

# Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 7/22

Date: December 2022

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To provide members with an update on the most recent breastfeeding data and progress against the Infant Feeding Strategy

## **Breastfeeding**

### Background

Giving children the best start in life means taking care of their nutritional needs. The first 6 months of a baby's life are particularly important when it comes to feeding.

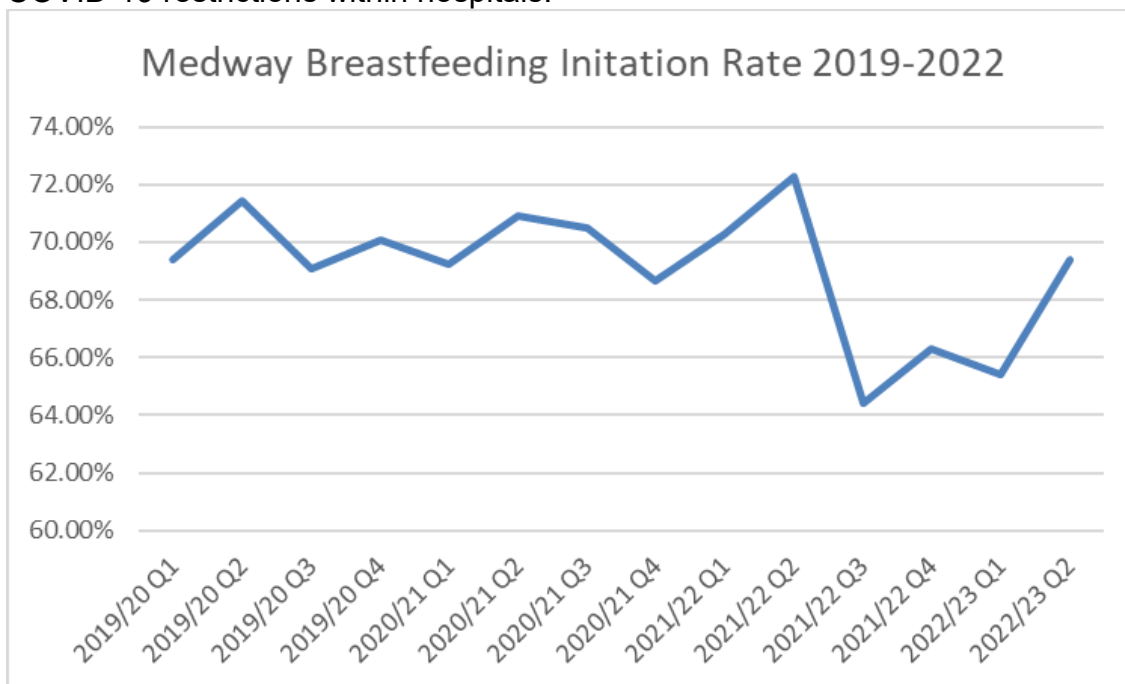
Responsive infant feeding means:

- Encouraging and supporting women to breastfeed
- Supporting parents who choose to formula feed to do so responsively
- Creating breastfeeding friendly places
- Infants being introduced to solid foods after 6 months

Responsive infant feeding is much more than simply the provision of food to children. It is reliant on parents building close relationships with their babies creating a strong bond between infant and parent. This process starts during pregnancy and continues throughout the early year's period and beyond. All the evidence shows that breastfeeding provides the best nutritional start for babies. Mothers should be encouraged and supported to initiate and continue breastfeeding for the first year and beyond.

Breastfeeding provides the greatest health benefit to the infant and the mother. The most recent data suggests that around 68% of women initiate breastfeeding, but there is a rapid decline in this rate after the first 48 hours. Nationally less than 40% of women are still breastfeeding by week 6 of their baby's life. Medway is committed to increasing these rates.

**Figure 1:** Breastfeeding initiation rates for infants born at Medway Foundation Trust, with a Medway home postcode. The line graph shows that initiation was consistently around 70% in 2019 and 2020. There was a large reduction in 2021, coinciding with COVID-19 restrictions within hospitals.



