

Experiences of pregnancy, birth and onwards:

The views of parents about
services and support in
Northamptonshire

January
2017





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Summary

Throughout March 2016, Healthwatch Northamptonshire (HWN) worked with parents to help design a questionnaire which asked parents with infants or young children their views on the help and support they received during pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period. The survey was designed to give a 'snapshot' of what parents thought of the available services, their overall experience during this period and their mental health and wellbeing. This work helps ensure the voices of parents are heard throughout the development and implementation of changes to services.

Healthwatch Northamptonshire held two focus groups with parents in March 2016 to develop the questionnaire, which was widely circulated during April to August 2016. The questionnaire was completed by 77 new parents.

We found that whilst the majority of parents felt they had received good care and support during pregnancy, labour and after birth, there was variability in their experiences, a number of perceived gaps in services and points where they would have liked more support.

The quality of care and supportiveness of healthcare professionals, particularly midwives, had the biggest impact on the experience of pregnancy and labour. Being listened to was valued, particularly when wanting a level of choice with birth - a number of parents gave positive feedback about the homebirth team because of this. Parents also wished to see the same healthcare professionals (particularly midwives and health visitors) for continuity of care.

The quality of information and advice was also important, during pregnancy, labour and after birth. Many felt that the NHS ante-natal classes were too basic and preferred alternative, non-NHS classes. There was also a desire for more information and advice about breastfeeding and other support available to families after birth. Parents suggested that this advice and information should be available in one, central place.

Many parents had greatly benefited from breastfeeding support cafés/groups, especially by having easy access to experts for technical and emotional support. These also facilitated valuable peer support and networking. A number of parents were disappointed about the closure of these cafés/groups and the reduction in services provided at children's centres and were concerned about where alternative support could be found. Most parents with older children felt they did not receive much support once their child had turned one, just routine checks and vaccinations. Many had benefited from using universal services (such as play activities and parent classes/groups) at children's centres with previous children and did not feel they had the same level of services now.



One third of mothers had experienced a mental health issue at some point before they got pregnant (including previous post-natal depression), 11% during pregnancy, and 25% after birth. Medical support for depression, etc. was available from GPs but there was some dissatisfaction with the support received and suggestions that parents would value additional support, such as counselling and assistance. Some felt that health visitors needed to take more interest in the wellbeing of the mother after birth.

Suggestions of what help or information should be available for parents during pregnancy and afterwards were for more information and advice, peer support and breastfeeding support as well as access to health visitors/midwives, mental health and wellbeing support and someone to 'check in' on how they were doing. Therefore, drop-in events and centres providing all this under one roof would meet most needs of parents after birth.

Key findings

Support during pregnancy

- **Most parents felt that overall, they had a positive experience during their last pregnancy (78%) and had received the right support during pregnancy (79%).** Aside from whether or not a pregnancy had complications, the **quality and nature of care from health professionals** (mostly midwives and consultants) had the biggest impact on overall experiences of pregnancy.
- **Continuity of care**, particularly seeing the same midwives, or not, was also a frequently mentioned factor affecting the pregnancy experience and level of support.
- Nearly three quarters (73%) felt that the **support from their midwife during pregnancy was 'very good' or 'good'**, compared to **49% for support from health visitors and 46% for support from GPs** (although many had not seen or not needed to see a health visitor or GP).
- Whether the healthcare professionals were **supportive, helpful, friendly and listened** were the most common factors affecting the ratings. The **quality of information and advice given (and it not being 'fear-inducing')**, the **availability** of GPs and health visitors and seeing the same person were also factors. A number of women did not see a health visitor before birth but most of those who did appreciated it. There was also a lot of support for the **home birth team**.





- **Nearly two-thirds did not attend ante-natal classes**, although 57% of these had a previous child. Choosing to attend **alternative, non-NHS classes** - which most rated highly (e.g. hypnobirthing, pregnancy yoga, National Childbirth Trust - NCT), not wanting to go/**being anxious about attending**, and having **logistical difficulties** were the other reasons for not attending ante-natal classes.
- **61% of those who had attended ante-natal classes rated them as 'very good' or 'good'**, mostly because they felt they were **informative**, and/or the **teacher was good**. On the other hand, some thought the information was **too basic**, did not cover the support available and was not interactive enough. Other parents **struggled to get a place on a class**.

Mental health

- One third of mothers had suffered from a mental health issue before they got pregnant. **The most common issue was depression, experienced by 14 women (18% of respondents) at some point before their pregnancy** (including six cases of previous post-natal depression).
- Of those who had suffered with a mental health issue before they got pregnant, **11 mothers (42%) were offered additional support during pregnancy because of this**, including from their GP, midwife or obstetrician.
- **Eight parents (11%) told us they did suffer from a mental health issue during their pregnancy**, seven of whom had these mental health issues before their pregnancy. Four parents gave examples of the support they received for these issues, **most of whom seemed dissatisfied with the support** offered. One mother told us how their deteriorating mental health was picked up by their obstetrician at Northampton General Hospital.
- **11 (25% of respondents) said they had suffered from a mental health issue after birth**, four for the first time. **All 11 said they experienced depression and/or anxiety. GP support and prescription of medication was main source of support people received**, although one was offered extra visits from a health visitor. Two would have liked different support or counselling and one was not offered any support.



Labour experience

- **Two thirds felt that overall, they (or their partner) had a positive experience during labour**. For many parents whether their experience was positive or negative **depended on whether there were complications with the labour, birth or baby** rather than the care they received. Other than whether there were complications, **being listened to and having supportive, calm, attentive and knowledgeable midwives** had the most impact on experience.





- 14 parents told us about **additional support** they would have liked, including a midwife who knew them, being kept more informed, and having more choice or control.

Breastfeeding experience

- **Three quarters of new mothers breastfed.** Most of those who did not were not able to because of an issue with the mother or baby. **Most breastfeeding mothers (41%) breastfed for up to six months**, but some of these would have continued to breastfeed after we spoke to them. The shortest amount of time mothers breastfed for was two weeks and longest was four years, nine months (and counting).
- 10 people (17%) told us they did not have any support with breastfeeding. Over half of those that did receive support told us they had been helped by breastfeeding cafés and midwives.
- Many were **positive** about the support they received, particularly from **Baby Ways¹/Northamptonshire Breastfeeding Alliance (NBA) Baby/Breastfeeding Café**, and expressed **disappointment over these services closing due to a lack of funding** and concern about where alternative support could be found. There was also positive feedback about the **Baby Ways visits and experts** and the **La Leche League² (LLL)** charity, whereas a few people felt that the support provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT) was poor.
- 19 parents suggested **additional support**. Almost all suggestions related to wanting **access (drop-in and home visits) to experts and peers for ongoing technical and emotional support** from birth to months later, as well as giving people **additional information, raising awareness of support groups**, and someone to check in on them.



First six months experience and support after the first year

- **88% of parents felt that the six months after the birth of their baby was a positive experience.** Reasons for a poor experience included health issues with the baby or mother (including mental health and wellbeing).
- **44% of the parents who had a child over a year old said they did not receive any or much support a year after their baby's birth.** Another 44% said they had seen a health visitor (29%) or had only had scheduled health visitor and/or GP check-ups and vaccinations (15%). Three told us their health visitor



¹ A Community Interest Company that held the contract to run breastfeeding support services.

² La Leche League provide mother to mother support for all stages of the breastfeeding journey via their helpline, social media, online help form and face to face at local meetings.



was available if they needed them. Six parents received support from **local parent's groups, peer support** or friends and three from a **midwife**.

- 19 parents suggested **additional support** they would have liked. The most frequent suggestions were about the **support from health visitors and ongoing access to advice from health visitors, such as a drop in session, and home visits. Checks on how parents were doing, more mental health support, breastfeeding support and other advice** were also suggested.

