact size. They are absolutely rigid. If you cut the pack open it will immediately spring apart with the nappies bursting out because they are under so much pressure. That has not just happened overnight. It has not been a matter of simply squashing them and wrapping them tightly. It has been a matter of developing that film that has to be safe, has to work and do all the other things as well as withstand that pressure in the pack. Any ordinary plastic would just split and burst. The product would be wasted. It would not be good for the baby; the nappy would potentially split on the baby. To develop that, has been a very significant technology. Also, to develop the single wrap that goes around them as well. If you are talking about a pack that was that size and is now that size, you can imagine how many more you are getting into a truck. You are taking trucks off the road. You are using less raw material. You are using less energy. You are using less fuel and all the other sort of raw materials that go in. That is just one example.

That is why the materials are very specifically chosen. That is not to say that over a period of time they could not change. I do not doubt that the best minds in the companies that make those products are looking at innovation. It is always a very competitive thing, to always have the best product. However, right now those

are the materials that are best for the product. They are the ones that work the best and that is why they are chosen.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Thank you. Can I bring in Alice to comment on plastic in relation to nappies, whether you think plastic is needed in nappies?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Thank you. A standard conventional disposable nappy is nearly 50% plastic with superabsorbent polymers, the polyacrylates, inside the nappies. When there are cloth nappies available, which do a superabsorbent job already, there is opportunity. The problem is the end-of-use lifecycle of disposable nappies. Eight million nappies are thrown away in England, which is 3 billion a year.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Is that 8 million a week?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Eight million a day are thrown away, which is 3 billion a year. When you think of the end-of-use lifecycle for that, it is landfill or incineration. Today's cloth nappies reflect designs primarily created by parents solving problems. They have noticed how much waste nappies produces. There is an opportunity for research and development to pick up designs.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Thank you. Can I bring in Mandu on period products and plastic? A lot of women are not even aware there is plastic in period products.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** I spent most of my life being completely oblivious to the fact that period products contain plastic and other non-biodegradable material. I am 37 years old now. I was 26 when I first discovered a menstrual cup, which I believe you have been briefed on. It is a reusable alternative and lasts for ten years. I have used mine for the last nine years.

For me, the extraordinary thing was, why was I 26 years old when I discovered this for the first time? Why was I 26 years old before I realised what the period products I had been using previously contained? That really made me think that there is a job to do around making sure that everybody who is using these products has all the information they need so they can make an informed choice from a young age about the products they are using and what the alternatives that may well be available to them are. Why was I not at 11? Why cannot all the other girls in this city and in this country start thinking that through and making that choice from a super young age. The answer is pretty simple, in my view. What has worked against that information being spread, disseminated and shared is that products like these are a terrible business idea. I sell you a menstrual cup, Tony [Arbour AM], and I have lost you as a customer for ten years. The incentive is not really there for that information to be proliferated. Nor is the incentive there for people who are going to make a choice about what period products they use to be given full awareness, full knowledge and full disclosure of the alternatives.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** I would like to come in here because, in a sense, I take issue with the word "simple". It might be simple for you but how could it be simple because you were saying you did not know until a certain age. Therefore, I would ask you to reflect on the context you are talking about, a subject that is still taboo in huge parts of our communities, London being the most diverse community. There are communities here that are at the same stage as the country of origin of the grandparents in their homes. I do not think there is anything simple about this and we should not be using words like that because I think that is going to stop us moving on. I would therefore challenge you on that term "simple"; it is not simple.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** I absolutely accept the challenge, you are right. The layers of taboo and stigma compounds the issues I outlined. Baseline, there is a very kind of crude explanation for why this information is not out there but then there are layers on top of that, which clearly make the problem even more difficult. That is why for me it is extraordinary today, right now, to be here in the London Assembly

having an open conversation about menstruation with officials who are have the power to make a difference. We are doing a great job being here right now, having that dialogue.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** We are prepared to talk about anything. Some of us have been to sewage farms and actually seen some of the plastic products. We have spent a lot of time talking about poo and a number of other things therefore we are on a roll now.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** I am very focused on the culture of this, why people do not use alternative products or use the current products that there are. Is there a performance difference in the nappies and also in the menstruation products? As a consumer, I might just want the one that performs the best, is there a performance difference?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I would say there is. Menstrual cups are highly effective - more effective than tampons really - in terms of absorbing blood. However, in terms of the plastic issue we are questioning why in disposable menstrual products plastic is needed at all. I know there are products on the market that are disposables, are not reusable, which do not have plastic in. A conventional menstrual pad is 90% plastic, which is equivalent to four plastic bags that then do not decompose. Along with that it is filled with a load of chemicals therefore we do not actually know what is in our menstrual products. That is at the heart of the issue. If you go on the AHPMA (Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association) website, for example, it is hard to find out the exact list of ingredients that are in tampons and pads. If people knew the ingredients then they could decide, "I do not want to put those chemicals in my body or then put them into landfill". It is about giving consumers - as Mandu said - an informed choice to be able to make these decisions that are right for themselves.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Every woman is different; therefore, this is not about imposing one set of options on the people who would use these products. In my experience with the women I have worked with through The Cup Effect, we get a 77% uptake rate with women who try menstrual cups. For many of them their experience echoed mine. They find it to be more reliable, more convenient and more comfortable than the alternatives they used. I would not have used it for nine years if that was not the case, I can afford the regularly available products.

As a little technical thing, a menstrual cup like this can hold up to three times the capacity of your average pad or tampon. I normally do this demonstration with red wine, which I am not going to do here and now, which proves that. Unless you have a very heavy menstrual cycle you can go the whole day.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Should that not be blue wine because that is the traditional colour that we normally see on the television? I mean, really, it has to be blue wine because that is so natural, is it not.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Very good. Is there any way that consumers can find out at the moment how much plastic is in their menstrual products, or indeed in the nappies as well that they are using on their babies?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** The industry assures us of the safety of these products but will not reveal the details of the tests. It has been up to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and consumer organisations to do the tests on these products. When they did they found an unbelievable list of chemicals present; possible carcinogens, glyphosphate, chlorine dioxin and various other endocrine disrupting chemicals in conventional menstrual products. That is a huge consumer issue, why should the onus be on these NGOs to conduct these tests rather than the industry to provide safe products in the first place.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Tracy, do you advertise how much plastic is in the nappies?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** We do not advertise it but we are recognising that people - not just in this country but in other countries, particularly across Europe - are asking these questions. We do respect that that is something we need to be looking at. We are actively looking at that now. In fact, we have engaged with your organisation very recently on some more detailed discussion. We are very happy to take that further.

I have to say that all products are different. AHPMA is a trade association so we can only discuss generic terms. While the products are largely similar it would be down to individual companies to decide what they can and cannot reveal. In terms of operating within competition law and things like that, there are constraints. Products are entirely safe, absolutely entirely safe. I would not be sitting here now if they were not. I would not have used them myself, my family would not use them and so on.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** If that is the case then some transparency would be fine. I think that is happening.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** I agree with you but I do not want to leave here with an aspersion that products are not safe. If you test anything with the aggressive methods you can test anything with - the clothing we are wearing, the water in that jug, anything, your products as well - you will find things at whatever level, trace levels. That does not mean the product is not safe. That has happened with alternative products as well, I have to assure you.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Tracy, do you think there would be an appetite amongst the manufacturers of these products to provide more transparency?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** There is. I can confirm that and that is something that individually a number of them are looking at, and that collectively we are looking at.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** You mentioned competition. Are there any blockages to getting that transparency that we should be exposing?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** I am talking about competition law and disclosing commercially confidential information. That is something that is prohibited. I do not know how far that would go but I flag that up as a consideration when you are having these discussions. There are some limitations, particularly when you are innovating a product you cannot discuss that product or your future plans until that product is actually on the shelf. There are those kinds of things that we have to observe as well.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Why is it all wrapped in plastic? Menstrual products are not classified as medical devices therefore the excess packaging is not really necessary. They are not sterile products. Some of the fragrances, again, are a mixture of a whole cocktail of chemicals as well. There can be up to 3,000 chemicals in a fragrance. Why is that necessary in a menstrual product? I would say why do you need fragrance to be added to some of these products? That is what I would like to question.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That also brings us back to the taboo thing with the little packages where you have things wrapped in plastic that is covered in flowers as if it might be embarrassing to be found with a period product in your handbag, whereas those individual packages could always be put into a reusable bag in your handbag. You do not necessarily need them to be individually wrapped.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Tracy, I have a couple of questions around the interface with the producers of these products. You are the association that represents producers, is that right?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** The end producers, the end converters of the product.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** What do you mean, "the end producers"?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** The companies that put the products onto the market rather than the supply chain. They are the companies that either make for a customer, such as a retailer and the product will go out under the retailer's name, or they are the big brands that we all know.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Surely to get change we have to go back to the original producers. For instance, I sit on a committee in Brussels representing London. A Belgium company is the largest global producer of nappies and hygiene products. There was a recent survey there and there is no pressure on them to change, if you like, the information that is coming out about their product. In a sense, you are blocked in terms of anything you can do because you are representing the interface with the public but change has to take place at the manufacturing base?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** That is right, but there is a will to do so.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** What do you mean there is a will to do so?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** Because we are hearing that people are wanting to know more. At our organisation and at our sister organisation - remember I was here with somebody from EDANA the last time we sat in front of you - this is an active programme at the moment. We are looking at what more generically we can put out. I know that a couple of the bigger brands have actually now got listings on their websites of what is in their product. They are not going to go down into minute detail but they are going to give the main ingredients and what the product is largely composed of. Under the Consumer Product Safety Directive, they are meeting all of their requirements currently. I guess that is another thing to consider, that they are providing what they need to.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** A follow-up question because there is no meeting without Brexit now, is there, from where you are sitting clearly you have thought through the impact of Brexit on your organisations. Will we get more clarity? Will the cost of the products be higher given that there may well be additional tariffs?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** We are a long way from really knowing that, there is so little coming out at the moment. All of what you have said is a distinct possibility and probably quite likely. However, at the moment we have very little to go on. We would like to know more but there is very little information at the moment.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** There are implications --