Breastfeeding rates are also routinely recorded and reported at 6-8 weeks of the infants life, which is also known as the continuation rates. Medway's most recent continuation rates are

- 2021/22 - Q1 39.53%
- 2021/22 - Q2 40.49%
- 2021/22 - Q3 37.36%
- 2021/22 - Q4 42.44%

Since the first Medway Infant Feeding Strategy in 2011, considerable progress has been made. This includes:

- The launch and growth of the Medway Breastfeeding Peer Support Network
- Community and acute settings progressing along the UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation process
- An increase in skills and knowledge for the health professional workforce
- A number of infant feeding marketing campaigns promoting breastfeeding and infant nutrition messages

This strategy was refreshed in 2018 with the following priority areas set:

- Providing support for women wanting to breastfeed
- Workforce development
- Making Every Contact Count
- UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation
- Infant feeding friendly environments

- Marketing campaigns
- Introducing solid foods after 6 months
- Promoting Healthy Start Vitamins

The Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group take the lead and facilitate action against these priorities, engaging with wider stakeholder groups.

### Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group

The Medway Infant Feeding Strategy Group meets quarterly to progress the actions within the Infant Feeding Strategy. Membership includes

- Medway Foundation Trust midwifery and neo-natal service
- Medway Community Healthcare Health Visiting service
- Medway Public Health team
- Medway Council Family Solutions team
- Commissioners

The partners work collaboratively to deliver a wide range of actions. The Infant strategy feeding group are part of the wider Medway Healthy Weight Network, acknowledging the large affect that promotion of infant feeding can have to reduce child obesity rates. The infant strategy feeding group produce annual priorities that are reviewed by the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board. The priorities for 2022/23 are:

- Increase uptake of antenatal education sessions and ensure breastfeeding and responsive feeding is included
- Achieve the highest level of BFI accreditation for acute and community settings

These priorities are focussed on facilitating and empowering mothers to breastfeed by helping them to address any specific concerns of issues they may have about the practice. They are also aimed at creating the right environment across Medway to help normalise the practice.

In 1994 UNICEF launched the Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) across all four UK nations. The baby friendly standards have several accreditation stages. Hospital and health visiting services across Medway are working towards accreditation and are regularly reviewed and progress monitored. The stages of accreditation are:

- Stage 1: A firm foundation
- Stage 2: An educated workforce
- Stage 3: Parents' experiences
- Re-accreditation
- Achieving Sustainability and Annual Audit (Gold standard)

Medway Foundation Trust services have achieved stage 2 and Medway Community Health services have achieved stage 3. Both providers have recently been reviewed and the latest ratings have not yet been released. The accreditation process sets rigorous standards for mandatory staff training and up to date policies being implemented that are in line with BFI standards.

To support families with infant feeding and to deliver gold standard services takes leadership, education and training, staffing resources and commitment. Services in Medway are committed to delivering the highest standard of care possible for the population.

Infant feeding support is provided at 3 key stages

1. This starts during a family's antenatal care with discussion about infant feeding with health professionals, antenatal classes and access to antenatal drop-in sessions with peer support groups.
2. Support immediately in the labour room with skin to skin contact immediately after birth. This support continues in the postnatal ward until the mother goes home.
3. Postnatally in the community, families are visited and offered infant feeding support from the community midwife in the early days. The health visitor takes over providing care after the first 10 days.

Additionally

- Families can access help at any time from the #Beside You online Breastfeeding support campaign, which includes a messaging function between professionals and parents
- Peer support groups (three groups running at the time of writing)
  - Each session starts with a one-hour antenatal hello baby class followed with the postnatal booking slots. Families who want to drop in are welcomed.
  - Attendance is through families booking for the sessions. Families are cancelling or not attending at short notice. This is disruptive to the volunteers who have to arrange travel and childcare. The current booking process reduces the disruption.
- There are currently seven peer support workers actively volunteering. The numbers have recently reduced as volunteers have needed to return to paid employment. There is a steady turnover of peer supporters, a supportive induction and training programme is in place. There are four volunteers shadowing with a further 4 hoping to start shadowing in September.
- Monthly peer support socials in Rochester with informal talks and occasional attendance from Health Visitors
- There is a specialist breastfeeding clinic running each week, with a lactation consultant and team seeing infants experiencing challenges breastfeeding (including assessing and treating tongue tie)

### Infant Feeding Strategy Refresh

The Infant Feeding Strategy is currently being refreshed and the ambition is to be ready for summer 2023. The key steps of this process will include

- Detailed analysis of the current breastfeeding prevalence and other infant feeding data, identifying groups with the lowest rates
- Insight and engagement work with these groups to understand the barriers and enablers to responsive infant feeding

- Review of the evidence base and best practise to improve infant feeding levels
- Identification of the new strategic priorities and priority actions to improve infant feeding rates for Medway

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