

**Report to CABINET**

## **Infant Feeding Peer Support Service – new contract**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Barbara Brownridge, Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing**

**Officer Contact: Dr Rebecca Fletcher, Director of Public Health**

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**21<sup>st</sup> July 2025**

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### **Reason for Decision**

To ensure that Oldham residents have access to comprehensive infant feeding support, including a dedicated Infant Feeding Peer Support Service from 1 April 2026.

### **Executive Summary**

Breastfeeding is an important public health priority to provide every child with the best possible start in life and provides short and long-term health benefits for both the mother and baby. Whilst breastfeeding rates are improving in Oldham, they remain significantly below national rates. It is important that there is provision for a community Infant Feeding Peer Support Service.

The current contract for the current Infant Feeding Peer Support Service is due to expire on 31 March 2026, with no further options to extend. We are seeking permission to continue to maintain and build on the successful partnership with Tameside Council to commission a high-quality Infant Feeding Peer Support service that meets the needs of local residents. Tameside will be the lead commissioner and there will be a new contract which will commence on 1 April 2026 for a period of 3 years, with an option to extend for up to 2 further years.

There will be an additional report submitted for approval by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, in consultation with the Director of Public Health, following completion of the tender process (subject to Cabinet Member approval for delegated

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authority) which will include actual costs. The budget will be review and based on the current service model for 2025 to 2026.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Cabinet approves the continuation of the collaborative commissioning agreement with Tameside Council, by providing approval to:

- a. Continue to work with Tameside Council and delegate authority to Tameside Council to commission an Infant Feeding Peer Support Service on our behalf, through STAR Procurement.
- b. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member of Adult Social Care and Health and the Director of Public Health to approve the outcome of the Procurement Tender exercise, on behalf of Oldham.
- c. Give authority to Tameside Council to award the contract to provider with the most advantageous tender following STAR's procurement exercise.
- d. Entering into a new collaboration agreement with Tameside council for the new service to commence on 01 April 2026, for a period of three years with the option to extend for an additional two years.

**Infant Feeding Peer Support Service – Request to collaborative commission****1 Background**

- 1.1 Breastfeeding is a global and national priority. Recommendations from The World Health Organisation are for infants to be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, and thereafter for as long as the mother and baby wish with gradual introduction to a more varied diet from six months of age. Encouraging more mothers to breastfeed is a key area of focus for the Council and partners in tackling health inequalities as evidence indicates that breastfeeding saves lives and protects the health of mothers and babies both in the short and long-term.
- 1.2 Oldham has some of the lowest breastfeeding rates across England. In 2023/24, 56.3% of newborns received breast milk as their first feed which is lower than the England's average of 71.9% <sup>1</sup>. By 6 to 8 weeks after birth, 43.3% of mothers were still breastfeeding, which also is lower than the England's average of 52.7%.
- 1.3 There are many reasons why people are unable or choose not to breastfeed, including lack of emotional and practical support. Evidence suggests that mothers living within deprived areas are least likely to start breastfeeding, particularly those who are on lower incomes, young and early school leavers, routine and manual workers; thereby adding to health inequalities.
- 1.4 Breastfeeding peer support is an evidence-based intervention, recommended by NICE, for increasing breastfeeding rates, and offers support to help parents make informed choices around feeding their baby.
- 1.5 Oldham Council is party to a collaborative commissioning agreement with Tameside Council (STAR Procurement) for the provision of an infant feeding peer support service, currently delivered by Home-Start Oldham, Stockport, and Tameside. The service commenced on 1 April 2022 with the initial term ending on 31 March 2025. The contract was approved by the cabinet member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing in September 2024 to extend for a further period of 12 months in line with the extension clause. The contract is due to expire on 31 March 2026 with no further extensions.
- 1.6 In addition to the 12 months extension, the contract was modified to develop the service to offer comprehensive Infant Feeding support to all parents and carers across our communities and within the hospital post-natal wards. The service provides specialist support and advice around breastfeeding, early diagnosis of issues such as tongue-tie, and help with formula feeding where that is more appropriate.
- 1.7 The Infant Feeding Peer Support Service makes breastfeeding easier for mothers by removing some of the practical, emotional, and cultural barriers that prevent them

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/child-health-profiles/data#page/3/gid/1938133228/ati/502/iid/93932/age/309/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/cardo-0>

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from breastfeeding. The service includes a combination of paid, and volunteer peer supporters with support and advice from local infant feeding coordinators and advisors and delivers:

