

Employee Matters Committee

1 May 2025

Breastfeeding Policy

Report from: Sam-Beck Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer

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Summary

This report seeks to introduce a Breastfeeding Policy to inform and support employees who are breastfeeding and wish to continue when returning to work. The policy will help to make sure the necessary accommodations are put in place, where possible, to enable a continuation of breastfeeding upon returning to work.

The policy aims to help inform discussions between managers and employees during maternity leave to allow provisions to be made to support breastfeeding on a return to work.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to approve the introduction of the Breastfeeding Policy set out at Appendix A to the report and support the implementation of the policy across all directorates and services.
- 1.2 The Committee is asked to support the creation of breastfeeding-friendly spaces where possible and the communication of awareness programs.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1 The adoption of the new policy is within the purview of the Employment Matters Committee and the decision is within the council's policy and budget framework.
- 2.2 The Breastfeeding Policy does not have a direct impact on the overall council frameworks and strategies. However, the policy does support the relevant strategies indirectly as the adoption of the policy will support ambitions to be an employer of choice. By supporting employees when returning to work this will help them to perform to the best of their abilities to deliver services and outcomes both for the council and the communities of Medway.

3. Background

- 3.1 The NHS recommends that parents who've chosen to breastfeed do so exclusively for around 6 months, and many continue for up to 2 years, alongside solid food.
- 3.2 However, the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world and [Unicef](#) reports that many in the UK stop breastfeeding before they want to.
- 3.3 The [World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative](#) argues that mothers are more likely to breastfeed for at least 4 months if their employer offers family-friendly or flexible work arrangements
- 3.4 Though many employers acknowledge the business and social benefits of being family-friendly and supporting working parents, breastfeeding remains an under-discussed area. Offering thoughtful provision and inclusive policies can therefore form an important part of the aim to be an employer of choice.
- 3.5 The law requires employers to assess risks and make reasonable adjustments to ensure the health and safety of birth parents and their babies.
- 3.6 Key health & safety requirements include:
 - **Suitable Facilities:** Employers must provide a private, hygienic space for breastfeeding or expressing milk. It is not sufficient to signpost toilets for this need. The area should also include somewhere to store their milk, for example a fridge.
 - **Risk Assessments:** Regular assessments should be conducted to ensure that work conditions do not pose risks to breastfeeding employees, for as long as they are choosing to feed in this way.
 - **Flexible Working Requests:** Under UK law, all employees have a day one right to request flexible working which can be particularly important for breastfeeding parents. These should be fully considered as it can allow employees to better balance their work and personal needs.
- 3.7 Supporting breastfeeding employees has tangible business benefits such as:
 - **Increased employee retention:** A supportive environment can significantly reduce turnover among new parents. When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to return to work after leave and remain with the company long-term. Supporting breastfeeding is just one aspect of being an employer of choice but it is important not to overlook it as the practical challenges can feel daunting.
 - **Enhanced Employee Satisfaction:** Employees who feel supported in balancing work and personal responsibilities, such as breastfeeding, are likely to have higher job satisfaction. This can translate into increased

loyalty, reducing the costs associated with hiring and training new employees.

- **Improved Productivity:** While some may fear that breastfeeding breaks reduce productivity, the opposite is often true. Employees who are less stressed and more satisfied are generally more focused and productive during work hours. Additionally, flexible working arrangements can help parents manage their time more effectively.

4. Options

4.1. Approve the Policy: This option ensures compliance with legal requirements and promotes health and well-being.

- Advantages: Legal compliance, improved employee satisfaction, and retention.
- Disadvantages: Practical implementation of the policy will require a review of building provision and the development of a meaningful communication and awareness plan.

4.2 Do not Approve the Policy: This option avoids immediate work required and resulting officer time which would be required across a number of service areas/teams but risks non-compliance and potential legal challenges.

- Advantages: No immediate outlay of officer time and development of training and awareness programmes.
- Disadvantages: Risk of legal non-compliance, negative impact on employee morale and retention

5. Advice and analysis

5.1 The recommended option is to approve the policy. This decision supports the council's commitment to inclusivity and legal compliance. The analysis includes considerations of sustainability and diversity, ensuring that the policy promotes a supportive environment for all employees

5.2 Appendix B to the report is a Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) which has been undertaken.

5.3 To summarise there is no detrimental impact identified due to the adoption of this policy. It would likely advance equality and foster good relations for Disability, Age, Sex and Pregnancy/Maternity.

6 Risk management

6.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Lack of support for the continuation of breastfeeding	Lack of support for breastfeeding can negatively impact the health of breastfeeding employees and their infants. This can lead to increased absenteeism due to health issues for both the mother and child.	Implement a comprehensive breastfeeding policy that includes providing private, clean spaces for breastfeeding or expressing milk, and flexible break times.	B IV
Employee Retention	Employees may feel unsupported and undervalued, leading to decreased job satisfaction and higher turnover rate.	Foster a supportive work environment by ensuring managers are trained to support breastfeeding employees and buildings have the required facilities where possible.	B IV

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

7 Consultation

- 7.1. The policy was shared with the Trade Unions and was discussed at Corporate Consultative Committee on 26 March 2025.
- 7.2. The policy was shared with colleagues within the Public Health team who collaborated on the policy content.
- 7.3. Staff forums have been engaged with, and the policy was presented at the Medway Makers meeting on 11 March 2025.
- 7.4. Any feedback received has been considered and implemented.

- 7.5. Further guidance will be developed from the feedback which will include a case study from a member of staff who has come forward to offer their account of how continuing breastfeeding at work was implemented successfully.

8 Climate change implications

- 8.1 There are no climate change implications regarding this report and policy.

9 Financial implications

- 9.1 The financial implications regarding the implementation of this policy cannot be defined as monitoring of resources requested would need to be implemented. Allocation of suitable areas have been considered as part of the Gun Wharf renovation plans and the communication of awareness programmes will be provided through normal communication channels.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 Key legislation includes the Equality Act 2010, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.
- 10.2 Breastfeeding employees are protected from discrimination and harassment under the Equality Act 2010. Employers must provide suitable facilities for breastfeeding or expressing milk and conduct risk assessments to ensure a safe working environment.
- 10.3 Employees have the right to request flexible working arrangements to accommodate breastfeeding needs under the Flexible Working Regulations 2014.
- 10.4 Breastfeeding employees must not be treated less favourably or subjected to offensive comments or behaviour. Failure to meet these obligations can result in grievances, tribunal claims, and reputational damage for the employer.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix A: Breastfeeding Policy

Appendix B: Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None