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** There will be, for sure.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** -- in terms of information and costs.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** I would say so.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** We talk about the chemicals used in these products. We talk about whether they are unnecessarily packaged and fragrant. Are we in danger of telling the consumer what they want? Some women may like the colourful packaging or the fragrance. Are you saying that should be outlawed and that is wrong as well? Do you want to remove that choice?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** People need to have a proper informed choice of what the chemicals are in these fragrances, the health implications and the possible link to cancer and infertility.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** You say, "possible link". You could level that accusation at almost everything we consume, sit on or eat. If we do it that way the package will be an A4 piece of paper with possibilities written on it. Is that a risk?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** The packaging is creating so much waste per year. Disposable menstrual products, along with the packaging, generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year. That is an awful lot that we could prevent. The average consumer does not want to see all the plastic in the oceans and ending up in seas. This is contributing to that. It is about letting people make the proper informed decisions, with the right information.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** May I come in on that? This is a discussion on weight we are having with yourselves at the moment, we have had some very polite and open correspondence between us. However, I strongly dispute the 200,000 tonnes. We know exactly how much goes onto the market, we have the manufacturing data. Let me tell you that there is just over 15,000 tonnes dry-weight of product that goes onto the market. Even wet weight, saturated weight and adding as much packaging as you can, you could not make that into 200,000 tonnes.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** We have done a lot of research so I am happy to share our calculations

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Is this not a problem for the consumer? The point I am getting at is that we are getting close to people's opinion. I fully accept we would want as little waste as possible. I fully accept that some information is right. However, I wonder if we are angling at dictating to people what they are going to have or not. That is my only worry.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I wonder if I might comment on that. There is a very closely related issue and there are two questions; one is what is going into the product and the second one is how do we dispose of it. One of the things that we see a bit from our authority's perspective is that people assume that if you improve the nature of the product that is going in, that somehow makes it more recyclable at the end. That is not always the case. They are separate issues. One of the things that is important for consumers is helping them to understand the benefits but also the fact that just the fact something is good in one area does not necessarily mean it is perfect in everything. You are right, there is a real challenge on how you have messages that have enough detail for people who really want to take an interest but then do not confuse consumers in an unhelpful way. Particularly, what is the input and what is the disposal are two separate things that we need to communicate quite carefully.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Assembly Member Bailey, with respect to the alternative products that are out there, the ones that are more reusable, they - if you ask me - are a classic example of a public good, to use very basic economics. They suffer from suboptimal distribution because of market failure and

basic market failures around imperfect information. People do not even know they exist. Menstrual cups have been around since the 1930s yet a tiny proportion of people who could potentially use them are aware that they exist and do not even understand how they work. Then there is a slight monopoly factor whereby you have the big manufacturers who dominate the production of options that are out there. There are the positive externalities whereby the benefits of using a menstrual cup, for example, accrue to the entire community. There is no incentive really for the manufacturers to put that information out there. Therefore, there is a role for public authorities and others to ensure people have the information they need to make an informed choice. It is not about dictating to consumers. It is not about telling them what to do. It is about making sure that when they make choices they are doing so with full knowledge of what they are buying into and what might be an alternative they could consider.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** What you were saying applies to reusable nappies as well.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** This whole debate is not about how you manage menstruation but the impact of the products we use. That is what the debate is really about. I come from a background in medicine and I see this issue regularly. This is an opportunity for us to look at what the impacts are of the products we are using and to inform the public so they can make better informed decisions.

Can you please tell me what the environmental impacts of these products are?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** I am going to defer to Martin a little on the detail about impact. What I will say is there are various estimates out there but a middle-of-the-road estimate is that from puberty to menopause a woman will use in the region of 10,000 menstrual products, every single woman. That equates to about 150 kilograms worth of waste for every single woman. That equates to two minibuses full, for every single woman. There is a significant material volume that needs to be disposed of. I will hand over to Martin to demonstrate what that can mean in our sewer system but there are significant consequences to that volume of waste being generated as a matter of course.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** If I start off with nappies, which are bigger by volume. For the North London Waste Authority, they are about 3% of our total collections. We collect something like 800,000 tonnes of waste per year, therefore you get an idea of the size. Broadly speaking we spend £30 million a year on our main waste contract, which is our black bin waste disposal. Therefore 3% is in the order of £1 million. The North London council taxpayers are spending £1 million a year to dispose of nappies. The average cost of our services per resident is just over £30. If you are talking 3% of that you can work out that it costs a few pence per resident.

In terms of period products, I am less able to comment. They are a smaller amount of the waste stream but clearly, they would still be subject to collection and disposal at the same cost per tonne. To the extent that adversely affects Thames Water, or other water companies - I can understand that is much more the social focus - their disposal is a matter for themselves and the commercial therefore those do not come to us. Therefore, the costs of things that are flushed into the sewers is well over and above what we are having to pay for through the Authority.

If I can say, those are the identified costs. The other thing that is a particular challenge for us on nappies - again, I realise it is moving the debate slightly therefore I will not go too far in that direction - is people who are, if I may say, so impressed by the marketing of disposable nappies that they think they are recyclable, not that that is what the packaging says. There is a proportion of parents who think that disposable nappies are recyclable. They put them in their recycling. That contaminates the load. That then means we have some loads that go to our recycling facilities that then have to be rejected and disposed of separately. We do not quantify that by exact source but disposable nappies are a significant source of contamination. Again, helping

people to understand the right route of disposal is an important thing for us. That is probably enough of a statistic attack for now but I am happy to give you more details if you would like.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Let us talk about menstruation products and the impact on water. Are they all flushable?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** No, that is a huge problem. Over half, 60%, of women flush down the toilet. Maybe they do not know or it is because of the taboo around menstruation. They just want to flush it away and maybe do not know the impact. That has a huge impact on our seas, rivers and it gets onto our beaches. Menstrual products can take up to 500 years to decompose therefore that is another thing. The Marine Conservation Society did a beach clean. For every 100 metres of beach they found 4.8 pieces of menstrual waste. That could include plastic tampon applicators - again, why are they plastic, they used to be cardboard - and panty liner backing strips. All of that can end up in our sewer system and on beaches.

Even when it is in landfill, because of all the residues on these products, they leach into our soils and into our waterways. It is like a toxic soup, if you like, in landfill that is affecting our health.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Are the consumers given accurate information? When it says, "This is flushable" is it really flushable? When it says, "This is biodegradable", is it really biodegradable? Is that information accurate?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I think it says, "Do not flush" in tiny writing therefore people do not look. There is not enough information to know about that as well. People do not want to talk about it. As Mandu said, this is part of the whole culture of shame. Even some of the conventional manufacturers have played into that. Think of all the adverts never showing blood but blue liquid and it is all something you have to hide. That does not help to have honest discussions about how to deal with it.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** I have to ask one thing here, is there a problem with a lack of bins in toilets? Is that something that contributes to people flushing?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** That could be a factor, yes, definitely.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** I think it really varies. When I used to use disposable products, I would typically flush them. That was what felt more convenient for me. I was a bit lazy. It just felt like a bigger deal to wrap them up and put them away in the bin. That was what I used to do and I think I am not uncommon. If it is 60% I am certainly not uncommon. There was just never a moment where I had a dialogue with myself and where I was confronted by what the consequence of that might be. There was nothing to stimulate me to make an alternative discussion. There is a big gap there and work to do.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** If I might get one small point out of the way, the blue liquid is a requirement of the Taste and Decency Rules for advertising. That is why it is used. None of us are frightened of talking about periods.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** I mean it is so embarrassing, is it not, having periods for women. There are very few women who have them after all. We have no taste and we have clearly no decency.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** That is the reason for that. If I might also say that no sanitary protection products are flushable. They should not be flushed, absolutely not. We would be entirely with everybody here on that point. We do not want to see our



products causing a problem. We are looking at improving the labelling on products and hopefully it is going to be a fairly big change. When I was here last time we detailed the new guidance for wipes manufacturers, which is to bring the “do not flush” onto the top of the pack in a bold specified symbol of two specified sizes that are actually quite large. Those products are really doing it now. I probably cannot mention the names but they are very, very noticeable. There is mixed interpretation of the guidance but they have got until the end of October to get this on their packs. That is really important and it is leading the way. We are seeing other initiatives in some of the supermarkets where they are putting that symbol in various formats onto other products, which is great.

I can probably not get into too much detail saying that we have a code of practice for tampon manufacturers. The last time we reviewed that we specified the symbol. We are reviewing it again to see how much further we can take that forward as well. It is really, really important and we do not want to hear of those products causing a problem in sewers, that is vital to us.

