

**Report for Health Improvement Board, 27 October 2015**  
**By Laura Epton, Healthwatch Ambassador**

My report wishes to raise the concerns expressed by 41 medical professionals and infant feeding professionals in a letter dated 10 August 2015 addressed to members of the Health Improvement Partnership Board [and Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board among others] at the prospect of the closure of the breastfeeding support service delivered by the Baby Cafe.

This report asks the Health Improvement Board to request the OCC and OCCG to consider these concerns as they determine their priorities and funding decisions for 2016/17 given both the value of the service and Health and Wellbeing Strategy's priority to tackle obesity.

Oxfordshire's Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy for 2015 - 2019 states that increasing the number of breastfed babies is the foundation of an obesity strategy for the county:

*Priority 9 - Preventing chronic disease through tackling obesity* commits to ensuring that 63% of babies are breastfed at 6-8 weeks of age (the current figure is 60.4%).

Oxford's high breastfeeding continuation rate of 68% (measured at 6-8 weeks) would likely decrease without funding of the breastfeeding support delivered by Oxford Baby Café.

**Background on the Oxford Baby Café**

Below is some background detail on the service delivered by the Baby Café and its impact and value to women and families in the county.

**Best Practice**

The Baby Cafe model has been recognised as the most effective breastfeeding intervention by the **Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO)**. It is also recommended by **UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative**. All Baby Cafés must adhere to the 12 Baby Café Quality Standards (as outlined by C4EO - <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/local-practice/validated-local-practice-examples/baby-caf%C3%A9-breastfeeding-support-service.aspx>). This well-evaluated service combines a social model of care and one-to-one breastfeeding support.

**Activity**

The total footfall per year is on average 3,218 which includes 1,147 individual mothers.

The current service:

- Eight weekly 2-hour drop-in sessions, open to all breastfeeding mothers, pregnant women and their supporters.
- Four monthly antenatal breastfeeding workshops.
- Annual peer support training for 12-15 peer support volunteers.

The Baby Café helps to establish breastfeeding by:

1. Being available at the time of need: out of hospital, five days a week and with a closed Facebook group offering peer and professional advice. Many mothers are discharged from hospital long before the breastfeeding relationship is established.
2. Offering high quality care from trained lactation consultants who provide consistent

- advice, information and trouble-shooting to women and families.
3. Offering peer and community support by bringing together families at different stages of the breastfeeding journey and demonstrating that their current difficulties can be overcome.

The service dovetails with the Oxford University Hospitals Trust Breastfeeding Clinic and works closely with midwives, health visitors, GPs and OXPIP.

### **Funding**

The Baby Café service costs approximately £40,000 per year, which equates roughly to £40 per family. Given the long-term health benefits this is excellent value for money. The service is fully funded through the Children's Centre budget until March 31 2016. It is unlikely to be extended as OCC propose to discontinue funding and provision of the 'universal' services of Children Centres.

### **Healthwatch feedback**

Healthwatch Oxfordshire have spoken to mothers over the county as part of their Outreach programme and the praise for the baby café staff has been strong with mothers stating that the encouragement and reassurance they received ultimately helped them to go on breastfeeding for as long as they did; that the support was invaluable and a "life-saver" and that the loss of such an important resource will leave new mothers with no support which they felt could lead to post-natal depression and inability to cope.

### **Potential impact of reducing the breast feeding support**

The letter anticipates a number of implications if the service is closed. These include:

1. Reduced access to prompt expert help, leading to greater distress for parents.
2. Demand transferring to other services.
3. The workload of Community midwives, GPs, health visitors and the infant feeding clinic at the JR will increase.
4. Decreased breastfeeding rates.

As well as lower rates of early years obesity, the health benefits of breastfeeding are well established: lower rates of gastrointestinal and lower respiratory tract infections; prevention of SIDS; and reduced rates of maternal breast cancer.

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