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21 June 2024

Suzanne Rankin
Chief Executive Officer
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
Maes y Coed Road
Llanishen
Cardiff
CF14 4HH

Dear Suzanne

CONCERNS ABOUT THE CHANGES IN THE AVAILABILITY OF SPECIALIST BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT PROVIDED BY CARDIFF AND VALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD

Dinas Powys Community Council is writing this letter to express its concern about the changes in the availability of specialist breastfeeding support provided by Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

The Community Council is aware that at present there are a number of breastfeeding groups/clinics running throughout the Health Board to support mums, babies and partners with breastfeeding. Only two of these groups currently have specialist breastfeeding support – held in Cardiff Bay on a Wednesday afternoon and Dinas Powys Library and Activity Centre on a Monday morning.

Residents have been informed that the Cardiff Bay group is being withdrawn at the end of June and the specialist breastfeeding health visitor at Dinas Powys group is also being withdrawn (although no date has been given). Residents are advised that the Dinas Powys group will still run, as will other groups/clinics. They will not be staffed by the specialists in breastfeeding support that currently run these groups. Instead, those that need that assistance/advice will need a referral from a health visitor to attend a clinic (by appointment only) in Llanederyn on Fridays or a home visit from other staff members will need to be arranged. Residents have been told these decisions are financial and management based.

These changes will result in a lack of accessibility for mums, partners and babies seeking specialist support. At present, mums can attend Dinas Powys and/or Cardiff Bay any week as a drop in without having to make an appointment. For many, the specialist support provided by these groups is a lifeline during the varied challenges of breastfeeding, not just for peer support, but for the knowledge and advice of the specialist gained from their training and extensive experience.

Wales breastfeeding rates are already low compared to other parts of the UK, with the UK having one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with only 1% of babies being exclusively breastfed at 6 months. The World Health Organisation recommends babies are breastfed until the age of two. The long-term public health benefits of breastfeeding are well documented. These two groups and the

specialist support provided by the two members of staff who lead them, provide vital advice and support at all stages of the breastfeeding journey for anyone who is breastfeeding, expressing or combination feeding – all of which can pose a challenge.

The Community Council, is concerned that these vital services are being withdrawn and reducing access to specialist support for babies of all ages but specifically over 28 days old. Withdrawing these specialists is also a concern in terms of upskilling other staff to take their place, if the specialists are not there, how can they be upskilling others. For many parents and babies, they cannot wait to speak to their health visitor, to then get a referral and wait for an appointment as any problem with breastfeeding cannot be left for days. The Community Council also need to mention the potential challenges of travelling from Dinas Powys to the North East of Cardiff or waiting for a home visit appointment. For those without transport this journey wouldn't be possible.

Between April 2023 and May 2024 the Dinas Powys Group supported an average of 17 babies, mums and partners per 2hr weekly session, with some sessions having up to 30 mums, babies and partners attending. This does not include the statistics from the Cardiff Bay Group. We question how this need can be replicated by the incoming changes? Parents and babies from the Dinas Powys area access both of these groups. The Council is aware they have met parents and babies who travel from further afield in the western Vale of Glamorgan who will also be impacted by the loss of this service and have further to travel. Breastfeeding support needs are dynamic, and it is unpredictable when challenges and needs arise. Support and education have been found to improve the duration of breastfeeding (Bengough et al 2022). It is important that this support comes from a place of training and experience. Ultimately these changes in service provision risks a reduction in breastfeeding success for parents and babies resulting in physical, emotional and psychological impacts for mums, partners and babies due to lack of timely, accessible, experienced support.

The Community Council implores the Health Board to reconsider their decision to withdraw the specialist support in Dinas Powys and the neighbouring group in Cardiff Bay and to honour their commitment outlined in the All Wales Breastfeeding Action Plan and Accreditation with the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative to the health and well-being of parents and babies who are breastfeeding.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanette Haigh". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Jeanette Haigh
Clerk, on behalf of Dinas Powys Community Council