There was a report that came out by Water UK, which was put together by the 11 water companies. The industry supported it and also the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs supported it. I am not looking to defend anything but I will say that surprisingly little femcare was found in that. The vast proportion - and possibly where there is some confusion over the weight figures - was wipes, absolutely non-flushable wipes. Of the blockages or identifiable masses that were examined, 75% were baby wipes alone. The vast proportion of the remainder was other types of wipes - like facial wipes and surface wipes - and some femcare. However, the femcare was literally a few per cent, which we were pleased to see. There were also one or two tampon applicators, which was a nice surprise.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** One more question about education. When young girls are about to start their periods should they get education in their classrooms and from their parents? Parents may not be fully informed but do the teachers discuss the range of products available for the girls to manage this very real biological situation they will be finding themselves in?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women’s Environmental Network):** They should do.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Does it happen in our schools at the moment?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** I think it is very rare that it happens. That is partly because a lot of the teachers themselves are not aware of the alternatives. They may not be confident, even if they are aware of the alternatives, to stand up in front of a classroom for some of the reasons that Assembly Member Arnold mentioned around the stigma and taboo and also just a simple lack of knowledge. There is a real gap there. One of the things that tends to happen across the country is the module where kids are taught about menstruation - how to handle it and how to manage it - is more often than not outsourced to the big manufacturers. You get the Tampax lady who comes in. She is the one who leads the session that takes the girls - usually the boys are kicked out of the classroom at that point - through, “This is what your period is and this is how you handle it”. Clearly there is an incentive and a vested interest in a disposable menstrual product manufacturer in not giving much airtime, if at all, to the alternatives. This is why some of the alternatives should be seen as a public good. There really is an opportunity for schools and teachers to be equipped with the knowledge and information to impart effectively to their students. It would make a big change in people’s ability to make an informed choice if we zoomed in on schools.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** I think there is a recommendation here too.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Indeed, recommendations are falling out of the air.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** We have been contacted by concerned parents who did not know that this was happening in their schools by some of the big brands and they were outraged. It was even done through the National Health Service (NHS) nurse and they were only given products from the big brands. Yes, quite a lot of parents have contacted us about that.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Thank you.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Maybe this is a question for my colleague, Assembly Member Sahota, who in a parallel life is also a general practitioner (GP). My question is: are we getting the messages out about real nappies to parents when babies are first born via the NHS, GPs and nurses, and getting those messages out? Also, are we getting those messages out for young girls? I think some of the messaging is too late in schools, starting with girls when they are 15 or 16. Maybe schools should be having those sessions with girls a bit younger. Are we also getting those messages out through the health service? People go regularly to see the doctor or the nurse. Is it at that point where those discussions should be taking place?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** That is a really good point. More can be done to raise more awareness of and education about the alternatives to disposable nappies at ante natal classes. I am going to use Hackney as an example. They do the Hackney Real Nappy Network. They do a lot of outreach there at the moment. They pop along to the antenatal classes. I have dropped off some of our leaflets to hospitals as well and they are happy to pass them on. However, it is dominated by disposable nappies. The first nappy a midwife puts on for the baby when the baby has just arrived is going to be a disposable one. There should be more options to say, "Here is the education. Here are the different types." Also, "Would you like your baby to be in a cloth nappy or a reusable nappy?" The parent can take the baby home in it. They have the choice of bringing the nappy in as well, which is a key message. They should not feel marginalised for bringing a cloth nappy into the hospital, being prepared, and things like that.

I definitely think education through NHS antenatal classes and the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) as well. It should not just be down to local authorities to be raising awareness and the messaging. More could be done as a collective whole.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** The problem is the big brands pay to get in the Bounty pack, £100,000. The smaller cloth nappies simply do not have that budget, unless the NHS completely commits to promoting it.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes, I think it should be a fair game really.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** It is not an equal playing field.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I strongly agree with Alice. The health service has a particularly valuable position in this because it is so trusted. One of the things is that you can put out information but if you put out information through the health service it is much more likely to be trusted. I know it has a lot to do but that makes it a particularly valuable place, in particular in the lead-up to childbirth when there is a series of interactions. It is not popping into your GP and, with any luck, you do not have to see them again for another ten years. It is part of a regular interaction therefore it does not have to be, "Here is a massive message, listen to it". It can be helping parents to prepare and think. A bit of intelligence we get is that parents generally who go for reusable nappies think about it in advance. They do not have a baby and suddenly go, "Right, I better go and buy a load of reusable nappies". Helping people to think a couple of months out would be a really useful thing. That is not forcing people.

I definitely understand that although they are significantly improved from when I had children still some parents will choose not to use them. Indeed, some parents who strongly favour reusable nappies will also sometimes use disposable nappies if they are out on a trip or maybe their childminder requires that. Again, it is getting parents to understand that it is not an all or nothing choice. You can think about using them. If we

could develop a second-hand market - I am not saying the NHS should develop a second-hand market - again, that makes it easier for parents to experiment.

That leads me to say can the NHS be a gateway to more of a parental network that helps to demythologise the challenges of reusable nappies? Putting all the weight on the health service - expecting one person to have one conversation and say that as a result of that we transform the world - will not quite get us there. It is part of a process. It feels to me like it is part of the steps.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Certainly in terms of any form of behaviour change it is having regular messaging from multiple sources. That is why I was asking that question as to whether or not that would be helpful. Thank you for that.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Nurseries are a really big aspect and I do not think we mentioned it. Applying a model of saying children who are in the nurseries can be wearing reusable nappies. There could be a laundry service that provides the cleaning of them. To show support to a parent who would like the baby to be at nursery wearing a reusable nappy, and not to say, "No, you are not allowed to wear them". It is making that clear and not marginalising parents who do use reusable nappies.

There is education for midwives as well, to show them cloth nappy innovations. Maybe they still have a bit of traditional views of what a cloth nappy is.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** The time we are in is so important and this discussion is so important that I would ask through you, Chair, we contact the Royal College of Midwives (RCM). I would hate for us to be thinking they are not already doing this. Good practice is usually at the leading end of change before it becomes, if you like, authorised. The RCM would be able to give us that information. I totally agree with you. As Martin says, it is a series of meetings and interventions at that point of life - I did a bit of it myself - where you are that person's trusted adviser. That is a good point but I would not want us to go away thinking that is not being done now.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** We will definitely ask for that to happen.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** I want to make one comment, that manufacturers do give free gifts to new mothers when the baby is born, a gift pack. I think the education process has to start from our schools. Let us not medicalise having babies or periods more than it needs to be because it is a normal physiological event. Education in schools is very important for girls about to start menstruation. The build-up to a pregnancy is a long-term thing and there needs to be discussion about that. Also, help groups for mothers and babies are very important. I remember the days when babies were brought home and you went to your neighbour to ask for good advice rather than going to the GP. It is a community effort with support groups that this is what we should be doing.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** You mean more networking of information?

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Yes, rather than leaving it on the NHS or to the GP. The RCM will tell you also there is a shortage of midwives in this country already.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** This is why bottom-up schemes, like Real Nappies for London, are so important. It provides that extra support for knowledge and information to parents. It is crucial. It is so difficult sometimes to put the message out. More support for cloth nappy networks, cloth nappy libraries and bottom-up schemes, like Real Nappies for London, could help alleviate pressure. Also, like Martin was saying, going to antenatal classes and to hospitals if there is that direction as well.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** A cloth nappy library, is that where you borrow nappies or you borrow books?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Cloth nappy libraries are kind of a sharing/hiring system. One of the main challenges is the upfront cost to buy reusable nappies. There is a UK Cloth Nappy Network that has packs and parents can hire them out, use them for a few weeks, see how they go and then bring them back.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** How could these products be less environmentally impactful? Would it be possible to recycle these products? I am talking about disposable nappies and disposable one-use menstrual products. Is there any way they could be environmentally less impactful than they are now?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Thinking about, as I said earlier, what goes into them and what comes out of them and focusing on the disposal of them, it is very difficult because at the moment the waste that we collect in most boroughs either goes into a black bag, which is collected and then disposed of - in our case predominately to be converted into energy, to be burnt - or it goes into the green bin and then taken to the recycling facility where things are separated out. That recycling facility does not have the capability to recycle the contents of nappies.

I have been aware of developments in Italy, where they have developed a hygiene product specific facility that does enable materials to be taken out of hygiene products and converted into things that have another life. That would not be doable through an authority effectively, we do not have the scale to make it worthwhile. If you were going to go down that road there would then be the need for a facility. The question would then be how we would engage with producers to ensure you can supply and fund that facility. One of the challenges in the waste sector particularly is that there are some things that might be technically possible but are very difficult to be practically possible. Certainly, in North London, if nappies were made of materials that were a bit more recyclable, it would be very hard for us to do anything other than just dispose of them in the same way as now. That is why we do think reusables have a significant advantage. If we were looking at disposal, we would have to look at a broader producer responsibility scheme that would then need to be connected with collections and focused disposal in that way.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** You are almost talking a separate facility London-wide and being far broader?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Or even beyond London potentially.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** It would be a far bigger event, quite frankly.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I think that is right. As I say, my understanding is that is technically possible. We have not looked into the economics of it, what it will cost, but I think it will be on that sort of scale.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Shaun, can I interrupt you for a moment so we can welcome the children from Mowlem Primary School from Tower Hamlets who have come to join us. This morning we are talking about disposable nappies. Have any of you got younger brothers and sisters? Are they babies and do they have nappies? Do any of them use reusable nappies that get washed? No. In London there are an awful lot of nappies that have to get thrown away. We are talking about what happens to all those nappies and also talking about how you can get some nappies that get washed in the washing machine, which means there is not so much stuff to throw away. That is what we are up to. Welcome to you all.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Are manufacturers trying to make things more recyclable? If so, listening to Martin's comments, is it going to have any impact? He is saying there is more than just the fact there is recyclable material that needs to be taken into account.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** They can be recycled is the answer to that if the technology is in place. It does exist. In fact, only last year a 36,000-tonne plant was refused planning on the outskirts of London. It is a company that has existed for 30 or so years. They have good technology. They have set up in various countries. I do not want to speak on their behalf but I can just tell you what I know of the history they have of operating in various countries around the world. They have progressed their technology. They have come to the UK. They did have a small plant just outside of Birmingham as a pilot. They decided they needed to adjust the technology so they stopped with an intention of starting again. They were all ready to go. In fact, Caroline has met the firm I am talking about. They simply could not break through the planning problem of people saying, "We really want this but could you put it somewhere else, please?" That is the difficulty.

There is an operation in Wales that has been going on for quite a number of years now that deals with nappy waste in Wales. There is a company based on the West Country that has a food waste collection process, where you can put another system onto the front end that will remove the plastics and the rest of the nappy will go through with the food waste. They have the right kind of materials to make anaerobic digestion (AD), with food waste technology, work really well. Certainly, one of the main brands at the moment - you were talking about Italy - now has an operation in Italy and is looking to come to the UK with that. The other brands are doing the same.

Ultimately if the technology is in place - it can be small plants on farms or bigger plants like the one that was planned for outside of London - yes, they are recyclable and there is a market for the output.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** That is great. Almost to go back to Martin's comments, there is a difference between it being technically possible and it being physically possible, and also viable. In one sense that is an argument for reusables because the planning issue will always be an issue. If you can avoid that by having something that is recyclable, in my little head count that goes on the side of reusables being more viable and a more welcomed option.

