

This petition was started in response to Kent County Council's proposal to radically change Kent's breastfeeding services in 2018. As a lactation Consultant working with breastfeeding families every day, I know the proposed service will have a deep impact on Kent families. That is why I, and 4940 people signed this petition asking that Kent County Council include the following in their plans to ensure that those who want to breastfeed, can.

Ensure all families who require specialist support can access this locally and within a short time frame.

Most breastfeeding problems cannot wait. The difference between seeing a specialist tomorrow and in 3 days is huge. The quicker a breastfeeding family sees a specialist, the more chance they have of continued breastfeeding.

Many of those who have breastfeeding problems have recently given birth, are recovering from surgery or lack access to transport. To have one clinic a week covering such a wide area will make it impossible for many families to receive support. For example, a family from Sheppey (an area with very low breastfeeding rates and many low income families) might have a 40 minute car journey or 2.5 hours by public transport to see a lactation professional if the clinic was run in Maidstone that week. This is one example and others could be made for any of the vast areas in Kent the proposed 4 clinics are to cover.

Breastfeeding specialists are just that. They have completed hours of dedicated breastfeeding education and years of direct support to families. Breastfeeding problems can be complex and those cases need specialist input. Complex breastfeeding problems are not quick fixes. Often families are seen over weeks and sometimes months. This is especially true where milk supply has dropped or there is nipple or breast injury. With only a handful of appointments available each week, either this won't be possible or new referrals will have a long wait.

The Unicef BFI training, although a great starting point for health workers, does not train professionals to offer more than basic breastfeeding information. Health visitors will continue to support families with breastfeeding concerns in the new proposals but it is unclear what training they will receive to be able to support families with more complex problems. At present, Health visitors and Midwives refer families in large numbers to the specialist services. The proposed scheme will not have enough appointments for this.

Keep dedicated Breastfeeding Services available to families needing support.

In Kent we have over 200 breastfeeding peer supporters. They provide a vital service to breastfeeding families. These volunteers need to be trained, supported and nurtured whilst

in their role. There is no management plan for this in the proposed service. Presently, the co-ordination of peer supporters takes over 150 hours, weekly.

Breastfeeding Parents want and require a quiet, private and dedicated space while learning to breastfeed and being supported by volunteers or health professionals.

I urge the council to reconsider their plans before altering this service.

Anna Le Grange

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