

LONDON FOOD BOARD

BRIEFING PAPER MARCH 2019

Empowering Good Nutrition in the First Year of Life

Background

On 1st March 2019 the Mayor and First Steps Nutrition Trust hosted an 'Empowering Good Infant Nutrition in London' conference at City Hall.

In the London Food Strategy, published in December 2018, the Mayor committed to:

- Support an increase in breastfeeding rates in London
- Make London a baby friendly city
- Make the GLA group more breastfeeding friendly
- Encourage all Boroughs to achieve Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation in maternity and community services.

These commitments complement other work taking place in City Hall to improve the health and well-being of London's children. Mayoral Food Policy Officers are working with colleagues in the Health Team to implement complementary commitments made in the Health Inequalities Strategy. The Healthy Early Years London programme is working to reduce inequalities via early years setting support for eating well and activity and the London Childhood Obesity Taskforce is focusing on the ambitious target of reducing overweight and obesity in children in London by 2030.

In the London Food Strategy's implementation plan, the Mayor also commits to work with TfL to ensure those feeding their infants on London's Transport Network are supported by updating the TfL website and leaflet given to those applying for the baby on Board scheme; briefing staff to support those wishing to feed their infant on TfL and helping to normalise breastfeeding in London through a poster campaign on the network.

GLA officers in the Food and Health teams at City Hall will work together this year, with external partners, to produce an action plan for making London a baby friendly city. The 'Empowering Infant Nutrition' conference was held as part of the implementation plan for the strategy and aimed to bring voices from different sectors together to talk about some of the key areas of change needed to ensure all Londoners get the very best start in life.

The context

- The influential Lancet Breastfeeding series of 2016 confirmed that breastfed babies have fewer infections, are less likely to become overweight or have diabetes and have greater intelligence than those who are formula fed, and the longer the period of breastfeeding the greater the protective effect (Victora et al 2016). In addition, breastfeeding protects women against breast cancer, ovarian cancer and diabetes.
- The UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, with only a third of babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks of age and very few exclusively breastfed to 6 months (and breastfed alongside complementary foods throughout the first year and beyond) as all global health recommendations suggest. We also have poor data on breastfeeding rates, with no data routinely presented after 6-8 weeks, with 6-8 week data patchily recorded.
- Between one in three and one in four babies gain weight faster than is desirable during their first 6 months of life, and this is a strong risk factor for the development of childhood obesity (Baird et al 2005; Monteiro and Victora 2005; Ong and Loos 2006).
- The government's recent report on feeding in the first year of life highlighted that babies who put on a lot of weight in their first months are also more likely to be given their first solid foods earlier than the recommended six months of age (SACN 2018). We know that this also adds to their risk of becoming overweight (Brown and Lee 2015)
- There is a growing evidence-base that babies who self-feed their first solids, for example through 'baby-led weaning', are less likely to be overweight than those who are spoon-fed (Brown and Lee 2015; Dogan et al 2018).
- The types of foods babies and children are given to eat, how often and how much they are given, together determine the appropriateness of their diets. Children who eat poor quality diets from babyhood are fatter by school age (Okubo et al 2015).
- Infant weight at 1 year of age is a good predictor of childhood obesity, and 90% of children who are obese at 3 years old are overweight or obese as adolescents (CEDAR 2019).

EVENT: Empowering Good Infant Nutrition in London – 01.03.19

Claire Pritchard, chair of the **London Food Board**, opened the event with an introduction to the Mayoral commitments which aim to support and promote better infant health.

Dr Helen Crawley who sits on the **London Food Board** and who is also Director of First Steps Nutrition Trust opened the talks with a session on why infant nutrition matters, highlighting what we want to achieve feeding infants in the first year, and how the UK is deviating from global health recommendations with diets high in ultra-processed foods.

Anne Woods from **Unicef UK Baby Friendly** gave an overview of their accreditation programme, where we are in London with accreditation in maternity and community settings and where we need to go. Currently:

In the community: 13 boroughs have full accreditation, 14 are on their journey and 5 Boroughs are yet to achieve stage 1.

In London's hospitals: 11 out of 25 are fully accredited, 12 are on their journey and only 2 are yet to achieve stage 1. In addition, a number of neonatal units and children's centres are also accredited or working towards accreditation and the year on year increase seen suggests that having 100% Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation in London is achievable.

Joy Hastings from **Tower Hamlets** presented on how they have invested in a borough wide breastfeeding support service and the success of this in improving breastfeeding rates in the Borough. While breastfeeding rates nationally have stagnated, in Tower Hamlets 81.6% of babies are breastfed for more than 6 weeks. A borough-wide breastfeeding support service that complements the Royal London Hospital maternity service is credited with these high rates and Joy provided an overview of the baby feeding service they offer.

Livia La Camera presented an overview of the Nourishing Nippers programme run by **Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency** which supports families with the introduction of solids, the voices of parents who have attended courses showed the importance of local, practical and accessible support for new families. **Mita Pandya** and **Marjon Willers** from **Islington** gave an overview of the 'Bright Start' work in the Borough and the impact of Healthy Early Years London in practice at the Willow Children's Centre. Embedding good nutrition and activity into the early year's setting enhances the integrated, holistic and responsive approach used to develop children's physical health, emotional wellbeing, creative and critical thinking skills

Kim Roberts of the **HENRY** programme showed how the programme integrates family behaviour change work into support for feeding in the first year. The HENRY programme works alongside other early years work in several London Boroughs to provide direct support to families, and their behaviour change approach has recently been credited in contributing to a reduction in child obesity observed in Leeds.