My worry with the recyclables is scale. The scale at which the current disposables is being used is a huge problem for reusables. I wonder if there is more that can be done to make the reusables viable because I cannot see this scale issue being solved any time soon. We still have the rubbish that they generate, the chemicals in them, and the blockages of the sewers.

Just to drill down, are producers then working together with waste authorities as well to make these sites more abundant? Will they be around so a council can get access to this stuff?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association):** I get your point that planning is always going to be a problem. However, we are moving in that direction. It is definitely the direction of travel and it has to be the direction of travel as well. At the moment, the priority is to make sure that the product is compatible with existing treatment plants that are there and in existence. They work very well in energy-from-waste when they are burnt. They have a very high nitrogen content. They are compatible with landfill technologies. They are compatible with diaper recycling technologies, whether that is AD with a plastics-removing system at the front end, or whether that is a specific technology that is going to reconvert the plastics and the cellulose in them. There is a very good market, apparently, for pet litter, for the fluff pulp and so on. It is there and it can be done. It is just a matter of that technology being available for the products to be taken to.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Just a minor point about menstrual products. For Natracare, for example - that are disposable menstrual products but plastic free and organic cotton - they recommend on their website that you can compost their products. If you have a garden and a compost bin, they will biodegrade and you can put them in your compost bin. Obviously, if you are living in a flat, or how to do that on a big scale, it is maybe not viable.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That raises the issue of whether some of these products can be composted. The ones that get buried in landfill that have plastic in them, how long will they take to break down?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I think about 500 years.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** That is very speculative. They have only been around for the last few decades.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Yes. They have said that, with a disposable nappy, that if Henry VIII had been wearing a nappy, we would still have his nappy. It would still be in landfill now. That is how long it takes to break down.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** On the BBC website, I saw that they had some charts explaining the effects of plastics. There was a chart saying that a disposable nappy takes the same amount of time, about 400 years, as a plastic bottle to break down in landfill. Now, we are doing a lot on diverting plastic bottles and so it is really great that we are talking about it, but we have to remember the waste hierarchy and that waste prevention and reuse is on the top. With reusables, we are eliminating that waste and so the end life is that, but then, with eco-disposables, they are trying to get their products to be more biodegradable. Some products are claiming to be about 77% biodegradable now in landfill. However, the issue is, if everything is being sent to an incinerator at the moment in London, then it does not really match up.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** We do have a certain amount that goes to landfill, do we not, Martin?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** No, it is around 9% for our authority. That is very significantly down from what it has been in the past, but there is some.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Just to clarify, 9% of the waste that you collect goes to landfill?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Yes.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** And the rest?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** It either is recycled or goes to our energy-to-waste plant.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Is that a typical figure? That seems very high.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I think that we perform pretty well, actually, but generally the introduction of the landfill tax has encouraged all waste authorities, really, to look at alternative ways of removing and disposing of waste. Generally, we have seen the development of energy-for-waste plants in and around London, latterly, for example, a riverside one in Bexley, which is a new facility. Generally, landfill is significantly declining as a way of dealing with waste, particularly in London where we are space constrained.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Could I add to Martin's point? I found out last year that only 12% in London of all the household waste was sent to landfill.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** When we talk about the environmental impact of these products, both reusable and one-use, is there a difference in the energy used to produce them in the first place? I suppose, if something is going to last a long time, is it off sturdier component parts? Does it take more energy to produce? Is there a significant difference in how you produce these things?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** The Life Cycle Assessment that was run by the Environment Agency and published in 2008, which was an update of one that was published in 2005, showed that there was pretty much equivalence between the two when you take him to account everything throughout the whole life cycle of products. As you say, one has longevity and the other has not and will use water and that water then is wastewater that goes into a wastewater treatment plant, whereas ours go into landfill. When they are thoroughly examined, they are about the same and so we say it is.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Are you talking about washable pads compared to --

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** No, I am talking about nappies, sorry.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Nappies? All right. The way I understood the Life Cycle Analysis the 2008 one, is that it does say that reusable nappies are up to 40% better for the environment, following a guideline of not tumble-drying your cloth nappies but line-drying them, not washing above 60 [degrees]. What has failed to be noticed by the media is that cloth nappies are 40% better.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** It depends if people stick to those stipulations. The problem we have in London is the ability to line-dry is a little bit of a luxury for most people, quite frankly. I used to live in a flat on the fifth floor and the tumble-dryer, unfortunately, got used. We have to look at the reality of these things. You say it is 40% better, but how? Is that from an energy point of view? What is the clear comparator here? If you are asking us to recommend that public resources are used to promote a particular thing, we have to be very certain that that thing does have the public good, as you say. When you give us a figure of 40%, it has to be a comparator that we can easily explain to people who are not as deeply interested as we are now. Do you see what I mean? I do not understand what that 40% means.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Assembly Member Bailey, I wonder if we should get those figures sent to us after the meeting. That might be helpful.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Just before I move on to Assembly Member Cooper, there is one thing I just wanted to clarify. When the plastics in these disposable products are burned in incinerators - and it seems that 90% of the disposable nappy waste is being burned - what is the environmental impact from burning those plastics? Do have any information on that, Martin?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I can give you a separate note on that, but basically our incinerator is subject to emission standards and emissions monitoring. We have to make sure that what emerges from there is filtered so that it matches Environment Agency standards.

A little plug: as you may know, we are developing a new energy recovery facility, which we hope to open in five or six years' time, which will have even better performance than our current one, but it is absolutely essential

that the emissions from our energy-from-waste plant, as with all of them, must comply with Environment Agency limits. I can give you a note on what actually comes out of our facility at the moment.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That would be helpful. If there was less plastic going through your plant, would that make your life easier? Does that make it easier to run?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** That is a very good technical question. I will have to check on that. It certainly must be the case that on the whole plastic does generate more toxins when it is burned. Effectively, we have very efficient filters and so whether that just makes the filters work harder may be one of the impacts which could have a higher energy use there, but we will give you the --

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** It would be useful to understand the cost of that, yes.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Sorry, just for completeness, I should also add of course that when we burn we also generate electricity, and so that produces benefits to the country and income to us. That is just to ensure that I give both sides of the coin.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Sorry, just to come in on that specific point before I move on - and I want to ask Alice a few questions - it might have some benefits in needing less downtime for cleaning of filters. Although it does produce energy, burning plastic is a pretty mad way to use a resource that contains a lot of embodied energy and also fossil fuels contained within it in the first place. There surely has to be better things to --

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** All of those things are true.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** -- feed the incinerator with if we are going to put things into incinerators at all.

On reusable products, Alice, we have touched on this quite a lot. You have waved a few things around and I wonder, now that we are doing the webcast and we have talked about this a bit with you already, could you give us a bit more information about the range and diversity of the alternatives that are available? We have also touched on the fact that perhaps they are not being made known to people as being available in terms of reusable nappies.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** I guess in the cloth nappy world, there are three main types: all-in-ones, flat nappies and also shaped nappies. Would you like a demo?

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Yes, if you want to demo them a little bit, as in wave them around. I am not asking you to wear them, obviously!

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** This nappy I have here is a birth-to-potty all-in-one. This is a Bambino Mio.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** This would be a nappy that you would purchase and then you would use completely from the moment until the child is potty-trained?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** You might want to have two or three of them, but you would not need to change after year nought to 18 months old to purchase another nappy; it would go all the way through?



**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** The birth-to-potty will go all the way through, yes.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** You would want more than two or three, though.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** On average, you would be looking at about six nappy-changes a day for disposables and so about 5,000 over the 2.5 years that a baby is expected to be in nappies. For cloth nappies, it varies a little bit depending on the age at which you start using reusables nappies. From eight weeks to six months, you might need about 20 reusable nappies in your stash, but that is an average and it is normally 18 to 24. From six months onwards, you would need about 15 nappies. That goes on a cycle where you are washing it say, three times a week.

I guess we can talk about the costs a bit later, but in terms of nappies this is the all-in-one. You can also have them shaped. They vary as well in materials: cotton, organic cotton, bamboo, hemp, microfibre. They are the types of materials. Then you have your traditional styles as well. You can have flat nappies, which traditionally were called “terries”. The idea with pre-folds is that this is held in by a nipper, but you do not always need it. A pre-fold you would put out like this.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** That is a completely flat nappy that you then fold up?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes. There are three main folds, really. A new-born fold is one I can show, but then after a while you can just fold it and then plonk it in the wrap when your baby gets older. The best thing about the nappies is that they are so versatile. You can pick up nappies for free. Parents pass on their reusable nappies they no longer need them. The upfront cost could be eliminated completely.

I will just show you, as we are here. You could just bring it in, plonk your baby on top, bring it down and wrap it in. Sometimes the wrap holds it in place, but you might need a nipper just for that time. Then wraps vary from shape and they adjust by size or they can go up as well from birth to potty.

Yes, they are very versatile. That did not take too much time to put on.

**Tony Arbour AM:** You did not wash it.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** You did not wash the baby.

**Tony Arbour AM:** In real life, you would wash the child, the child would be wriggling, and it would take a lot longer.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Obviously, do not pick up the baby like I did.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** I do not think the child wriggling or needing to be washed would vary as to whether or not you were trying to put a disposable nappy on or a real nappy on. Those factors would be common in both experiences and so I do not think we need to worry too much about that. The point you are trying to make is that it took possibly very slightly longer to do the wrap and put the nipper on and then put the outer pant on than it would if you just pulled on a disposable.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** It is good that “Nappy Man” was able to share his experience!

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** We are delighted to hear that Tony has so much experience of

baby-changing.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Using the wrap, you do not need to wash them. You can just rinse them and they can be used multiple times. It is easy.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes, exactly.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** How long would these ones last? Would they go on from birth to potty-training as well?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** There are some varieties that might be suitable for smaller children and not so suitable for larger children and so then you might need to grade up, but then you might be able to get them from somebody else who has stopped using them - obviously washed in between, as Assembly Member Arbour seems concerned about that issue - and so you might actually have no upfront cost.

