

Action Plan to improve maternity and early years outcomes

Date: 22nd June 2023

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Consideration: Information Discussion
 Decision Endorsement

Please indicate to which priority in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, [Happier, Healthier Lives Strategy \(2022-2025\)](#) your report links to.

Start Well	Live Well	Age Well
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Improving outcomes during maternity and early years	<input type="checkbox"/> Reducing the rates of cardiovascular disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Improving places and helping communities to support healthy ageing
<input type="checkbox"/> Improving mental health support for children and young people	<input type="checkbox"/> Improving mental health support for adults particularly for those at greater risk of poor mental health	<input type="checkbox"/> Improving mental health support for older people and reducing feelings of social isolation
<input type="checkbox"/> Reducing the prevalence of obesity in children and young people	<input type="checkbox"/> Reducing the prevalence of obesity in adults	<input type="checkbox"/> Increasing the physical activity of older people

1. Purpose of report

1.1. The refreshed Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes a priority to improve maternity and early years outcomes for residents. The start of life (from conception to the age of 4 or 5) is the period of our lives which contains the greatest potential for future health and wellbeing outcomes throughout the whole life to be maximised, for health risks to be successfully mitigated and for inequalities to be addressed. The Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2022-25 Priorities for maternity and early years are:

- To reduce the proportion of women who smoke during (and after) pregnancy in Buckinghamshire

- To improve school readiness in Buckinghamshire children, especially among the most deprived communities, and
- To increase the proportion of babies that are breastfed from birth until at least 6 to 8 weeks old.

1.2. This report provides the action plan for this theme of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and updates the board on progress towards the above priorities by partners.

2. Recommendation to the Health and Wellbeing Board

2.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to note the targets and actions set out within the report and in Appendix A.

2.2. The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to commit their respective organisations to deliver these actions and identify if there are further areas for action.

3. Content of report

3.1. The crucial importance of the first years of life (from conception to the age of 4 or 5) on an individual's future health and wellbeing has been well established. Interventions during this period to reduce exposure to risk factors, improve outcomes and tackle inequalities have the potential to positively affect prospects throughout the whole life course.

3.2. The Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2022-25 Priorities for maternity and early years are:

- To reduce the proportion of women who smoke during (and after) pregnancy in Buckinghamshire
- To improve school readiness in Buckinghamshire children, especially among the most deprived communities, and
- To increase the proportion of babies that are breastfed from birth until at least 6 to 8 weeks old.

3.3. The "Start Well – Maternity and Early Years Programme Board" is chaired by the Director of Midwifery at Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT) and includes representatives from public health, maternity services, education and health visiting. The "Healthier Pregnancies Steering Group" is chaired by a public health consultant at Buckinghamshire Council (BC), and reports to the Programme Board. These two groups are responsible for providing oversight of efforts by the various partner organisations involved in this area of work to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities during pregnancy, birth and the early years of childhood.

3.4. The full current programme of work can be seen in the Action Plan in Appendix A. Two key projects in development are listed below:

3.4.1. Pre-conception health and service access/awareness pilot project.

- This novel pilot project aims to identify and address the health needs and service access challenges experienced by women of child-bearing age in Buckinghamshire who

are either a) of younger age, b) from Black/Asian communities, and c) who live in Opportunity Bucks wards.

- Evidence shows that maternal and early childhood health outcomes vary considerably by deprivation, age and ethnicity.
- For example, the 2021 [MBBRACE-UK report](#) (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK) identified that the risk of dying during pregnancy was twice the national average for Asian mothers, and four times the national average for Black mothers.
- Deprivation and younger age also show strong associations with a range of risk factors and negative health outcomes for mothers and babies.
- This pilot project has been informed by an engagement and listening exercise, in which the organisers are having open ended conversations with a wide range of potential stakeholders, such as voluntary and community groups (in particular women's groups representing minority communities and/or based in Opportunity Bucks wards). This is designed to inform the planning of a more structured series of focus groups in order to gather views and insights from the groups that the subsequent phase of the project will aim to benefit.

3.4.2. Improving the educational/parenting support available to families in deprived areas.

- Young children from deprived areas of Buckinghamshire are less likely to score at or above expected levels on early development assessments, less likely to achieve school readiness, and consequently less likely to get the most out of their education. This dynamic has the potential to make deprivation a self-reinforcing cycle which traps each generation in the same pattern of poor health and wellbeing.
- However, there is good research evidence that attending high quality early education settings can help to reduce the negative effects of growing up in an economically deprived household, and that parenting programmes can be effective in helping parents and carers to support their children to develop the skills they need to thrive.
- Since the start of the Opportunity Bucks programme, the BC early years education service has been prioritising early years settings in Opportunity Bucks wards with their wide range support offer and increasing efforts to maximise the uptake of funded early education placements (families are only eligible where they are in receipt of universal credit). The percentage of vulnerable 2 year old eligible children in funded early education places increased from 90.3% in Spring Term 2022 to 94.3% in Spring Term 2023.
- The BC public health team and family support service are working together to expand the pre-existing "Family Links" parenting programme in Buckinghamshire, with the aim of expanding capacity in Opportunity Bucks wards for courses such as "Little Talkers", which supports parents with their children's language development.

3.5. The full list of current projects and workstreams can be seen in Appendix A.

4. Next steps and review

4.1. The Start Well: Maternity and Early Years Programme Board, and the Healthier Pregnancies Steering Group will continue to oversee and develop these projects and workstreams and can provide the Board with updates later in 2023 as required.

5. Background papers

5.1. Appendix A - Buckinghamshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy: Start Well – Maternity and Early Years Action Plan.