

# **Walsall Council – Health and Wellbeing Board**

**For Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

## **Walsall Infant Feeding Strategy**

### **For Endorsement**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report seeks endorsement from members of the Walsall Health and Wellbeing Board for the aims, actions and proposed governance arrangements for the Walsall draft Infant Feeding Strategy 2024-2027.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That members support the work undertaken by the multi-agency Family Hub partnership group which has developed the Walsall Infant Feeding Strategy contributing to ensuring babies have the best start in life.
- 2.2. That the Walsall Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) provides overall governance for the Infant Feeding Strategy, with Walsall Together's Clinical Professional Leadership Group overseeing the new developing partnership Strategy on a quarterly basis. Reports on activity will also be submitted to the Childrens Alliance and Family Hub steering group.
- 2.3 That the HWBB oversight role will include the expectation that the Chair of the strategic group feeds back the progress, impact and achievements of the Infant Feeding Strategy to HWBB annually.
- 2.4 That HWBB members use their strategic influence to support changing the culture of Walsall to one where breastfeeding is seen as the norm.

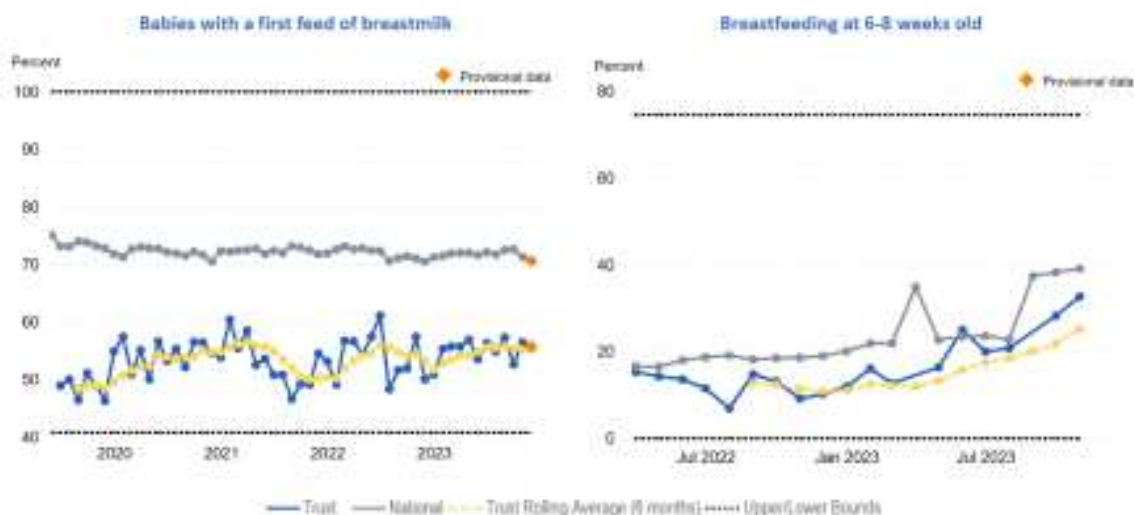
#### **3. Report detail**

- 3.1 Breastfeeding and human breastmilk promotes health, prevents disease, saves lives and contributes to reducing a broad range of inequalities. There are benefits for baby, mother, the wider family, the environment, and estimated cost savings for health services. However, breastfeeding can be hard and currently eight out of ten women stop breastfeeding earlier than they would want to.
- 3.2 The Walsall Infant Feeding Strategy draws on national and local policy and guidance as well as local information to outline a series of actions to ensure

local families are supported in their choices for feeding their infants, and to improve breastfeeding rates across the Borough. This requires actions for all organisations, and individuals, working together to achieve the best outcomes for Walsall children.

- 3.3 Nutrition in the initial 1,001 days from conception to a child's second birthday is critical, as sound infant feeding practices during this phase yield important benefits including optimal growth and development, reduced susceptibility to infections and chronic diseases, and enhanced emotional well-being and parent-infant bonding. Breastfeeding has many long-term benefits for parents and babies. There is evidence that breastfed babies from low-income families are likely to have better health outcomes in early life than a child from a more affluent background fed with formula milk, so compensating for some of the disadvantages of poverty. In addition, breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity in later childhood and is associated with a decreased risk of dental decay. [Breastfeeding in the UK - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](https://www.unicef.org.uk)
- 3.4 In 2020/21 59.1% of babies born in Walsall had a first feed of breastmilk. This figure is **significantly below** the West Midlands regional rate of 68.3% and the national rate of 71.7%, and has been the trend for several years. [Public Health Outcomes Framework, Office for Health Inequalities and Disparities, 2024](#)

Table 1 Trends in breastfeeding prevalence in Walsall.



- 3.5 In addition, in Walsall, only around 1 in 3 babies are still totally or partially breastfed at 6-8 weeks, which is also significantly lower than the national rate. Although the breastfeeding rate in Walsall as a whole is low, it is however

higher in some areas of our borough than others. Research indicates that there are many cultural, demographic and socioeconomic differences in attitudes and behaviours to breastfeeding.

#### **4. The Strategy**

- 4.1 The multi-agency strategy group, consisting of representatives from Family Hub Children's Services, Midwives, Health Visitors, community groups and Public Health, have been instrumental in developing the multiagency strategy. This group will continue to drive the agenda should Family Hub funding cease at the end of 2024/25.

4.2 Our vision is to create a supportive environment in Walsall that protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding. It will enable all parents to optimise the nutrition of babies and infants as they make their infant feeding choices and therefore develop healthy children and close, loving parent-infant relationships.

4.3 The Walsall Infant Feeding Strategy aims to;

- Protect, support and promote breastfeeding and healthy infant feeding
- Create a Borough that supports and normalises breastfeeding
- Support the introduction of solid foods to aid child development

4.4 While Family Hubs are funded only until March 2025, the infant feeding strategy has gained partnership commitment to embed aims and work towards its vision over the next five years. This will be monitored within Walsall but also through mandatory national reporting.

4.4 Walsall Together have agreed that the strategy group chair will report on a quarterly basis to the Walsall Together Clinical Professional Leadership Group and also report any issues of escalation or risk by exception.

## **5. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:**

### **5.1 Financial implications:**

The strategy brings no additional funding implications for consideration by the Health and Wellbeing Board at this time. However, Public Health are putting aside some non-recurrent funding for 2025/26 to support some of the aspects of Family Hub infant feeding work should the Family Hub national funding cease. Please note that this is not an ongoing commitment.

### **5.2 Legal implications:**

There are no legal implications linked with this strategy work.

### **5.3 Other Resource implications**

Staff time to support strategy objectives is already factored in within the partnership.

## **6. Health and Wellbeing Board Priorities - impact:**

6.1 The work programme for infant feeding supports the 2022-25 Council plan that “Our children should have the best possible start and be happy, healthy, and learning well” and also that every child in Walsall deserves the best possible start in life as set out in We Are Walsall 2040

6.2 The strategy and actions within it supports the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, specifically in relation to children and young people and contributes to the reduction of health inequalities.

6.3 Safeguarding: There are no adverse implications for safeguarding.

## Background papers

### Infant Feeding Strategy



107088 Infant  
Feeding Strategy 2024

### Appendices:

None

### Author

Esther Higdon – Senior Programme Development Manager  
Walsall Borough Council

☎ 01922 653724

✉ [Esther.Higdon@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Esther.Higdon@walsall.gov.uk)

Paulette Myers – Consultant in Public Health  
Walsall Borough Council

☎ 01922 653744

✉ [Paulette.Myers@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Paulette.Myers@walsall.gov.uk)