That brings me on to the next point, which you touched on. What are the financial benefits of the reusable nappies? Obviously, there is the issue of the convenience and the speed with which you can do the change versus not needing to go to the supermarket and buy huge selections of nappies. Also, there is the cost of those versus those because they are reusable.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes. Using cloth nappies you can save anywhere between £200 and £1,000 over the two-and-a-half years that a baby is expected to be in nappies.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** That is a not-inconsiderable sum if you have a family. If you are having several children, which is quite a common practice, that could be quite a considerable saving.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes. This is estimated by my calculations or what I think is the minimum amount that you need. The upfront costs of cloth nappies range between £100 and £300. Then you have to factor in the washing costs as well. It varies across the board but, in my mind, over a total week for disposables the weekly running cost is anywhere between £6 and £10. Then, for reusables, including the upfront weekly cost included and the washing, it is anywhere from £3 to £5.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** I will just check with Tracy that you are happy with those figures.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** No, I am not.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Does £6 to £10 sound about right to you?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** Like your products, ours range widely in price. Whereas we go from a few pence to maybe the late teens of pence, yours go from a few pounds to - actually, they can be really quite expensive - £20 or more. We work on a figure using the Life Cycle Assessment of a child needing 4,104 nappies in two-and-a-half years. Taking an average price of a disposable nappy - and we have been very fair to sit at 12 pence because you can buy them for a few pence or you can buy them for 18 or 20 pence, and we have said 12 pence - that comes out at a total spend of £500. You could economise by using the own-brand or you could use the most expensive, and a lot of parents will actually choose maybe a slightly less expensive nappy that they are going to change more frequently during the day and choose a different one for the night time. That does happen. That is how we have worked that out and I think that is a fair calculation.

At the end of the day, it is not for any of us to tell people how to spend their money. This is about consumer choice and I know very well that I would only use what I like best for my baby, and I can understand that. A lot of people would like that the best.

us.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** I am just saying it is about consumer choice and it is about people using what they like the best for their baby, and I said that I can fully understand that a lot of people would like that the best, but a lot of people prefer the convenience of --

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** We are not quite looking at it only from the consumer choice element because this is not the Economy Committee, this is the Environment Committee, which brings me on to the other side of the cost. We have not touched on the fact that rather than washing at home, you can also use a nappy-washing service, which is probably more cost-effective and probably uses less water. From the local authority point of view, my understanding is that the disposal of the black-bag waste which the nappies would end up in and then go into the incinerator is more expensive for the local authority than perhaps would be to run a real nappy service, but you would have to have that investment at the beginning. Where does that lie in terms of that balance for the local authority in terms of the cost involved?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** As I said earlier, we spend probably about £1 million a year for North London disposing of nappies, roughly speaking. If everybody in North London used reusable nappies, that would be £1 million less of council tax to pay.

What we do offer, working with Alice's organisation, is a voucher. Most of our boroughs offer a voucher for parents, which currently is £54.12, which is improbably precise, but that is our assessment of what we save if as a parent you decide to use reusable nappies. You can apply for a voucher, which effectively means that the money that we would have spent on disposing them, we give to the parents so that they can buy reusable nappies.

I would say that there is not overwhelming evidence that there are parents who say, "I was not going to but if there is £50 in it, maybe I will". That can be one of a number of factors. I do not think that is a factor in its own right. I agree with Tracy that there is lifestyle choice as well as cost, but then every little helps, as they say.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** How many people take the option to take up the voucher? How many participants in your voucher scheme do you think you have now?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** At the moment, we have just under 1,000 in North London.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** That is good and growing.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** How many boroughs is that spread across?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** That is seven boroughs, which are Barnet, Camden, Haringey, Hackney, Islington, Enfield and Waltham Forest.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** If you were able to quadruple that - assuming that there are that many parents across those seven boroughs, I would imagine very many more - it would then start to reduce your £1 million spent on disposal and, potentially, there might be a balance towards it costing you less overall?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Probably, given the scale, if we think that £54.12 is our calculation of what we would have spent, if we certainly reduce to some extent our costs of disposal and are giving equivalent vouchers to help the parents, then we do not particularly make more money out of it, but what we do end up with is a move of costs away from disposal into helping to do something more sustainable, which is a public good, really.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** You are saying it is cost-neutral but, environmentally, it is friendlier from our environmental perspective?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Yes, that is a much better way of putting it.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** We have explored some of the benefits for the parents, then, in terms of the finances. We have just touched on some of the environmental benefits as well. What factors do you think influence people to still choose the disposables? What do you think can be done to influence people away from the disposables? I am going to ask Alice first and then I am going to bring in Martin and then I am going to ask Tracy for her comments on that as well. I will stick with those three.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Brilliant. Obviously, there is convenience. Parents want something easy to put on. There is accessibility to the items as well. There is what Shaun [Bailey AM] was talking about earlier as well, drying space and the ability to be able to use them.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Washing and drying, and so potentially the nappy-washing services could be quite important there?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Exactly, yes, with economies of scale, doing it better, definitely. There is time as well. Parents are constantly on the move. That is a factor influencing consumer decisions as well. There is support. If it is a fairly new thing that they are treading into, they might feel that they need a bit of extra help. That could be support from a partner. If the carer of the child, like a grandparent or a parent, is not really wanting to use cloth nappies, then that might affect, say, a parent's decision or vice versa.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** There is not quite peer pressure, but if you are not surrounded by other people who have made the same choice, you feel different and an outlier in some way. We are going to talk about the period products in a minute with some questions from someone else, but I do wonder whether that makes people feel that they do not want to do it because they do not know anyone else who is.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Sometimes in our surveys we ask, "How many other parents do you know who use reusable nappies?" It is a very small number, like one or two people. Parents will use whatever nappies they want to use regardless of what is best. There are a lot of parents who say, "Yes, I will use cloth nappies", but then some do worry about what others might think. In general, just showing that there is a support network. Real Nappies for London does that and helps to provide support and that is good.

I guess, yes, price is not always a deciding factor for parents. They are looking at quality and supermarket-own brands as well. I am talking about disposable at the moment. There is a bit of competition there for you.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** It is a very big part of the market.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** You have not mentioned advertising and that must have pretty much of an impact on people. I do not think I have ever seen an advert for a happy baby crawling across the television wearing reusable nappies, or is that just me? Am I watching the wrong programmes?

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** How would you know?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes, you are completely right. In the media, it is always disposable nappies. If you see a picture of a baby on TV or anything, it is probably in --

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** They have usually paid for the ad.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes, it is the cost. Real Nappies for London does not have that cost to be doing wide advertising. I do not know. I cannot speak on behalf of the manufacturers of the cloth nappy industry. Maybe that is something that they could look into, but it is a difficult factor because I guess nappies are multimillions, are they not?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** Yes.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** It has become normalised in the culture that it is disposable, whereas in the past it was the opposite. It is a question of perceptions and changing people's perceptions around and that there are alternatives.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** That is why we are doing this whole thing around plastic and stopping people using single-use plastic water bottles through to people not sticking things down the toilet that are full of plastic, etc. Martin, did you want to come in on anything around choice?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Again, what evidence we have from dealing with communities is many of the points Alice made. It is slightly difficult because I do not want to be downbeat. On the other hand, if we do not acknowledge what the challenges are, we come up with solutions which actually do not resonate in the real world.

Amongst the things, in addition to what Alice said, which do have an impact are the fact that people still associate the comedy image of putting a fold-up nappy on a new baby, pick it up and the nappy falls off, which was a staple of 1970s sitcoms. That still is an image that people have of it, and the question is how we can get people to understand that they are much more user-friendly than they used to be. It is probably not grandparents and great-grandparents who will give that advice, which does come back to how we create more of a support network.

I would pick up the point that you made, which is that it is not so much peer pressure but there probably is a little bit of that. If I put my child in real nappies, then I have to stick with it. I cannot just experiment. I have to be fully committed. We just need to enable people to feel that they can try these things and it is not that you have to succeed no matter how it goes. Therefore, that causes people to avoid that choice because they think that once they have put themselves on that side of the argument, they have to stick to it. We should encourage people to have a go, if we can create the resources to enable people to do that.

One of the more difficult factors is just that when you are having a baby, your life is unbelievably complex. You are not just choosing nappies, you are choosing car seats, you are choosing cots, you are choosing everything. In an area where there is a strong norm at the moment, maybe people just go with, "I am already

agonising enough about what design of car seat to go for. I will not add nappies to the complexity". Again, just helping people to understand that it is manageable is important.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** In terms of the local authority members of the North London Waste Authority, there are seven that participate in the voucher scheme. In terms of the advertising of that scheme and getting people away from the current norm towards doing something else, how easy is it? I do not live in any of those boroughs. How easy would it be for me to find out details of that on any of those local authorities' websites? Is it very easy to find? Is it well signposted? Would I completely understand what I was looking at so that, when I am going through that sort of hugely life-changing moment of moving from not having a baby to having a baby and all these amazing new things that I suddenly need to think about, how easy are we making it for people to find that from the local authority end?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** That is a very good question. My recollection is that it is advertised on our Wise Up to Waste website, which is encouraging people to reuse, recycle and waste less. From that point of view --

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Would I be looking at if I was pregnant and about to have a baby?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** Exactly. That is the interesting question. The question is: where do families and individuals expecting a baby look?

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Not on a waste website!