Children's Centres, help and information

- **Two thirds of parents were aware of what activities were available at their local children's centre.** Nine parents told us their concerns about the reduction of services in recent years, and the impact that has on new parents. Parents would like services available at children's centres to include **activities/play, advice/classes, parent groups/support networks and breastfeeding support** (these made up 58% of all suggestion).
- Most suggestions of what help or information should be available for new parents during pregnancy and afterwards were for **more information and advice** (which was honest and realistic), particularly making sure it **was all in one place or easy to obtain. More peer support and breastfeeding support** were suggested again, as well as **access to health visitors/midwives and mental health and wellbeing support.**





Recommendations

1. Healthcare professionals need to make every effort to listen to expecting parents and give them as much evidence-based information and choice over the birth process as possible (rather than fear-inducing or dated advice). Mothers in labour should be made aware of who can advocate for them if they do not feel listened to.
2. Continuity of care (i.e. the same midwife) should be maintained where possible. Having a supportive and friendly midwife or health visitor made a big difference to new parent's perinatal experiences.
3. Information for new parents should fully explain the services and support available to them, and who provides them/where to access them. This information should itself be easily accessible and all in one place, such as children's centres/hubs.
4. Health visitors, and other healthcare professional seeing parents after birth, should be well trained in spotting issues with the health of new parents, such as post-natal depression.
5. Additional non-medical support should be offered to those with mental health issues, including regular check after birth and during the early years. In particular, healthcare professionals should be aware of pathways for perinatal mental health, when to refer to a specialist, and ensure that referrals are followed up in a timely manner.
6. Financial support and resources should be provided for peer support groups for new parents, particularly to support breastfeeding.
7. Free access to play sessions, advice, and support and networking groups should be available for all. Drop-in sessions where parents can see health visitors and other health professionals would benefit parents who have little or no support and should also be available to those with children over the age of 12 months. All these activities/services should be held at easy to access, local locations, such as children's centres/hubs. Access to such services would also help identify and support new parents with mental health and wellbeing issues. (According to the Royal College of General Practitioners³ only 50% of people with perinatal mental health problems are diagnosed and early diagnosis and treatment can mitigate the potential negative impact long-term consequences).

³ Royal College of General Practitioners Perinatal Mental Health Toolkit, www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/toolkits/perinatal-mental-health-toolkit.aspx



8. Further engagement with parents of children under the age of one, particularly first time parents, should take place to establish whether the current services available are meeting their needs and offering good quality care and a positive experience.

Background

The Northamptonshire Children and Young People's Future in Mind Local Transformation Plan for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health⁴ (here after referred to as the Transformation Plan) aims to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of Children and Young People (CYP) across the county and sets out the actions that need to be taken in the next five years to do this. Healthwatch Northamptonshire (HWN) has been commissioned to engage with CYP and families to inform the objectives of the Transformation Plan.

Perinatal mental health⁵ is an area within the Transformation Plan that has been identified for improvement. Mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year after birth are often under-reported, under-diagnosed and under-treated. Up to one in five women and one in ten men are affected by mental health problems in the perinatal period. Without appropriate treatment, perinatal mental health problems can have long-lasting consequences on not only women, but their partners and children too. However, this is not inevitable. When problems are diagnosed early and treatment offered promptly, these effects can be mitigated.⁶

We sought to investigate this in the context of asking parents about their experiences and the support they received during pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period.



⁴ Children and Young People's Future in Mind Local Transformation Plan for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health - NHS Nene Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is working together with local partners across the NHS, local authority public health, children's services, education and youth justice sectors and voluntary and community sectors to develop Local Transformation Plans for delivering improvements in children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in Northamptonshire over the next 5 years. The CCG will take guidance and approval from NHS England Specialised Commissioning and the local Health and Wellbeing Board in developing a vision for the future - to ensure that every child or young person gets the help they need when and where they need it.

⁵ Perinatal mental health problems are those which occur during pregnancy or in the first year following the birth of a child, www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/perinatal/

⁶ Royal College of General Practitioners Perinatal Mental Health Toolkit, www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/toolkits/perinatal-mental-health-toolkit.aspx



Method

Survey design

A survey was designed by the HWN Children, Young People and Families planning group and was then tested for appropriateness/refined at two workshops with Northamptonshire Breastfeeding Alliance (NBA) in March 2016. The survey was designed to engage with mothers and partners and explore their opinions. The survey (Appendix 1 and 2) was composed of short open and closed question asking various questions about their experience pre, during and post labour.

Survey distribution

The survey was sent to various venues across the county, e.g. children's centres. HWN staff and volunteers also attended stay and play sessions and play groups as well as soft play centres such as Hullabaloo, Berzerk and Wacky Warehouse.

HWN also asked partners to distribute the survey in their newsletters and shared it via the HWN newsletter, website and social media.

Limitations

Only 38% of those giving their child's age had a child under 1 year of age, so were perinatal by definition.

72% of parents had a previous child/children so may have told us about less recent experiences, although still have views on what makes a 'good' experience.

We spoke to both the mother and partner from three families so will have some duplication of experience for these three families, but from different perspectives.

The majority (56%) of parents spoken to live in Northampton so the report heavily reflects the experiences of parents in Northampton. For example, the proportion of home births in Northampton is higher than in other areas.

Data analysis

Data from open text question was manually coded into categories derived from the data. To maintain confidentiality, no-one is referred to by name or is identifiable by others throughout this report.



What people told us

- All figures given are percentages of the answers received for a particular question, unless specified otherwise.
- Overall 77 parents took part in the survey (64 mothers and 13 partners).

Demographics

The parents who completed the survey were between 19 and 52 years old (95% gave their age).

The average age was 34 years old and the most common age was 31.

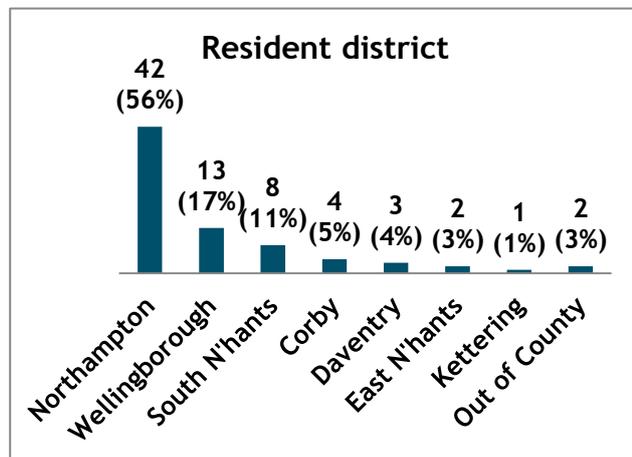
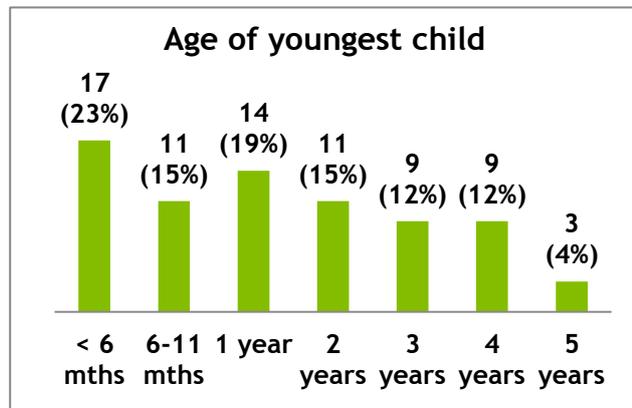
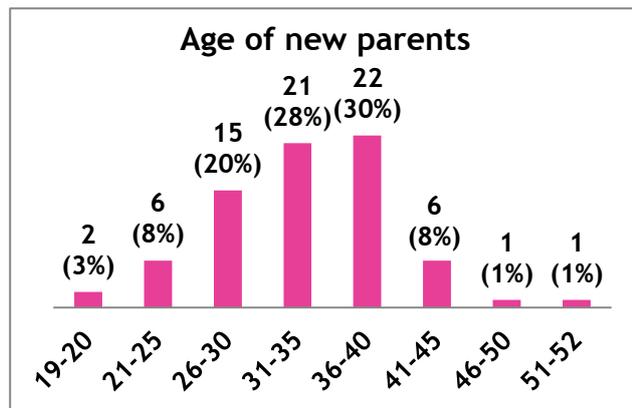
Most (78%) were between the ages of 26 and 40.

The parents' youngest children were between four days old and five years old. The average age of their youngest child was 21 months.

28 parents (38% of those giving their child's age) had a child under 1 year of age, 42 (57%) had a child under 2 years of age.

Parents had two children on average (and two were expecting their second child).

Most of the parents spoken to (56%) lived in Northampton.





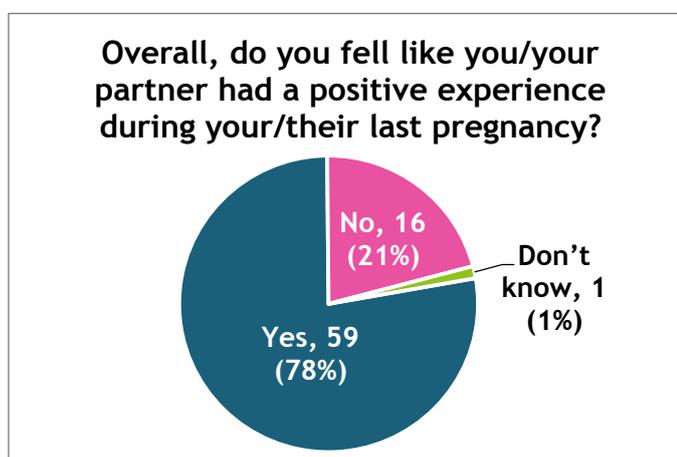
Support during pregnancy

Overall experience:

Overall, do you feel like you/your partner had a positive experience during your/their last pregnancy?