Claire Bennett of the **Royal Borough of Greenwich** concluded the morning with a discussion of how commissioners can embed standards and requirements for supporting good nutrition in the first year of life into commissioning documentation.

What can London Boroughs do to support good nutrition in the first year of life?

- Review the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation in neonatal, maternity, community and children's centres in your area. How can settings be encouraged to start their journey, to accelerate their training and progression and to learn from other settings in London?
- If you have a University in your Borough that teaches midwifery or health visiting find out if they are on their Unicef UK Baby Friendly journey and encourage them to do this.
- Look at the baby feeding service your Borough offers – are families supported in the crucial first days and weeks of life with a flexible and accessible service? What can you learn from services such as those in Tower Hamlets?
- As a Borough do you support the staff that work for you to continue breastfeeding when they return to work? Have you normalised breastfeeding in your Borough by using positive images and messaging to ensure women know they can feel comfortable breastfeeding wherever they are?
- Do you ensure that health workers in your area adequately collect and submit information on breastfeeding rates at birth and 6-8 weeks and could you collect and collate better data throughout the first year of life to inform service needs?
- Do you have a clear conflict of interest policy in your Borough that ensures that companies selling baby food and drink do not influence the feeding choices families may make in your area? What could you do to limit advertising of breastmilk substitutes in your Borough?
- Do you offer support to families with infants on how to introduce solids and gain the confidence needed to avoid processed baby food and offer simple, culturally appropriate home prepared foods?
- Are all the early years settings in your Borough applying for the Healthy Early Years London award? How can you support those that are not yet registered to do this?
- Do you have programmes available to support parents around behaviour change to learn techniques that support their young children to manage food choice and food intake?
- Are you using all the available commissioning opportunities to ensure that early years nutrition is embedded across the services you offer?

What can the GLA include in its Baby Friendly Action Plan to encourage London boroughs to empower better nutrition in the first year of life so that we can tackle health inequalities, childhood obesity and the short and long-term consequences of low breastfeeding rates? **Contact the City Hall Food Policy team** on londonfood@london.gov.uk with your ideas.

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MAYOR OF LONDON

The **London Food Strategy** sets out the Mayor's plans to help all Londoners access healthy, affordable and sustainable food – regardless of their background and circumstances. The Mayor is working closely with the **London Food Board** and other partners to ensure the strategy helps deliver a fairer food system.

EMPOWERING INFANT NUTRITION IN LONDON

A key priority in the London Food Strategy is **using good food to help give Londoners the best possible start to life**. Officers at the Greater London Authority are working with experts and partners across London to develop an action plan to make London a baby friendly city and support actions for increased breastfeeding rates and improved infant nutrition.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT INFANT NUTRITION IN THE UK?

Compared to formula-fed babies,
breastfed babies:



Have fewer infections



Are less likely to become overweight



Have greater intelligence

Only **one third** of babies in the UK are exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks of age



Feeding babies solid foods **before six months of age** adds to their risk of becoming overweight



Between one in three and one in four babies **gain weight faster** than desirable in the first six months of life



Children that eat **poor quality diets** from infancy are more likely to be overweight by school age



Babies that **self-feed** their first solids are less likely to be overweight than those that are spoon fed



90% of children who are obese at three years of age are overweight or obese as adolescents



MAYOR OF LONDON

WHAT ACTIONS CAN BOROUGHES TAKE TO SUPPORT GOOD NUTRITION IN THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE?

- Review the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation in neonatal, maternity, community and children's centres in their area and commit to becoming 100% accredited with a timescale to do this.
- Work with midwifery and health visiting education providers in universities in the borough to encourage them to adopt the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation.
- Look at baby feeding services in the borough to ensure they support families in the crucial first days and weeks of life and for as long as women choose to breastfeed.
- Actively support borough staff to continue breastfeeding when they return to work and ensure all buildings owned by the borough are breastfeeding friendly.
- Normalise breastfeeding with positive images and messaging throughout the borough.
- Ensure health workers collect and report information on breastfeeding rates at birth and 6-8 weeks.
- Gather and review infant feeding data throughout the first year of life to inform service needs.
- Implement conflict of interest policies to ensure companies selling baby food and drink do not influence the feeding choices families may make.
- End the advertising of breastmilk substitutes in the borough
- Offer practical support to new families on how to introduce solids and avoid commercial processed baby foods.
- Support and encourage all early years' settings including childminders in the borough to take part in the Healthy Early Years London award.
- Offer behaviour change parenting programmes to help parents support their young children to manage food choice and food intake.
- Embed early years nutrition principles through all procurement and commissioning opportunities.

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF LONDON'S CHILDREN?

The Mayor and First Steps Nutrition Trust hosted the 'Empowering Good Infant Nutrition in London' conference in March 2019. **A full briefing accompanying this paper** summarises the event and provides evidence to support the statements made.

Other Mayoral strategies and initiatives to ensure all Londoners get the very best start in life include the **Health Inequalities Strategy**, **Healthy Early Years London** and the work of the **London Childhood Obesity Taskforce**.