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** That is harder to hit the right place. The answer is to try to cover as many places as possible. We were talking earlier about whether it is accessible through midwives, through visits to the NHS and through maternity clinics. I would say we probably have mixed success in that area. I would say, probably, as a parent, it would be fair to say that you have to look for it. Hopefully, if you look for it, you can find it, but what you probably will not do is stumble into it and say, "That looks interesting". That is a fair comment.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Then I would just say that probably more could be done in that area to make sure because, quite often, the website will have a scrolling advert for something on the very front page. Does it ever appear there? Who knows? Maybe we can make some recommendations, then, about better signposting towards this as a service or as an alternative.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Is it OK to just add a few things to you? That is from a local authority perspective, is it not? One of the main ways that parents hear about our scheme and about cloth nappies is word of mouth. There is a rise of social media. I have been working for Real Nappies for London for eight years. We used to code the website and we used to do so much, but now just having your mobile phones the internet is easy to have. It is so accessible that now parents, as soon as they hear about a scheme, they are on their phone and are already looking for things. Bloggers have helped so much recently, especially during Real Nappy Week. That was great. There are different avenues to explore.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Did you say "bloggers" or "vloggers"? I can see that this might be something that was really susceptible to doing a video blog on so that people could see how easy it is to put the real nappies on.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** There are vloggers, yes.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** It would help Tony because he has trouble with wriggling babies, perhaps not currently.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** This is actually right and I am really glad that you mentioned it because there are mum bloggers and dad bloggers who go out and normalise their cloth nappy routine. Parents can search for it and then find out more support and come to face-to-face events as well. It is really important.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** Certainly we know that when people are doing something for the first time, whether that be cooking or changing a baby or anything else, they quite often do go online to look at videos to get information these days. That is a very well-made point.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Leonie, I am going to be bringing Assembly Member Arnold in on reusable period products but, just before we do, just going back to the costs with Martin, you were saying that it costs £1 million a year to dispose of disposable nappies. From the figures you gave, you are giving out about £50,000 a year in vouchers for nappies. That leaves you with £950,000 a year just for the cost of disposing of disposable nappies.

Have you thought about running a nappy laundry service? There is a huge issue with nappy poverty and people having to get nappies from food banks. Have you thought about trying to set up a local authority reusable nappy laundry service in order to save your costs over disposal?

**Tony Arbour AM:** That sounds like a good idea.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I will comment on that. I will just do a quick bit of arithmetic. We are spending £1 million disposing of nappies. In addition, we are giving away about --

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** You are spending, yes, £50,000, sorry, and so it is £1,050,000. It is an even bigger budget for your nappy laundry service.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** The vouchers are over and above. It is not something that we as a disposal authority have looked at. The individual boroughs do the waste collection and I know that Camden of our boroughs, for example, offers parents a separate nappy collection, which is aimed principally at avoiding the contamination I was describing earlier, which is yet a further cost that I have not calculated.

We have not looked hard at what a nappy laundry service would look like. One of the concerns we would have would be how distributed the population who uses real nappies is. What you want to get is effectively a concentration so that you minimise collection and transport costs. That is one of the main challenges. Commercial services have been able to operate in that space as well and I am sure there would be a question as to whether we will be impacting on commercial services in that area.

I am not going to say now never, but from that point of view it is not something we have looked at hard, and I can just explain a little bit more. I am sure I can provide a note which just explains a bit more about what the nappy laundry market in north London looks like.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That would be really helpful.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** I will just add that there are two laundry services operating in London. North London has Nappy Ever After and then there is Number One for Nappies as well. There is really a huge gap in the south of London for laundry services.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Do those laundry services have a problem with finance? Could there be more discussion going on between the local authorities, who are having to pay so much to dispose of disposable nappies, and those?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Yes, there is room for discussion, and investing into infrastructure that helps use reusable nappies better is really good.

I would just like to go back quickly as well to the scheme. The Real Nappies for London scheme is not just for north London. It is also for Bexley and Lambeth at the moment. There are different boroughs happening. I just wanted to add that.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** If we are just going to add complexity, I would say that not all of our boroughs do vouchers. Some do direct cash for parents, but, anyway, that is --

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** There is lots of detail.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** The broad picture is right.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** My point is: would you actually be making a saving if you did this nappy service? You have missed a trick because, if you are giving this money out, it would probably be better pooled to provide the service. You would get more users and you get more bang for your buck. Actually, are these not sunk costs? Are you specifically collecting nappies or are they just part of your collecting activity and so you would not actually make a saving if the nappies were somewhere else?

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** That is a good question. The nappies in the main are just part of the general waste, but of course - not to go into too much detail - as for those collection costs, maybe your collections would be 10 seconds quicker if you had smaller bags, but that that would not make a huge difference. You would still be putting fewer tonnes of waste into the energy-for-waste centre, which would effectively be a cost saving.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** OK, it would be. I just wanted to understand. It just strikes me that with terry nappies or reusables, the problem is that disposable nappies seem like a technological advance. That is your challenge. If you use disposables, they feel like the new thing. They are the smartphone of baby goings-on and you need to --

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** There are people wanting to go back to --

**Shaun Bailey AM:** That is the case: you are saying "back". If you look at the volume difference, most people do not want to go back. You need to suggest that reusable nappies are a step forward.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** They are. Now a lot of paediatricians are coming on board with the social and health benefits because they are finding that because of the disposables, children are coming out of nappies at a later age and that is having a lot of social impacts in our society. There are lot of other benefits.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** I fully agree and the Chair wants to move on. I am just saying that if you want to get this moving, you have to have a look at how people operate. With lots of the things that this Committee deals with, people are trying to force behaviour change on the public, forgetting that the alternative is so convenient and so well advertised that you need to present this as a beneficial choice, a new thing, rather than just the



environment, because the environment makes sense to us but not to everybody else. Otherwise, they would all be environmentalists.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Just a follow-up question, before I go on to disposable period products, to Martin. In terms of reaching out with this initiative, I was not sure whether it is a local authority-led initiative or whether it is your initiative, and whether or not you were working with an organisation like Mumsnet or that wider world about disseminating this information. It just seemed like it was an initiative and it is very passive.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** I might describe it as a bit of a pyramid. There is one North London Waste Authority. We work with the seven boroughs. The boroughs tend to work with the communities. We have a waste prevention team, which works strategically, and many of the boroughs have people who work much closer to the communities, and so we work together. We work with organisations like Alice's that are enabling people to do the detailed engagement with parents. In the same way, if I look in another area which is not connected with this, but, for example, encouraging people to repair rather than throw away equipment, again, we do something through our authority which then works with the boroughs and then worked with repair cafés at a local level. We always try to make sure that we work right to the coalface. It is just that I get only so far under my own authority.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** You are not doing any positive promotion of this incentive.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** We are not doing paid advertising for it. That is true.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** That is right. If you wanted greater take-up that would be something you would have to consider?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** In a way, Real Nappies for London is there to do a little bit and take the load off the local authorities and do it through us.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** I am just suggesting that there are more mums in north London with a Mumsnet app on their phone that, if you wanted to bring this to their attention, it might be something worthwhile doing.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** I have actually tried, but I need to try harder.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** It is all about trying harder. Over to you, Mandu, and, Kate, I am sure you will want to come in. Let me start by saying, Mandu, I have been reading about the marvellous work you have been doing with The Cup Effect. Is it a charity?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Absolutely, yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** In terms of looking now at the alternatives to disposable period products, your major focus is on the use of the cup?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** That is the primary focus, absolutely.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** What can you tell us? When did you start and what has been the response?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Initially, The Cup Effect's work began in low-income communities in Malawi and Kenya. That is where it began because the scenario of need in those contexts is very different

here and there are women and girls whose lives are being held back significantly because they do not have access to products. What I realised, though, was, after doing an initial series of projects in both those locations, there is an issue on our doorstep and so we have started doing work here in the UK as well.

It is fascinating working in two very different environments, but the reaction, the challenges and the barriers have more in common than you might expect, certainly more than I expected when I began doing this work. Absolutely, I want to agree with Tracy about consumer choice being a factor, but informed consumer choice is the missing piece of the puzzle. One of the main reasons, whether you are talking about the UK or a slum in Kenya, that people do not use menstrual cups is because they have not heard of them and then, when they have heard of them, they do not know how to use them or they might be intimidated by them or there might be factors related to what you alluded to around stigma, taboo, etc, that create other barriers.

Fundamentally, we do not, in a slum in Malawi or rural community in Kenya or a refugee camp in Malawi, drop them out of a helicopter and be done with it. All of our work is accompanied by information and is accompanied by giving people the opportunity to explore what their hesitations may be about using the product, to ask the difficult questions and to go through a process of acclimatising and becoming what I call “cup confident”.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Of course there is the environmental impact of the cup. You are saying it is lasting ten years plus --

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Ten years, yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** -- as a minimum. If we focus on the UK for a while, the population you are trying to speak to is currently using disposables in the UK?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Primarily, they are using disposables, absolutely.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** It is to get them, then, to get greater awareness of the cup --

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** -- and understand the environmental impact. How do you get those messages over?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** To be honest, this is one of the challenges when you are a small NGO and part of a small NGO community, really trying to tap into existing structures and networks. My first instinct is the schools route. That is likely to be a very fruitful route for all sorts of reasons.

It really is about demystifying a product like this first of all and so you do need people who have experience and confidence to lead those initial discussions. Forget Tupperware parties; we do “cup aware” parties, where we take people through that journey of getting the information that they need.

I would love to scale that up and there are possibilities to scale it up through existing schemes such as the Mayor’s Healthy Schools Programme or the London Curriculum, etc, which already have infrastructure in place, networks and connections into schools. What you need is a module that you could tag on to that to ensure those girls have the opportunity to make that informed choice.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** That might come in in terms of the impact on the environment and alternatives. It comes in that way. Of course, there are financial benefits of the cup. You have told us about it, but just repeat what the financial benefits are.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Sure. If you are a woman or a girl who spends about £6.50 a month on pads or tampons, if you are using a menstrual cup, apart from the initial outlay, which would be about £20 to £25, you will spend zero pounds on menstrual products. That will equate to about £78 a year. Over the 10-year period that you can use your menstrual cup for, you are going to save about £780. I have used mine for nine years. I have saved about £700. That is a nice holiday. That information is not presented and is not put out there when people are at the point of making the choice about what to use.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Do you think that young people appreciate that, really, we lose only about two to three teaspoonfuls of blood a day? The ads would have you believe that you are awash with blood and that is why you need all these disposables. Tracy is going to come in and say they do not, but the reality is that the ads have moved away from the actual physiology.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** The reality. I would agree with that. In my experience of working with either teenage girls or grown women in their 30s and 40s, there are a lot of misconceptions around how your body works and the function of menstruation. Clearly, every woman is different, but a menstrual cup has measurements on it. I do not take any notice of those. I do not have a spreadsheet which tracks how much blood I have lost month on month, but one of the unforeseen advantages of using a menstrual cup is the familiarity you gain with your own body and the connection. We take people through a journey where they understand those things and also link that to the relationship we all have as consumers with our wider environment.