Most parents (78%) felt that overall, they (or their partner who was pregnant) had a **positive experience** during their last pregnancy.

44 parents gave various reasons for why they had a positive experience or not, grouped as follows:



Positive reasons	Number of responses
Good care:	13
<i>Good midwife care</i>	6
<i>Good homebirth team</i>	3
<i>Good consultant care</i>	1
<i>Good clinical care</i>	1
<i>Good GP care</i>	1
<i>Good health visiting team</i>	1
No complications	10
Knowledge from previous pregnancies	2
Well supported	2
Seeing the same midwife	2
Kept informed	1
Total	30
Negative reasons	Number of responses
Poor care:	8
<i>Poor midwife care/pre-natal care</i>	4
<i>Poor consultant care</i>	3



<i>Poor clinical care</i>	<i>1</i>
Complication	7
Not seeing the same midwife	4
Referral to wellbeing not processed	1
Depression	1
Total	21

Aside from whether or not a pregnancy had **complications**, the **quality and nature of care from health professionals** (mostly midwives and consultants) had the biggest impact on overall experiences of pregnancy, mentioned by 21 out of the 44 parents who answered (48%). Positive example of care included:

“My midwife went above and beyond to make me comfortable”

“Good support from midwife/health visiting team”

“Homebirth midwifery team were amazing”

“Excellent consultant led care at Northampton General Hospital”

Negative example of care included:

“The midwife pulled from the umbilical cord to release the placenta and managed to tear it off, leaving a bit behind. I nearly bled to death”

“The midwife wasn’t available and she did not know a lot - every question I asked she could not answer”

“The aftercare in the maternity ward is quite shocking due to lack of staff. Waited all day for pain relief”

Mixed experiences of care included:

“Midwives in labour were great and so was aftercare but pre-natal care not good”

“I eventually found an amazing midwife but consultant led care was awful and midwives were a mixed bunch”

Seeing the **same midwives**, or not, was also frequently mentioned (6 out of 44 parents), for example:

“Consistent pre-natal midwife. Good care and advice”



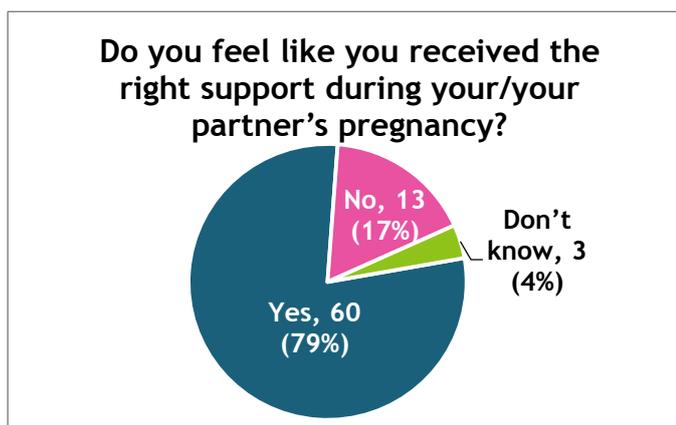
“I had the same midwife for every appointment, really supportive”

“I was messed around at the very beginning of my pregnancy by the midwife. Seen a different midwife each visit so could not build a relationship with a midwife and they also did not know you very well”

Do you feel like you received the right support during your/your partner’s pregnancy?

Most parents (79%) felt that overall, they (or their partner who was pregnant) had received the right support during pregnancy.

Those who said they did not receive the right support told us what they would have liked:



Need	Number of responses
Continuity of care	4
Good advice that doesn't unnecessarily raise anxiety	3
More breastfeeding support	2
A referral to wellbeing/physiotherapy	2
More medical help/general support	2
Better hospital maternity support	1
More helpful midwife	1
Earlier introduction to health visitor	1
More pregnancy information	1
Total	17

Continuity of care was most frequently mentioned, and two also mentioned that some advice can raise anxiety, e.g.:

“Too much change initially created a poor initial experience leading to some anxiety/nervousness about what was happening. Additional scans for concerns added to this and proved to be unnecessary”



“Continuity of care from midwife team; evidence-based advice from consultants/registrars NOT the opinion/fear-based ‘advice’ we tended to get”

“I had great continuity of care with midwives, I do feel the consultants are bully-ish on occasions”

Other example needs:

“I asked for a referral to wellbeing and it wasn’t processed”

“More from maternity in the hospital, I was made to feel I didn’t know my own body!”

“Would have loved to have met my health visitor before 6pm and have been pulled towards breast feeding services”

11 of those who said they did receive the right support gave us reasons why, including:

“All questions answered”

“Brilliant support with choice of birth, arranging dates, support with health concerns and general maternity care”

“Although different midwife most time. I do feel if I needed any support I could get it”

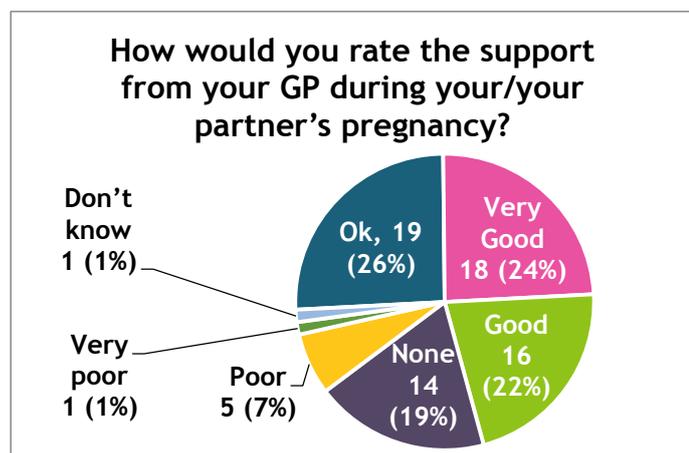
Support from GP:

How would you rate the support from your GP during your/your partner’s pregnancy?

Nearly half (46%) felt that the support from their/their partner’s GP was ‘very good’ or ‘good’. 6 parents felt it was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’.

36% felt it was ‘ok’, mostly because they had not seen their GP or had not needed to. 14 mothers said they did not get any support from their GP, again they had not seen them or felt they needed to.

55 parents gave various reasons to explain their rating, grouped as follows:





Positive reasons	Number of responses
There/available when needed	8
Good GP/midwife/care	8
No concerns with GP/practice	5
Answered questions	5
Helpful/supportive	3
Kept informed	1
Total	31
Negative reasons	Number of responses
Unsatisfactory/poor care	5
Did not see my GP, but would have liked to	2
Hard to get appointments	1
Did not always listen to my concerns	1
Total	9
Neutral reasons	Number of responses
Did not see my GP	15
Saw midwife/consultant instead	6
Total	21

Availability of primary care staff was mentioned in both positive and negative reasons, although many parents felt they did not need to see their GP, or that it was more useful to see a midwife, e.g.:

“My GP and midwife were always there when I needed support”

“They did ask if I was ok, but didn’t really offer much help”

“Was very nice when the one time I saw a GP. Didn’t really need to see one during my 9 months”

“Not really involved as midwife took care of everything. Went straight to home birth team”

“I don’t feel a GP is the right healthcare professional to direct pregnant women but it is best done through the midwife”



We heard examples of helpful or **supportive GPs** who answered questions, but also of those who did not **listen** well or were dismissive, e.g.:

“He helped with any questions I had”

“Explained morning sickness and treatments available. Caring and empathetic”

“They gave us lots of advice”

“Didn’t always listen to my concerns”

We also heard some examples of poor care, e.g.:

“Took a lot to get anti-reflux medication for chronic heartburn at around 6 months pregnant. He expected me to sleep upright!”

“Failed to diagnose infection and led to sepsis and a week in hospital at 12 weeks”

“I saw my GP regarding my post-natal depression and post-traumatic stress disorder from my previous birth and he seemed to dismiss this”

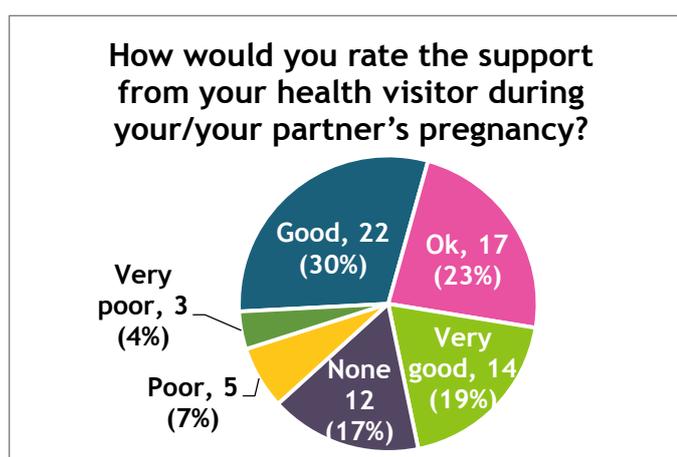
Support from health visitor:

How would you rate the support from the health visitor during your/your partner’s pregnancy?