- Support at antenatal clinics
- Support on the Hospital Wards
- Family support through home visits and phone calls, including culturally appropriate support to people who do not speak or read English.
- Weekly Breastfeeding Peer Support Groups held at Family Hubs including other community venues.
- Collaborative working with midwifery services and other health professionals to embed a system wide pathway of care
- Supporting the achievement and maintenance of the UNICEF UK's Baby Friendly Initiative – full accreditation, in both acute and community settings.
- Online Breastfeeding Basics Workshops
- Supporting local businesses and organisations to be more breastfeeding friendly through the promotion of a breastfeeding and baby welcome scheme whilst achieving recognition that the borough of Oldham is a 'Breastfeeding Welcoming' local authority.
- Promoting clear and consistent messages around infant feeding and links in with the wider work to promote breastfeeding/ healthy child nutrition.

1.8 The Infant Feeding Peer Support Service delivers a universal and targeted offer across Oldham and Tameside to ensure that parents and carers have access to support, encouragement and understanding in their community. It has adopted a 'proportionate universalism' approach, promoting the provision of universal services which are delivered at scale and intensity to proportionate need (Marmot). This ensures that intensive support is provided for families who are deprived or have greater need with the aim is to reach those in most need of support and be inclusive to their needs.

1.9 The service has had a positive impact on promoting breastfeeding in Oldham. The performance activity data for the financial year 2024/2025 demonstrates positive outcomes towards increasing the borough's breastfeeding rates. This includes dedicated breastfeeding support groups and peer networks, with referrals pathways embedded with Tameside General Hospital, Royal Oldham Hospital, and other health professionals. Recent activity data includes:

- a total of 874 referrals were received from Tameside General Hospital, Royal Oldham Hospital, community midwives, other health professionals including parents
- a total of 815 mothers were provided with support and advice, with 361 living within the target wards
- There were 18 antenatal zoom sessions with a total of 46 attendees
- There were 31 antenatal one to one home visits
- There are currently 7 active volunteers living in Oldham to support the weekly breastfeeding support group within the Family Hubs and other group settings.
- 76 breast pump loans were delivered as part of Oldham's breastfeeding equipment loan service.
- There are a total of 85 Breastfeeding Friendly venues in Oldham all of which are promoting breastfeeding and improving access to environments that support mothers to breastfeeding.

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- Ongoing awareness raising campaigns via social media with activities delivered during National Breastfeeding Week

- 1.10 Moreover, since November 2023 and as part of the Family Hubs development, Home-Start staff members have been attending the antenatal clinics at the Royal Oldham Hospital to introduce the service to expectant parents and support the initiation of breastfeeding. There were 490 conversations with additional support offered. This included antenatal 1 to 1 home visits with an additional online support offer, which includes the Breastfeeding Basics Workshops. The feedback from the Infant Feeding Satisfaction survey demonstrates the value the service brings to support breastfeeding mothers who would otherwise have found breastfeeding challenging
- 1.11 There has recently been a significant increase in the number of referrals to the service. This is due to new referral processes which now sees discharge information being shared by the Royal Oldham Hospital along with the support from community midwifery services. The Q4 performance activity data for 2024/25 highlights a total of 225 referrals were received by HOST, which is substantial increase in comparison with Q4 in 2023/24. It is anticipated that referrals are likely to increase as more awareness is raised around the importance of breastfeeding and the service offers through the Family Hubs and Integrated Families Services.
- 1.12 UNICEF UK recognises the importance of breastfeeding in improving health, saving lives, and reducing demands on healthcare services. The Infant Feeding Peer Support Service in Oldham was recognised for good practice in 2023 as part of UNICEF UK Baby Friendly re-accreditation for Oldham Right Start. The re-assessment report stated that “many appreciative compliments were made about this excellent service” (UNICEF 2023). This demonstrates the contribution of the service towards ensuring that Oldham was accredited, with staff members being verbally commended for their good practice.

## **2 Current Position**

- 2.1 The collaboration agreement with Tameside Council and the contract between Tameside Council and Homestart (HOST) for the Infant Feeding Peer Support Service are both due to expire on 31 March 2026. The contract does not have provision for any further extension periods.
- 2.2 It is important that Oldham continues to have a dedicated community Infant Feeding peer support service to ensure that advice and support is in line with local needs. This service specification has recently been updated to reflect the findings and recommendations following the recent ‘Parents and Carers’ panel within the Family Hubs. This includes engagement activities focused on breastfeeding prevalence across the borough. It highlighted the importance of a breastfeeding support service to offer education, support on the hospital wards and within the community, peer support groups including breastfeeding friendly venues. These are important factors in determining a parent’s decision to breastfeed and the current service model is built around these recommendations

### 3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 Options and alternatives are detailed in the Confidential Part B version of the report, to be considered later in the private part of the meeting.