What I find typically is that people are usually like I was when I discovered this for the first time: utterly repelled at the idea. I thought it sounded like worst thing ever and disgusting. It did not appeal to me to begin with. I find that reaction is typical, but you take people through a journey where they have all the information before them and they suddenly become less reticent. It is an extraordinary transition we are able to take people on in the space of an hour's session in a classroom or three hours in a more informal setting if you are at one of my "cup aware" parties. We need to replicate that.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Thank you. I will leave that with the "cup aware" party.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** You are very welcome, Jennette.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** It is a great idea. Kate, tell us about the other types of products. What do you think are the factors that will influence people to move from disposable to reusable?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Also, similar to Mandu, we run 'Environmenstrual' workshops in schools and universities and, yes, I would totally reiterate what Mandu is saying. We would love to scale it up to give that sort of detailed, unbiased information, really, to menstruators.

We talk about all the different options and the pros and cons, environmental and health, of all the different options, looking at disposables, disposables using organic cotton and plastic-free, the cup, but also washable pads. I love the cup and I use one myself, but I know it is not for everybody, and so we like to give people different choices. Some people might want to use the cup but mix it with using washable pads. These are some of the options.

A new thing that is quite popular now is reusable period underwear. We have had a lot of feedback from young girls who are finding that these are very suitable for them. They can wear them all day and not have to worry. There are lots of different innovations coming on.

If people are not quite ready to do the full switch to reusables, it is about the best most environmentally friendly, disposable options, or maybe they will then use a cup at a later date. It depends. If you are, say, in a university hall of residence, you might not have a washing machine nearby. Do you want to use washable pads? It depends on your circumstance as well.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Of course, the other reusable pads that we know about are the pads that women of a different age need in terms of incontinent pads. Would that come into your product range?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Depending on your flow, you can have a thicker absorbency, but, actually, I was thinking that this period underwear could work quite well for the incontinence market, maybe not the fully incontinent, but people who have just that stress incontinence and perhaps do not feel confident going out. It is, again, another taboo subject and a huge waste issue, but there are some reusable alternatives that people might feel quite comfortable using.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Why are they not in pharmacies, not in a pound shop?

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Most of the companies running these are quite small and are running on a shoestring. They simply do not have those marketing budgets to be in with the big products.

We have formed an 'Environmenstrual' Coalition of lots of different organisations and companies who care about these issues and are wanting people to manage their periods so that they do not harm the planet or their own health. One of our coalition partners is Diva Cup. They make a menstrual cup. They are much bigger in the United States, where they have a big market. They said that this year they experienced triple-digit growth and it was down to distribution. They had managed to get in the big pharmacies, like Walmart, and that had a significant impact.

That is a key point: once people have access to these products, they are choosing them. That that is another barrier to overcome.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Just to add to that, in 2016 the global menstrual cup market value it was around £1.2 billion with a cumulative annual growth rate of 4% and so there is definitely movement towards. That would be between 20 and 30 million menstrual cups globally. There is movement towards greater take-up. Clearly, the thing that would create that exponential growth is if menstrual cups would feature alongside other products with the real "big fish" manufacturers, the likes of Procter & Gamble. I do not know if we are allowed to namecheck individual organisations, sorry, but that is the thing that would really create more parity and a playing field where more people were making the choice because they had more access.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** When we do these 'Environmenstrual' workshops that is a lot of the feedback we get, "I would love to use these products, but where can you buy them? If I just go into the supermarket, they are not there". It is probably the same with nappies as well.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Yes. Tracy, I cannot help but tease you. Are you not blocking a development that is just heading towards the way of your customers, and eventually we will see a majority use of reusables?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** We are absolutely not intending to block anything. We believe in consumer choice and I am very impressed with the sheer passion that these ladies have, actually.

The one thing that we would react to is inaccurate information and people being persuaded to switch products by using information that maybe made them worried about the safety of a product or the actual impact of a product. That is something that we would have to step forward and address, and I think you would understand that.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** What is the advertising budget of your industry?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** I have no idea.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** I am sure you do, Tracy.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** No, I actually do not and I am sorry and I will see if I can come back to you.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** I am surprised that you do not.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** I really do not, but I do know that it is very large. I will come back to you, if I can, with some numbers. I am sorry.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** It is too big.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Quite a lot.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Just since we have been talking about reusable period products, I just wanted to pick up on period poverty. There are a lot of people who are using food banks and needing to access period products as well as disposable nappies from food banks. With moon cups, you have to get used to it. You have to get used to it as an idea and probably, if you are living in poverty and dependent on food banks, there is probably quite a lot going on in your life and so being able to take on something like that is potentially more difficult.

On the relationship between these reusable products and period poverty, either Mandu or Kate, have you been doing any work around period poverty specifically with these reusable products?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** Yes, but treading very carefully, actually, and treading very carefully very deliberately because the last thing we really want to do is to create an association between reusable products and people who are having a rough time with respect to poverty. Again, the whole message around informed choice is absolutely mission-critical to any work we do, whether it is with people living in poverty or people who are more affluent.

What we have found is that people do respond quite warmly to the fact that you do not spend any money if you use a menstrual cup or one of the other reusable alternatives, and they also like the fact that they are less dependent on somebody else's goodwill or the ability to get free products from somewhere else. The whole psychology around making the choice is different when you are in difficult circumstances.

We are really careful about making sure that people have the information that they need and have the support they need, but also have the alternative of using a disposable product as well when we introduce this. I would not want to go down the route of saying, "All right. You folks living in period poverty or experiencing period poverty, these are best for you because of the sustainability angle", when, actually, not everybody wants to insert the product and you have to do that with a menstrual cup. Not everybody is totally relaxed about the

idea of having to wash it and figure out how to make it work. We do not want women or anyone else who menstruates to be in a situation where they have less choice and reusables are being imposed on them. The social justice angle is just as important.

One last thing I will say because we are here in the Environment Committee is that I was surprised when I started doing this work elsewhere - and I know that is not directly relevant to London - that the environmental issue and the issue of disposal was a big concern for women living in circumstances of poverty elsewhere. Therefore, it does not wash that just because somebody is struggling financially that they do not care about the environmental impact of the choices that they are making. We make sure they have that information and it is often persuasive.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I completely share what Mandu is saying. When we have done workshops even in universities where students are sometimes struggling financially, not that that is extreme poverty, but they are very happy to find out about these alternative products and that they can save money because they are on very tight budgets.

Yes, we definitely would not want to make people feel guilty or anything, but giving them their choice, or they might at another stage in their life perhaps then choose to opt for that as well. Bloody Good Period, which is working a lot on period poverty, is another coalition member of our 'Environmenstrual' Coalition and The Cup Effect and so, yes, we definitely take all of those factors into consideration.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** The key thing is that the reusables should be considered and should be part of any strategy to address period poverty and to address the environmental impact of menstruation. The fact that they have been neglected has resulted in us perhaps making slower progress in challenging these issues than we might have done otherwise. It is absolutely 100% mission-critical that they are in the mix and considered alongside all the other things that are more commonly thought of and - let us face it - are better understood.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** I wish I thought had about it before I came, but, as you know, I have a passionate interest in continence care, promoting continence care services and getting people assessed and effectively out of pads. I am aware that the producers of absorbent continence products do have a range of washable products as well. I will look into finding out how that works, how much of that goes into the NHS and what choices are provided for people, too.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That would be really helpful, thank you, if you could send that through afterwards. That is excellent.

I am going to move on to looking at how we can reduce the impact of these single-use products. Tracy, what could the producers change to encourage users to dispose of products correctly? Is there anything further that the producers and retailers could do to reduce the impact of nappies, incontinence and period products?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** There is still a great deal to be done around education. We can certainly do better than we are doing on labelling and making that more prominent. Retailers in particular are very good at acting very quickly on these sorts of things. They tend to be quite agile and certainly a couple of the main retailers have been very good at picking up the guidelines and applying it to other products as well.

One of the other things that I am very keen to raise, not just here but also in the all-party group that I am secretariat to on continence, is the fact that it has come to light recently that there is only a requirement or a stipulation in employment law for women to have disposal bins in the workplace toilet. There is no stipulation

for a bin in any other toilet and there is nothing whatsoever for men's washrooms. There are a significant proportion of men in the community who go to work and who do all the things that we all do every day - and why should anybody stop - but who are inhibited by the fact that they are limited in terms of disposing of products. That is something that I very much wanted to raise here today and, also, I will be putting it on the agenda with the permission of the chairs of the all-party group.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** There should be bins in men's toilets as well as women's toilets so that incontinence products can be disposed of properly.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** Yes, there should.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** Do you think some of them are being flushed, then.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** Either that or they are having to be carried home. That is really quite unpleasant and it is quite unfair as well. I have been sent recently by one of my clinical colleagues a document that estimates that between ages of 60 and 64 around 11% of men will have some form of urinary incontinence. It may be as a result of diabetes, prostate cancer, obesity, stroke, any of those things. It may be temporary or may be permanent. A huge number will report urinary incontinence less frequently. Boys need bins.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Very good. Boys need bins, yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Yes. We should start here.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** This whole session has been full of recommendations just falling into our laps. "Boys need bins". We even have a slogan.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** We should start at City Hall.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** We should, indeed. Yes, education, labelling, bins. Anything else?

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** In terms of reducing wrongful disposal, those are the key starting points, but it is also about working with other groups and other influencers - and I would say the same to you all as well in terms of getting your messages across - looking at trusted third parties, people who have a voice. We are talking about the NCT here and those sorts of groups that already are trusted and people listen to they sign up to their websites, sign up to their newsletters and so on. Those are all areas - maybe even Women's Institutes and groups like that - in terms of getting messages across and into the public domain, and making this something that can be spoken about, taking the taboo off it and making us all realise it is all of our problem and we all need to address it and talk about it.