Half (49%) felt that the support from the health visitor was ‘very good’ or ‘good’. 11% (8 parents) felt it was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’.

23% felt it was ‘ok’ and 12 mothers (16%) said they did not get any support from their health visitors as they had not seen them.

55 parents gave various reasons to explain their rating (see below). Some parents had based their rating on their experiences of health visitors post-birth and other during pregnancy (many are indistinguishable):





Positive reasons	Number of responses
Supportive/friendly	11
Informative/good advice	8
Available	8
Total	27
Negative reasons	Number of responses
Did not see health visitor/Did not see much	9
Poor care/unhelpful	4
Patronising/opinionated/rude	3
Inconsistent person seen	2
Lacking practical support/ Health issues not addressed	2
Total	20
Neutral reasons	Number of responses
Did not see health visitor during pregnancy	15
Health visitor not necessary	1
Conflicting advice to midwife	1
Total	17

Most of those parents who saw a health visitor during pregnancy **appreciated being able to see their health visitor before birth**, e.g.:

“Introduced before birth for second baby and this is better, always know they are there”

“It was nice to meet my health visitor before I gave birth this time”

“She came to our house and introduced herself before baby was born”

Others felt they did not **get enough support**, with many not seeing a health visitor at all, and **others didn’t think it was necessary to see them** anyway, e.g.:

“Medical centre doesn’t have a designated health visitor so minimal contact received unless necessary, which for me was fine but a first time mum may have struggled or felt unsupported”

“Didn’t see the health visitor until after my baby was born. Just saw my GP and midwife and was happy with that”



“Didn’t have any support from health visitor during pregnancy”

“Saw once. Little value of home visit”

Eight thought their health visitor was **informative** and gave **good advice** (although some of these may relate to post-birth support), e.g.:

“Always offered support on time and answered questions”

Four parents thought they had received poor support, although these mostly relate to post-birth, or do not specify, e.g.:

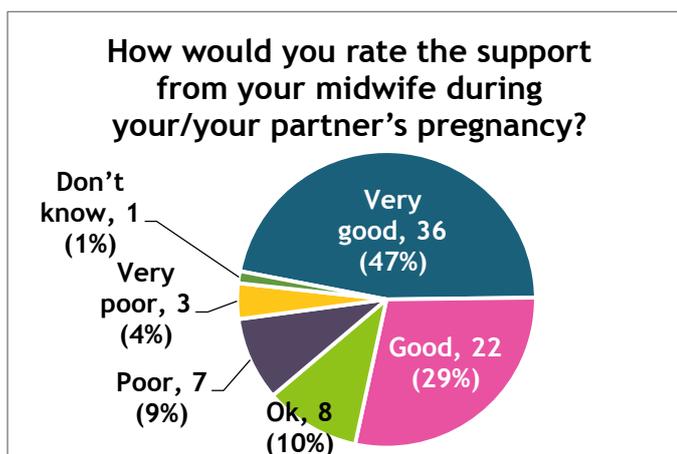
“Her attitude was rather rude and advice given was unhelpful”

Support from midwife:

How would you rate the support from your midwife during your/your partner’s pregnancy?

Nearly three quarters (73%) felt that the support from their midwife was ‘very good’ or ‘good’. 16% (10 parents) felt it was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. 11% (7) felt it was ‘ok’.

53 parents gave various reasons to explain their rating, grouped as follows:



Positive reasons	Number of responses
Supportive/friendly	17
Informative/good advice	9
Good home birth team	7
Available	7
Consistency	3
Total	43
Negative reasons	Number of responses
Lack of consistency	9



Poor care/unhelpful	6
Limited availability/delays	4
Bureaucratic - had to fight for beliefs	1
Total	20
Neutral reasons	Number of responses
Mixed feelings about home birth team	1
Would like more support for VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Caesarean)	1
Total	2

Whether the midwife was **supportive and friendly** and/or gave **good advice** was the most common answer resulting in a positive rating, e.g.:

“Always been supportive and given me correct information”

“Listened to my concerns and relaxed me”

“Very supportive throughout and after (even though I had to go into hospital for both births) - she was my midwife for both pregnancies (home birth team)”

“Extremely nice, informative, non-judgmental. Open to my ideas”

Other parents thought their midwives were less helpful, e.g.:

“She lacked confidence and said ‘waste of my time checking you as you are high risk and under hospital consultant’”

“Incorrect information given from midwife on more than one occasion”

“Very unfriendly. Felt like she was rushing me to get me out”

Availability of midwives and appointments also influenced experiences, e.g.:

“Gave us all relevant information/care. Was available when needed”

“Always there when needed questions answered”

“Very supportive - answered her phone and sorted issues after complicated birth last time. Referrals done on time”

“I had to wait until 10 weeks to get a booking with the appointment which then resulted in a delayed 12 week scan”



Continuity was again important to them, e.g.:

“I only saw my named midwife once, I never saw the same midwife twice, so there was no continuity of care. Thankfully I was seen regularly at the hospital by the consultant led team”

“Consistently the same pre-natal midwife”

“I wanted a home birth but the midwife team kept changing so never knew who my midwife was”

The home birth team received seven positive comments, e.g.:

“Home birth team, so got to mostly see the same midwife”

“My home birth team midwife was excellent, always at the end of a phone, very supportive for any question I had”

“Northampton home birth team are amazing! Super service”

There were also a few examples of issues not being addressed:

“Saw different one each time. No help with depression”

“She did not do a good job during the delivery but she was not accountable to anybody, so got away with extremely bad practice which could have cost me my life”

“Hands tied a lot by ‘policy’ - often felt I had to justify everything and fight for my beliefs”

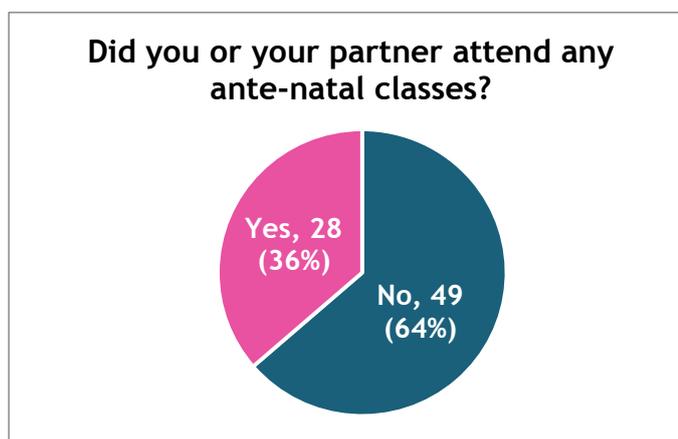
Ante-natal classes

Did you or your wife/partner attend any ante-natal classes?

Nearly two-thirds did not attend ante-natal classes.

43 parents gave reasons or clarified their answers.

Most parents (28) did not attend because they had previous children so they did not need the classes and were not offered them.





Five parents did not want to go or felt they did not need to go and two said they would feel uncomfortable going (one mentioned anxiety).

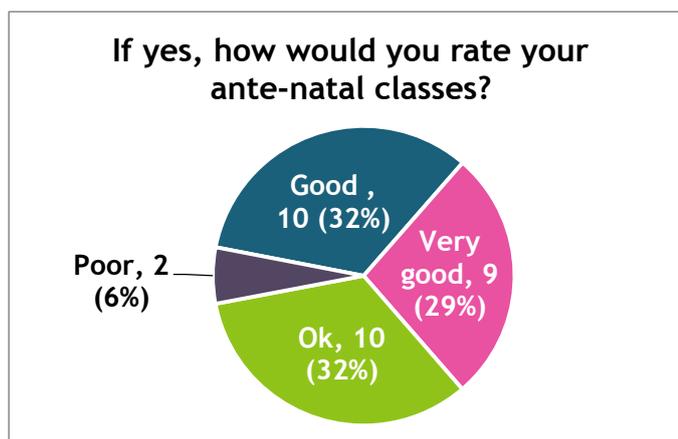
Four said they went to alternative non-NHS class instead (e.g. hypnobirthing, pregnancy yoga, NCT) and two felt that classes were not useful.

Two parents had difficulty with logistics (transport and childcare).