### 4 Consultation

- 4.1 The Director of Public Health, in her statutory capacity, and the Cabinet Member of Adults, Health and Social Care have been consulted on the performance of the service.

Regular performance monitoring meetings are held with the service and led by the Tameside commissioners.

Consultation has taken place with Tameside Council about the next steps for the collaborative commissioning arrangements through the dedicated working groups.

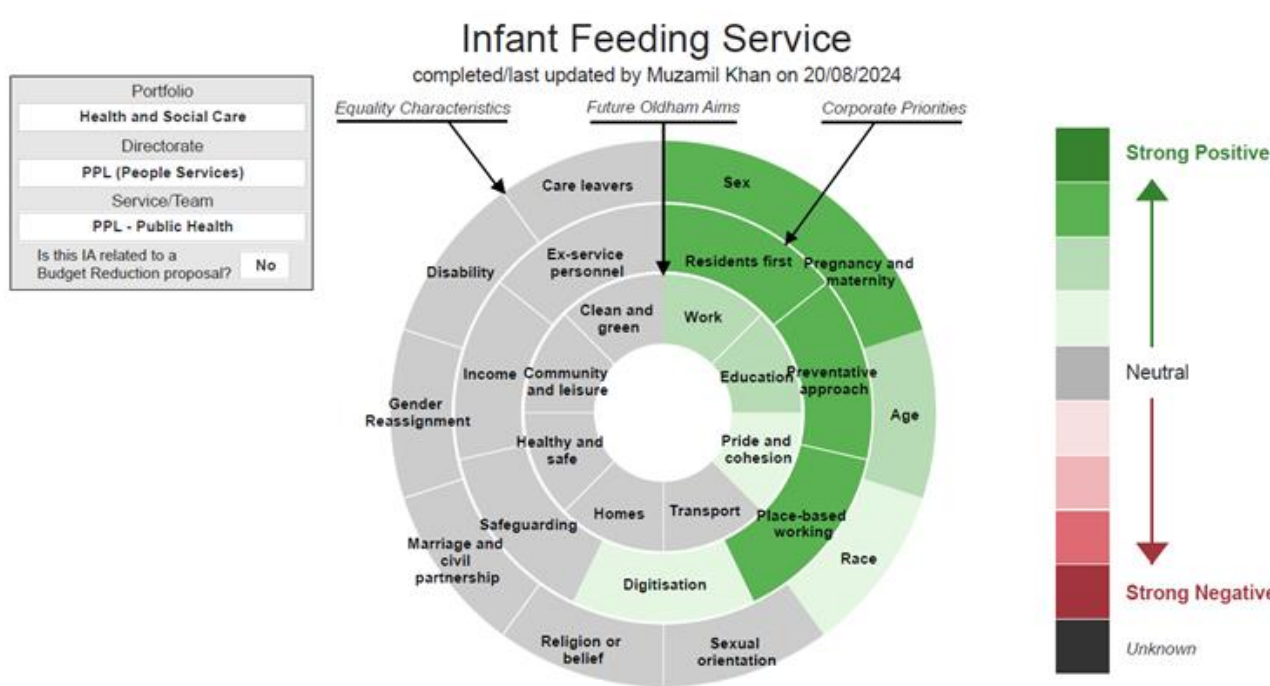
### 5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The financial implications are detailed in the Confidential Part B version of the report, to be considered later in the private part of the meeting.

### 6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The legal implications are detailed in the Confidential Part B version of the report, to be considered later in the private part of the meeting.

### 7 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People



The service is for parents who have just had a baby, and the specification will be inclusive and designed to meet the needs of parents across the borough, aimed particularly at those in areas of low breastfeeding rates.


8 **Key Decision**

8.1 Yes

9 **Key Decision Reference**

9.1 HSC-07-25

10 **Background Papers**

Title	Available from
Public Health Budget Settlement 2025/26 (07/04/2025)	<a href="https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5410">https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5410</a>
Infant Feeding Peer Support Service – Contract Extension (September 2024)	<a href="https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5270">https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5270</a>
Variation to Infant Feeding Peer Support Contract to support Family Hubs Delivery Plan (Feb 2023)	<a href="https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4612">https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4612</a>
Infant Feeding Peer Support (June 2021)	 Infant Feeding Peer Support Service - 202

11 **Appendices**

11.1 None