**Tony Arbour AM:** My question really is a complete patsy, which is: what can the Mayor do to help? We already have one, saying that we should have disposable bins here at City Hall, which we could do straight away. The general question is: what do you think the Mayor could do? Let me ask Martin the question. You are the one closest to the public sector.

**Martin Capstick (Managing Director, North London Waste Authority):** There are a number of areas of action and, to repeat my answer to Assembly Member Arnold, it is about building the supporting coalition, really, and in terms of encouraging use of reusable products, basically, then helping to create the right networks, whether that is working through the NHS or also working with boroughs to help parents networks

focus on things like real nappies. Generally, the Mayor has a large influence and just helping to create that level of dialogue and demystification is helpful.

Picking up Tracy's last point, in terms of avoiding at least people contaminating recycling products and helping people to understand the proper disposal route, is important. The Mayor should not bear that as a personal responsibility, but, again, it is encouraging us to have the coalition and probably also to engage with retailers to help us achieve that right.

We then come on to incentives for creating the right products and, on that, there is an argument for greater producer responsibility. Again, I am not sure that the Mayor can unilaterally drive that, but certainly working with the Government that is an important area. We saw, for example, this weekend there was some talk about the introduction of an incineration tax, the logic being that that might discourage incineration. My take in relation to things like disposable nappies will be that if you had an incineration tax, it would have absolutely no impact whatsoever on the manufacturers; it would simply be a cost on council taxpayers, who would then have a more expensive disposal method. If the Government was thinking about how to create the right financial incentives, it seems to me that the challenge is to create the right financial incentives that help manufacturers particularly to think about how they use more recycled products in their nappies. Again, I am not an expert to know, but if nappies use a lot of virgin plastic, what is the option for manufacturing them with a lower impact? That is an area which we have not particularly discussed today but it is an area where the Mayor with his broader reach can have that sort of impact.

Those would be the areas that I would particularly pick out as areas where somebody with his influence can help to move the debate.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Thank you for that. Does anybody else have any suggestions for what the Mayor could do? It strikes me that the publicity that you may get as a result of this meeting - which I have to say has lifted veils which I never knew existed, as far as I am concerned - may be quite helpful. Yes, let us go around from left to right. Mandu?

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** It is the classic stuff of leading by example. Bins for boys in City Hall is great, but there is also Transport for London, which has a much bigger workforce. Use the whole mayoral group to set an example to other employers. That is straightforward.

Another thing I would say is that I do not know if you guys realised you were doing it and I do not know if it was deliberate or not, but the thing is modelling really good behaviour. I noticed that every time you spoke today, you were talking about "menstrual products" and "period products". You were not talking about "hygiene items" or "sanitary products", which is the terminology that is typically used. That language reinforces a lot of the stigma around menstruation. It gives the sensation that it is something dirty and disgusting that needs to be cleaned up with bleach, but you guys all talked about "menstrual products" and "period products". I do not know who coached you in that. Well done, Caroline.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** I keep a strict eye on the language.

**Mandu Reid (Founder, The Cup Effect):** That is amazing. It may not seem like much, but it is a big deal. Modelling that good behaviour as and when we talk about this is another important step.

I have already suggested some potential avenues to pilot initiatives in schools using existing mayoral schemes. Why not have a module on menstruation and the products available in the London Curriculum and give schools the option of taking it up and see what the take-up is and see what the response is? Why not have something that you funnel through the Healthy Schools network in a similar vein? That stuff creates a blueprint for others to act and is actually not that difficult to do. You just need the right people with the right expertise. I



know the will is out there. I know that schools would like to do better but need somebody to give them a leg up. London would be really leading the way if it took an action like that with respect to schools.

The last thing is that I hope this is the beginning of further conversations. Having Tracy here is so important. We need to have industry in the room. We need to have industry in the loop. At the end of the day - and I know Tracy was coy about the advertising budgets and whatever else that your group has; I am teasing you as well - but those folks are incredibly influential when it comes to trying to make a step change. Keeping them part of the conversation is for me something that is an essential way to make sure we get a real enduring change in people's attitudes, change in people's ideas and then ultimately change in their behaviour.

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** I am not sure how to follow that up. That was really inspiring.

I guess I have a few points to add to what Martin was saying about just helping to normalise reusable nappies. Every year in April we do a Real Nappy Week and so maybe some support for that would be greatly appreciated.

Providing that support infrastructure for laundry services could be one, and also supporting real nappy entrepreneurs, like parents. There is especially a rise in women who are designing nappies. You might have seen on *Dragon's Den* a few months ago there was a cloth nappy entrepreneur. Yes, just support those small community organisations that are going face-to-face to parents and providing that outreach.

There is a Greater London Authority (GLA) family grant that I do not know if you are aware of at the moment to help families connect with neighbours and communities a lot more, which is great.

I am quite fascinated by a potential link between our project, Real Nappies for London to reduce disposable nappy waste, and wet wipes because there are reusable wet wipes out there as well. There is huge potential.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I am going to carry on with the "bins for boys" theme. This is a practical thing, but having sinks inside public toilets would make it easier for people to use menstrual cups because that is another barrier. People do not want to walk out and then empty it. Having a sink there, if you are having any new builds, might be something quite simple.

I support Mandu's point that we want unbiased period education throughout schools in London and universities, but a lot of the people running these are doing things on a shoestring and so supporting those organisations that are trying to bring this unbiased education would be great.

I would like to see full disclosure of ingredients on these disposable products so that consumers can make an informed choice about which products to buy. I do not know if there is any role where you could lobby manufacturers to say that this move to transparency would benefit everybody. Help to lobby companies to remove the plastics in their products and to use organic cotton because the bleaching methods used for these menstrual products are very harmful to the environment as well

We have touched on it throughout the whole meeting about the advertising budget and so I do not know if it is possible to have a whole London-wide advertising campaign about "bag it and bin it" but also about reusable alternatives, like on the Tube, making it really attractive, with "Supported by the Mayor of London" or something.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** What a great idea.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** I would encourage all the London boroughs or the Mayor -- we have this 'Environmenstrual' Coalition and all the coalition members will be coming together for an 'Environmenstrual' Week of Action in October [2018]. We would really welcome different partners, really, from local authorities supporting this as well. The more people who get on board, the greater impact we will have. We are having at the end of the Week of Action a big 'Environmenstrual' Women's Environmental Network Forum event here at the GLA and so, hopefully, that will attract publicity from other boroughs.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** Thank you and thank you for inviting me here as well. I am really pleased that the "bins for boys" idea went down very well. I have to say I did just think of that title while I was sitting here and it just rolled out.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** We will have to invite you to the unveiling of the first bin.

**Tracy Stewart (Director General, Absorbent and Hygienic Product Manufacturers Association):** While we are on the subject, shelves are very useful in toilets as well for people who are changing ostomy equipment and so on.

We have quite a bit of commonality here. We are coming from completely different sides of the fence, but there are things that we agree on. Maybe we should look at those topics like disposing of products correctly and encouraging good disposal practices. Maybe there is something that could be quite powerful - and you as well - that we could do. We are working with the water groups on that as I speak.

The disposable badge we cannot say is going to cure everything, but it is a jolly good step forward. How can we make that really desirable? How can we make companies want to put it on their products? They have their lovely packaging. How can we make them think, "I have to have that on there"? How can we make consumers say, "That is a responsible company. I want to buy that product because they are doing the right thing"? A bit like a Soil Association accreditation. That is an idea that I would like to have maybe a roundtable on. Who could we get to maybe say, "That company has shown excellence in its packaging and disposal instructions. We are going to give it a star", or something along that line?

I am also looking at things that I am involved with outside of the obvious. As an industry head, I belong to various groups and forums and committees and procurement boards looking at tendering and procurement and looking at other things that could be levers; auditing standards, for example, for consumer products and manufacturers. I am just trying to think outside the box a little bit.

I am taking the discussion in fact just this afternoon to one such organisation and so it is on the agenda because cogs can move quite slowly but they can be made to move a bit faster, too, by just making sure that there is a bigger discussion around this as well.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** That was an incredibly inspiring conversation. It was very good to pull all of those threads together at the end.

I have just one final tiny thing to just pick up with you, Alice. Your Real Nappy Network voucher scheme does not work in all boroughs. Is that right? If you were redoing your list for the Mayor, would you like him to be encouraging all boroughs to do a real nappy voucher scheme? Do you think that would be a helpful thing?

**Alice Walker (Project Manager, Real Nappies for London):** Thank you so much, Caroline, for mentioning it because it is actually at the top of my list here and I did not even mention it. A pan-London scheme would

be amazing and getting all the local authorities on board and having consistent messaging would just be awesome. That just helps, really. It is a pan-London scheme and normalising. Thank you, Caroline, and thank you for the opportunity as well.

**Kate Metcalf (Co-Director, Women's Environmental Network):** Can I just say? Because of the success of Real Nappies for London, it made me think. Could we have something similar for reusable menstrual products, like a voucher off if it is initially quite expensive, subsidised by the local authorities, with advice for people to try menstrual products? Real Nappies for London has been such a success.

**Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair):** I cannot quite see how you could ask local authorities to subsidise that, but we need more messaging from Thames Water and Affinity, which are the two water providers for London, given that they spent £12 million per annum on removing "rag", as they call it, which is the combination of all of these items. I understand what Tracy was saying and that the percentage of rag that relates to menstrual products is smaller than the level that is baby wipes, but baby wipes do relate to activities that people are undertaking when they are doing changing of nappies. Maybe that is something that we can take back to Thames Water and potentially Affinity to see if they might be interested as they ramp up their messaging to try to stop people putting unflushables into the loo. They also might wish to think about this as something that they could consider putting some money into. I cannot quite see how local authorities would do that.

**Caroline Russell AM (Chair):** The idea of help for reusable period products is a great idea. In that case, I thank all of you for your contributions and the Committee Members for joining in with such enthusiasm.