If yes, how would you rate those ante-natal classes?

All 28 parents who attended ante-natal classes and three who had previously attended them gave a rating. 61% (20 parents) rated the classes as 'very good' or 'good'. Only 2 parents rated the classes as 'poor'.

27 parents gave various reasons to explain their rating, grouped as follows:



Positive reasons	Number of responses
Informative	8
Good midwife leading class	2
Friendly/positive	2
Good couples workshop	1
All on one day	1
Tailored to group	1
Well organised	1
Total	16
Negative reasons	Number of responses
Too basic	5
Not interactive enough	2
Places unavailable	2
Did not explain rights/support available	2
Teacher biased towards home birth	1
Did not cover twins	1



Did not give behavioural advice	1
Total	14
Neutral reasons	Number of responses
Basic information	1
Only attended one	1
Total	2

Most positive ratings were related to the **information provided and the quality of the teacher**, e.g.:

“Covered entire process very positively while remaining informative”

“Tailored to the group - up to date information. I was booked for a caesarean section and received lots of information”

“The teacher was a practising midwife also so she was very current”

However, some parents felt that the **information given was too basic** and did not cover rights and **support available**, and was **not interactive** enough, e.g.:

“The free anti-natal classes I attended at my local Surestart was good for information. However I paid to do hypnobirthing and found out about all my right during these classes”

“I just felt I could have had more classes and more knowledge”

“They did not give info about twins. At Wellingborough only knew about Kettering General not Northampton General”

“Too long for such simple information or otherwise needs to be more interaction/activity involved”

“Just a one off class- very poor support”

Two parents told us they **struggled to get a space** on a class:

“Only issue was that there were no spaces available when you are meant to go, so didn’t go until I was very heavily pregnant, as were others”

“There was no NHS provision while I was pregnant, so we did private classes, Hypnobirthing and NCT - expensive but good”



Other chose to do NCT classes and/or Hypnobirthing instead. Four rated their NCT classes as 'very good' (2), 'good' and 'ok' and three said that Hypnobirthing was "excellent".

"NCT: not balanced, very focused on home/natural birth. Hypnobirthing - brilliant!"

"Attended NCT instead - was happy to attend both but was advised not to attend by first midwife"

The following comment may also relate to NCT classes:

"The lady who gave the classes was very anti hospital/NHS and very pro natural birth, which I find quite off putting"

Additional comments

12 parents offered additional comments about ante-natal care:

Two mentioned **lack of provision**:

"None offered via NHS"

"Still not sure why there was not NHS provision...."

Two suggested the provision of **alternatives** and better promotion:

"Alternatives like hypnobirthing/acupuncture should be promoted via NHS not have to be sought privately"

"Could be better advertised"

One would like ante-natal classes to be **available for people with previous children**:

"Would be good to offer to other pregnancies, especially if few years in between last pregnancy!"

One was **positive** about the classes:

"A fantastic service for any new parent. Necessary for confidence building and meeting other new parents-to-be!"



Mental health issues

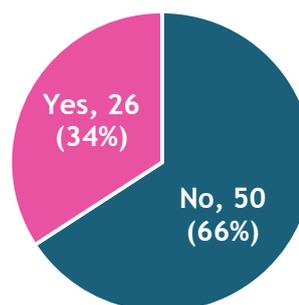
Pre-pregnancy:

Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues before you/she got pregnant?

One third of mothers had suffered from a mental health issue before they got pregnant.

When asked to tell us more, eight told us they had more than one issue (e.g. anxiety and depression) and six specified that the issue(s) was related to a previous pregnancy. The most common issue was depression, experienced by 14 women (18% of respondents) at some point before their pregnancy (including six cases of post-natal depression).

Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues before you/she got pregnant?



Issue	Number of responses
Depression	8
Post-natal depression with previous children	6
Anxiety	5
Post-traumatic stress disorder (one from previous birth)	3
Eating disorder	2
Bipolar disorder	2
Panic attacks	1
Ante-natal depression with previous children	1
Total	28

Were you or your partner offered any additional support during pregnancy because of this?

Of those who had suffered with a mental health issue, 11 mothers (42%) were offered additional support. 14 (54%) were not and one said they did not require it.

Nine parents told us more about the support offered. Four mentioned support from their GP (and one from their midwives), e.g.:

“GP put me on medication”



“Midwives and GP asked if support needed but I already knew how to access from previous experience”

“Offered a GP appointment but he felt I didn’t need any further support and he was right”

Two were offered counselling, e.g.:

“Counselling during pregnancy for number one, had a bereavement during pregnancy”

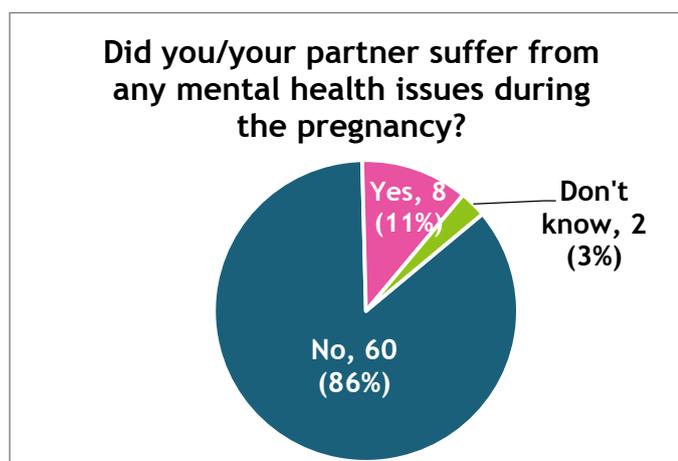
Additionally, one received a community midwife, one received a wellbeing team referral and one was offered help and admitted to hospital when an Obstetrician picked up their case.

During pregnancy:

Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues during the pregnancy?

Eight parents told us they did suffer from a mental health issue during their pregnancy, seven of whom had these mental health issues before their pregnancy (depression, anxiety, bipolar and eating disorders). The one person who had not previously had a mental health issue said they experienced:

“Increased anxiety, panic attacks, mild agoraphobia”



If yes, what support did you/your partner receive because of this?

Four parents gave examples, most seemed dissatisfied with the support offered, e.g.:

“GP unhelpful - can’t medicate, get on with it”

“Only wellbeing offered”

“Crisis team and A&E team... A&E mental health team did not liaise with crisis team” (Anxiety and depression picked up by obstetrician)



Post-birth:

Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues after the birth?

Only 44 (56%) answered this question. **11 (25%) said they had suffered from a mental health issue after birth.** Four of these had not previously experienced a mental health issue, three had also suffered from a mental health issue before and during pregnancy, three before pregnancy but not during, and one during pregnancy but not before.

Of the four that experienced a mental health issue for the first time after birth:

- Two experienced post-natal depression (PND)
- One experienced depression caused by hypothyroidism (initially thought to be PND)
- One experienced anxiety

The other seven experienced PND (3), Depression (2) and Anxiety (3)

If yes, what support did you/your partner receive because of this?

GP support and prescription of medication was main source of support - mentioned by six, including a referral to the wellbeing team, e.g.:

“GP - commenced medication”

“I did feel quite anxious and down, I then had some anxiety depression tablets”

“GP referral to local wellbeing team”

Two were offered medication but **felt they needed other support and counselling:**

“GP researched antidepressants - what I needed was support and encouragement and counselling”

“None - offered meds and told to contact health visitor, which after her last attitude I did not do”

One was offered “extra visits from health visitor”

Another said they were not offered any help and one person said they were able to manage on their own.



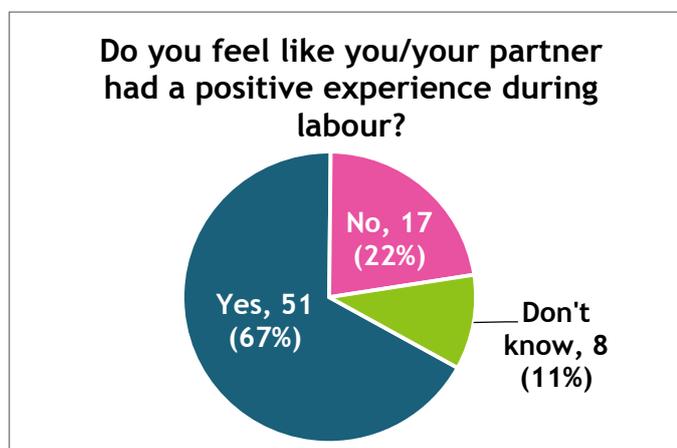
Labour experience

Overall experience:

Do you feel like you/your partner had a positive experience during labour?

Two thirds felt that overall, they (or their partner) had a positive experience during labour - 63% (40) of mothers and 85% (11) of partners.

When asked to give reasons for answering 'no', 48 parents responded, including 25 who said they had a positive experience (more may have given positive examples if the question had asked for them):



Negative reasons	Number of responses
Complications	15
<i>Complications with the labour, birth or baby</i>	11
<i>Complications as a result of not being allowed to go to hospital</i>	2
<i>Complications as a result of poor care/not being listened to</i>	2
Not listened to	3
Felt neglected/left alone	3
Unknown midwives/staff	2
Poor care	1
Forced to have treatment/test	1
Rushed	1
Had to wait to be seen	1
Poor cleanliness	1
Changing plans	1
Midwife not always calm	1
Resuscitation equipment visible	1
Total	31



Positive reasons	Number of responses
Supportive/friendly/knowledgeable midwives	8
No complications	7
Homebirth positive	6
Caesarean section positive/planned	3
Natural birth positive	2
Felt listened to	1
Clean and relaxing environment	1
Impressed with NGH labour ward	1
Total	29

For many parents whether their experience was positive or negative **depended on whether there were complications with the labour, birth or baby rather than the care they received**. Some parents implied the complications were a result of poor care or not being listened to, such as:

“Felt neglected at first. Was not listened to. Ended up with an emergency caesarean section and torn womb”

“Hospital wouldn’t let me come in for ages and then ended up having emergency caesarean section due to child in stress”

Other than whether there were complications, **being listened to and having supportive and knowledgeable (and consistent) midwives** had the most impact on experience, e.g.:

“Being told I was nowhere near having my baby as contractions were irregular then to completely deliver in the next 30 min felt I was judged not as a person”

“Unknown midwives attended, shift was changed during my active labour, resuscitation equipment laid out in my direct eye line, pressure put on to meet NHS timeline not natural physiological ones, e.g. placenta delivery”

“Left alone for hours in filthy bed”

“My homebirths were amazing. Midwives were incredibly knowledgeable and supportive”



“I had the care of a trainee midwife and her trainer/supervisor. They were a good team, very friendly and supportive. My husband got to rest whilst they and the anaesthetist looked after me (it was the middle of the night)”

There were other examples of poor care, e.g.:

“The midwife pulled from the umbilical cord to release the placenta and managed to tear it off, leaving a bit behind. I nearly bled to death”

“All happened very quickly (induction). Literally grabbed passing staff for delivery. ‘Forced’ to have an IV and blood test”

Support during labour:

What kind of support did you/your partner receive during labour?

Most parents told us they received support from midwives and or doctors/consultants and family members during labour.

A few took the opportunity to tell us about positive and negative experiences of support. For example, **good support from midwives and other healthcare professionals:**

“The student midwife was very calming and had a great manner about her”

“The ladies in the theatre were fantastic and really helped to keep me calm”

“Midwife always there, answered any questions and updated on progress”

“Midwives at home were excellent - very attentive. In hospital, it was very rushed as I had arrived by ambulance. But the surgical team were excellent.”

There were also some examples from parents who felt they had poor support, e.g.:

“Extremely bad support. No doctors were present and when complications started, no doctors were on duty as it was night time. I was left to bleed uncontrollably for 3 hours before a doctor appeared on the scene and conducted an investigation. Then they scraped the bits of placenta still attached after having offered conflicting information as to whether I should have a local or a total anaesthesia”

“It felt as though the healthcare professionals wanted to rush me along... I don’t think I could have done it any quicker...”



Others felt they did not have much support, e.g.:

“None from hospital, lots from husband”

“None, midwife was very blasé, kept leaving me for long periods”

What other support would you have liked?

24 parents did not feel they needed any more support and 14 parents told us they would have like additional support:

Three would have liked to have a **dedicated or consistent midwife**, e.g.:

“Midwife I knew and who had been through my pregnancy with me”

Four would have liked to have been **more informed** about what was happening during labour, and/or checked on or supported more, e.g.:

“Someone to talk me through what was going on around me”

“To have been checked on more before I went to the labour ward. Labour was slow progressing but baby was back to back and I was in a lot of pain and no pain relief or support given”

“Friendly face, supportive talk”

One would have liked better midwives:

“Proper conduct from the midwives and more accountability”

Others gave more specific suggestions, such as a desire for more peace and **quiet**:

“To be left alone when I wanted! Ambulance professionals could have responded to requests to be quiet.....Better understanding of hypnobirthing - someone to make them read my birth plan !!!”

More efficient **discharge** from hospital:

“More efficient discharge from hospital. Not released until 4pm, waiting for paperwork for 8 hours. I was bed blocking which had a knock on effect to labour ward”

A **peer support** group for people with anxiety:

“Group with other mums to be who suffer anxiety”



More choice or control:

“To be believed about what my body needed! Was told not ready to push when I was!”

“Not to have been induced due to age factor”

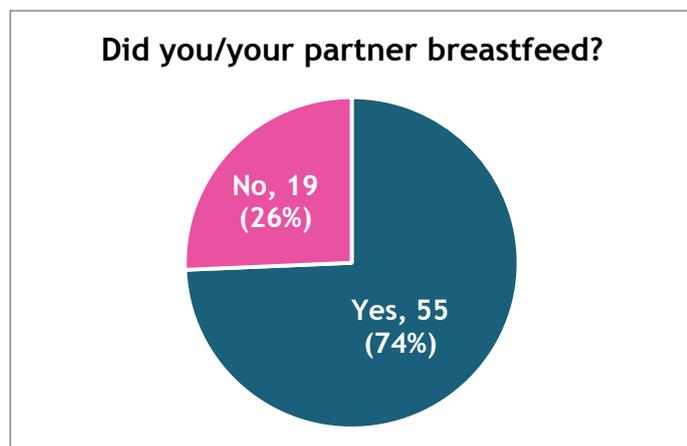
“Someone to have examined me sooner!”

And, availability of **finger food**, more **doctors working at night**, and **another scan** during induction.

Breastfeeding experience

Did you/your partner breastfeed?

Three quarters of new mothers breastfed. Most of those who did not (12) were not able to because of an issue with the mother or baby. Four mothers chose not to breastfeed, giving the following reasons:



“I had gone through IVF treatment to get pregnant which is physically and emotionally challenging and felt that I needed my body to be able to recover.”

“Just chose not to breastfeed”

“I just didn’t want to”

“I don’t like it”

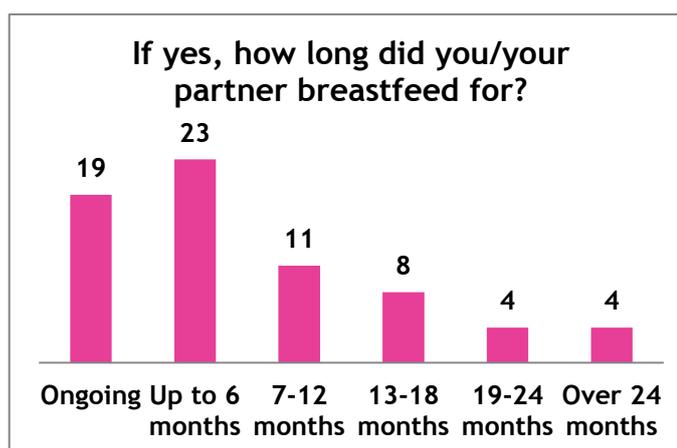
One mother who wasn’t able commented that they “don’t know why as wasn’t checked”.



If yes, how long did you/she breastfeed for?

Many mothers were still breastfeeding so could not say how long they would breastfeed for in total. They also answered how long they breastfed their previous children.

Most mothers (23, 41% of responses) breastfed for up to six months, but some of these would have continued to breastfeed after we spoke to them. 19 (34%) said they were still breastfeeding. The shortest amount of time was two weeks and longest was four years, nine months (and counting).



Breastfeeding support:

What support did you/your wife/partner receive when you/she breastfed?

10 of the 58 respondents (17%) told us they did not have any support and eight told us they did not need any. Support received by the other 48 (83%) can be grouped as follows:

Support	Number of responses
Breastfeeding/Baby café (Baby Ways)	15
Midwives	13
<i>Location unspecified</i>	7
<i>Midwives/Healthcare Assistant at hospital</i>	5
<i>Home visit from midwife</i>	1
Health visitors	6
La Leche League (charity)	6
Breastfeeding team/service/coaches/nurse	5
Peer support	3
Breastfeeding support worker at children's centre	2
Baby Ways experts/visits	2
Help with latching (not known where from)	2
Home visits (not known who from)	1
NHFT drop in	1



Northamptonshire Breastfeeding Alliance	1
Just leaflets	1
No support	10
None needed	8
Total	78

Many were **positive** about the support they received, particularly from **Baby Ways⁷/NBA Baby (Breastfeeding) Café**, and expressed **disappointment over these services closing** due to a lack of funding and concern about where alternative support could be found, e.g.:

“Baby Café on a Friday morning (not funded by council so had to shut - very short-sighted of Northamptonshire County Council)”

“Local baby café and Baby Ways, which have now closed due to lack of funding”

“Excellent. Breastfeeding café helped in hospital and after. Put me in touch with an experienced twin mummy who had breastfed”

“I used the services of the baby café in Northampton but this has now sadly closed down. I don’t use any breastfeeding support as I don’t know if there is anything out there other than online”

There was also positive feedback about the **Baby Ways home visits and experts** and the **La Leche League charity⁸**:

“With my first baby, lots of support. Baby Ways came to my house straight away which was invaluable. In hospital with my second the midwife support workers were excellent, helping me cup feed and Baby Ways came to see me in hospital, which was needed as she was a familiar face that I needed to see. I didn’t need the technical support, just emotional as the hospital stay was unexpected”

“Midwife referred me to Baby Ways, who were a great help. No support for baby two other than routine midwife appointments”

⁷ A Community Interest Company that held the contract to run breastfeeding support services.

⁸ La Leche League provide mother to mother support for all stages of the breastfeeding journey via their helpline, social media, online help form and face to face at local meetings.



Two parents accessed breastfeeding support workers through **children's centres**:

“A little at the beginning then not much after that. Sourced local breastfeeding support worker at children's centre”

Other **home visits from health visitors and midwives** were also (mostly) appreciated, although it was not always possible to tell which service was being referred to, e.g.:

“Offered support by health visitor - offered breast feeding tip and to attend classes”

“Some health visitors were great and supportive. One was quite nasty and told me I wouldn't be able to, etc. because I hadn't done every feed (simply because I found it hard) - once shown it was fine and fed”

“Once at home, I did speak to the midwives and health visitor regarding feeding and they were very helpful”

“Helpful advice from midwives and health visitor during home visits”

“Health visitor at clinic was amazing. Also breastfeeding team came out to me at home to help and also phoned and checked how was getting on”

There was some positive feedback about the **support received in hospital**, e.g.:

“Midwives/Healthcare Assistant in hospital were on hand”

“[Healthcare professional - possibly from Baby Ways or a midwife] in the Northampton General Hospital was great and the other healthcare professional who was promoting the benefits and ensuring baby had a good latch. It was done properly this time with a detailed interview and not just a quick look from the bottom of the bed. The advice was ‘feed baby when he wants feeding and feed baby when you want to feed him’ which was less regimented than previously”

Although some felt that **support from the NHS was poor**:

“Had to go looking for it - midwife in hospital glanced at us and said we were probably fine - eventually seen at baby café and diagnosed with significant tongue tie at 6 weeks old”

“La Leche League. NHS support is poor!”



“Had a horrible lady in the hospital who had no patience”

What support would you/she have liked?

19 suggested additional support. Almost all suggestions related to **wanting access (drop-in and home visits) to experts and peers for ongoing technical and emotional support** from birth to months later.

Five parents **valued support groups, including three who specifically mentioned valuing the Baby (Breastfeeding) Café**. Parents also suggested making sure parents **knew about these support groups** and that **additional information** was available, e.g.:

“Baby café was best help I could have”

“Would have been nice to have been told about Baby café rather than having to look for the resource”

“A regular drop in group to attend and additional information once there”

“More readily available expert breastfeeding support/support groups such as ‘Baby café’, peer support groups who will be able to do home visits, etc...”

Linked to this, three parents would **like more access to trained breastfeeding experts**, such as through the Baby Ways Baby café/sensitive locations:

“More trained women like [person from Baby Ways]. For emotional and technical support”

“IBCLC [International Board Certified Lactation Consultant] and face-to- face support somewhere accessible and sensitive/quiet as needs to be non-scary to attend”

Three parents would have liked **someone to check in on them**, either while they were in hospital or 3-4 months later:

“Would have been nice for someone to discuss how it was going and to see if I needed help while in hospital”

“In the hospital they assumed as I have one other child I was happy just left to my own devices. Never asked if was OK even when crying worrying about latch”



“Maybe a phone call after month 3 or 4 to see how things are going with breastfeeding as it can feel as though you are out there doing it on your own”

Other specific suggestions included: advice/support for twins, emotional support, support for those who don't breastfeed, help to show how to breastfeed, support for those combining breastfeeding and bottle feeding, NHS support for tongue tie, support with mastitis, support to be carried over when moving house/GP, and for hospital staff to be more enthusiastic.





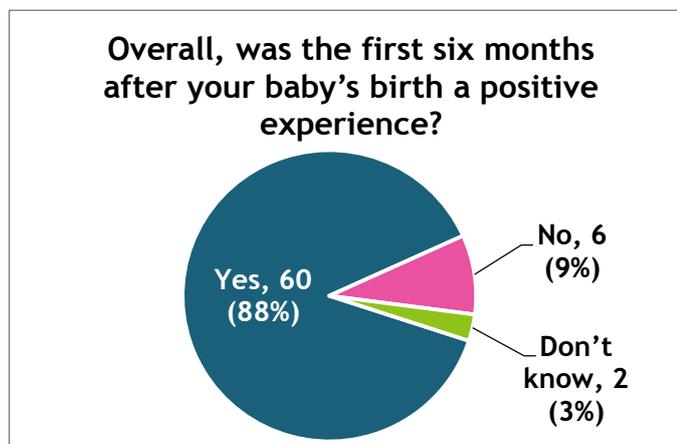
First six months experience

Overall, was the first six months after your baby's birth a positive experience?

88% of parents (68 respondents) felt that the six months after the birth of their baby was a positive experience.

The six who answered 'no' all gave reasons, and three others also described difficulties.

Five explained there were **difficulties with their baby**, such as poor sleeping, breastfeeding difficulties, not getting the necessary referrals and health scares, e.g.:



“Baby had reflux and screamed whenever he was put down - I was exhausted”

“We had a cancer scare with him as well as suspected epilepsy, swine flu and suspected meningitis”

“Breastfeeding was very painful for first six weeks. I believe this was due to an undiagnosed upper lip tie”

“Baby check in hospital picked up things, no referrals had to do it all by myself as I knew something not right”

Two told us how they **personally struggled with their physical, emotional or mental health** as a result of the labour experience:

“I developed two abscesses at [injection] sites, took nine months to heal, dressings every three days. It was truly depressing and very, very painful”

“I felt desperate and awful after the birth of my first son and no one offered help at all. When I finally did ask for help there was a 14 week waiting list! It was mainly due to the failed induction and emergency caesarean experience but no one considered this may lead to post natal issues. This time my positive birth experience finally helped me heal and realise it wasn't my fault for what happened before”

One mother felt they needed **more support after birth with having twins and poor mental health**:



“Twins is tough. My mental health was poor, I did not get support I needed”

Another had problems with their first child’s behaviour:

“The first four months were not 100% positive as I was struggling to come to terms with my first child’s changing behaviour towards me bringing another baby home”

Support after first year

What kind of support did you/your partner receive a year after your baby’s birth?

Of the 62 parents who had a child over a year old and who answered, 20 (32%) said they did not receive any support a year after their baby’s birth (almost all of these were referring to a child who was aged two or more) and a further seven (11%) said they did not receive much, most of whom implied they would have liked more, e.g.:

“Very little, a couple of midwife and health visitor visits, again different people every time”

“Not much, you kind of get forgotten”

“Less and less - which is okay if no issues”

“Only the Heath visitors and midwives for a couple of weeks”

Six said they did not need any support, although two of these also said they were not offered any, e.g.:

“Not sure I have had any and haven’t needed to see health visitor”

“None - would have called GP or health visitor if necessary”

18 (29%) said they had seen a **health visitor** and nine (15%) said they had **only had scheduled health visitor and/or GP check-ups** (e.g. at nine months, one year or two and a half years) and **vaccinations**, or short-term support from health visitors or midwives, e.g.:

“None, aside from the health visitor milestone check-ups”

“None? Does his nine month check count? That was awful! No communication with health professionals”



Three told us their **health visitor was available if they needed them** and one said they only saw them for a couple of weeks, e.g.:

“My health visitor was available when we needed her but we didn’t really feel we needed much help”

“With my first I was given contact numbers for health visitor and could discuss concerns at weight clinic”

Four parents thought they got **good support from their health visitor** (and GP and hospital midwives) but two felt the **support was poor**, e.g.:

“Seen health visitor, GP and hospital midwives in turn. All excellent”

“Good support from health visitor”

“I took her to get weighed with the health visitor and got told to weight at home now she’s one year old”

“Health visitor was very poor and offered no support”

Two parents got support from **local parent’s groups** (First Timers in East Hunsbury and Woodnewton groups), three mentioned **peer support or friends**, and one parent mentioned how **the Baby café** was their “lifeline”:

“Health visitor was very poor and offered no support. My life line was the Baby Café in Northampton. It got me out of the house and made me feel proud that I was able to nourish my baby through breastfeeding”

Three parents mentioned **midwives**:

- Community midwife (“**contact from community midwife**”)
- Midwife clinic
- Hospital midwives

One parents mentioned each of the following:

- GP
 - Weight clinic (“**could discuss concerns at weight clinic**”)
 - Sleep support
 - The health visitors at Children’s Centres
 - Sure Start
 - Local centre (“**With my older one called to local centre for review**”)
 - Wellbeing team:
-



“At seven months I saw the wellbeing team who were great. I had nightmares every night about the birth until my baby was one and felt like running away leaving my baby as I was incapable of caring for them and I was a useless mother. I felt abandoned by healthcare professionals who just wanted to fill in forms and weigh my baby”

What kind of support would you/your partner have liked?

15 parents suggested other support they would have liked during the first year after birth and 11 felt they did not need any more support.

The most frequent suggestions were about the **support from health visitors**, mentioned by eight parents. Seven would have liked **ongoing access to advice from health visitors, such as a drop in session, and home visits, e.g.:**

“Availability of health visitor advice/drop in”

“Would be nice if I felt I could contact the health visitor still but due to above [being told they had to weight their child themselves after one year] I feel I can’t”

“It seems long time since I saw the health visitor and it has been very much left to me to see the health visitor, get my baby weighed raise concerns etc.”

“Health visitor visits - children get abused because they don’t get seen enough by professionals”

Linked to this, two parents would have liked a letter or phone call to **check how they were doing.**

Another parent suggested that **health visitors were more attentive to the needs of mothers:**

“I think health visitors should be more attentive to the mother as well as the baby, at home”

Four parents would have liked more **mental health support**, including one who wanted **face to face support from someone other than a health visitor, e.g.:**

“A bit more advice/support for depression issues”

“I requested a referral to a different wellbeing practitioner which couldn’t happen. I was unable to get help for my ongoing post-natal depression and suicidal thoughts”



“Face to face support not from health visitor but a professional. Additional support for emergency caesarean issues and not to be ignored as a by-product of a failed induction”

Conversely one parent felt they did not need any help because they did not suffer from post-natal depression.

Two parents would have liked **breastfeeding support** and three would have liked **advice** on the following:

- Financial planning advice
- Information on free support and activities available
- Help with baby-led feeding

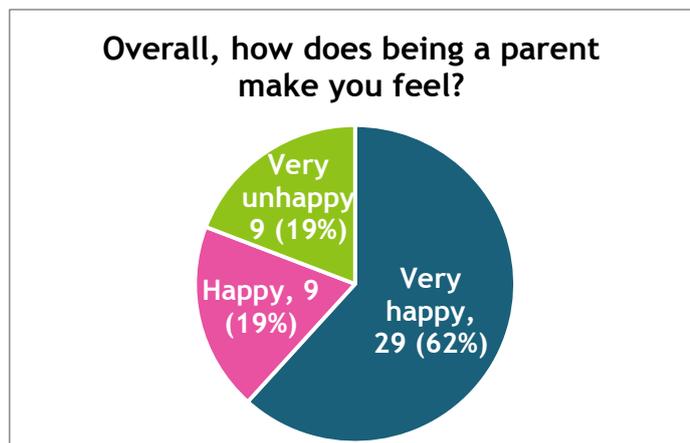
One parent mentioned each of the following:

- Lower childcare costs
- Continuity - seeing the same person
- Stand-and-play sessions to continue at local children’s centres
- Any support!

Overall parental experience

Overall, how does being a parent make you feel?

Of the 47 parents who answered this question, 81% (38) felt that overall, being a parent made them very happy or happy. Nine parents (all mothers) felt very unhappy.

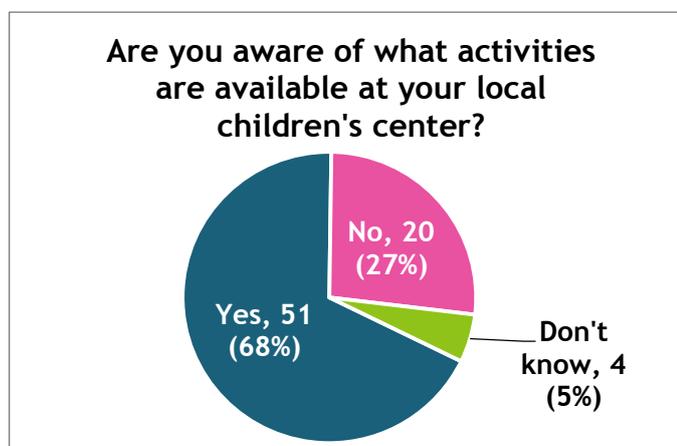




Children's centres

Are you aware of what activities are available at your local children's centre?

Approximately two thirds of parents were aware of what activities were available at their local children's centre.



What services do you think should be provided by children's centres?

39 parents told us what services they thought should be provided by children's centres, nine of whom commented on the reduction of services in recent years, and the impact that has on new parents, e.g.:

“A lot more was available after my first child. Shame there isn't more as mums need a support network”

“There used to be excellent activities like music and craft at Woodford Children's Centre, unfortunately these services have been taken away”

“They should be how they were four/five years ago, now they are not great”

“It seems that the services have been reduced which is a shame. We enjoyed regular music sessions and weekly meet ups with my first child. The children's centre always seems very quiet now”

“My local children's centre has just closed down and the groups they offer are for at risk families... I feel so sad for new mums as there is nothing unless you are a vulnerable young mum or a family with financial issues. It is disgusting what is happening to children's care and support for families. For a new mum in a new area how are they expected to make friendships with new mums for advice and support?”



There were 61 other suggested services:

Service	Number of suggestions
Activities/play	14
Advice/classes	8
Parents groups/support network	7
Breastfeeding support	6
More services in general	3
Toddler/baby groups	3
Health visitor session	3
Open access without referral	2
Current provision fine	2
Days out	2
Weight clinics	2
Support for families who need it	1
Socialising skills	1
Community events	1
Specialist children's support services	1
Anonymous post-natal depression drop-in	1
Information	1
Pre-school	1
Home visits	1
Total	60

Activities suggested included:

- Cooking with children activities (two mentions)
- Stay and play/play for children and families (four mentions)
- Music and song time (three mentions)
- Mum and baby fitness yoga
- Messy play
- Reading groups
- Learning
- Crafts



-
- Sensory play

Advice/classes suggested included:

- Baby/paediatric first aid (two mentions)
- Baby massage courses (two mentions)
- Advise on weaning and development/sleeping, food, etc. (two mentions)
- How to communicate with your baby and the importance of communication for their development, sibling rivalry, etc.
- Behaviour management
- Money/benefits advice, pension approaches and advice for stay at home parents
- Mum and baby fitness yoga
- Somewhere to ask for advice/support

“The six week new beginnings programme should be available for second and third time mums not just first time. There is no weaning support or baby massage/sensory play. You now have to source this privately”

Suggestions/comments about parent’s groups/support networks included:

- Mum to mum groups/general get together with other mums/meet other parents
- Breakfast morning for parents
- Networking opportunities

Other informative comments included:

“Day trips for mothers who suffer from mental health”

“Open access events - at our children’s centre all activities, breastfeeding groups, etc., must be referred to”

“Maybe a health visitor session as I have noticed recently at the weigh in clinic they have been very busy so can be difficult to discuss concerns”

“Weigh in and health days with health visitor and play staff”

“Parents and tots groups and maybe a midwife/health visitor now and again”

“More fun engaging community events”



Other help and information

What other help/information do you think should be available for new parents during pregnancy and after?

Four parents did not think that any more help or information was needed. 40 parents made suggestions:

Suggestion	Number of suggestions
Better advice/information	20
<i>A central list of resources/information/support available</i>	9
<i>Honest advice</i>	5
<i>More/better advice</i>	3
<i>Specific advice</i>	2
<i>More antenatal classes to prepare both parents</i>	1
Peer support groups/parents and babies/tots groups	11
Breastfeeding support	7
Access to health visitors	7
<i>Health visitor run groups</i>	3
<i>Easier access to health visitors</i>	2
<i>Health visitor home visits</i>	1
<i>Better midwife to health visitor transition</i>	1
More support	7
<i>More wellbeing support</i>	2
<i>More proactive support</i>	1
<i>More referrals to other support</i>	1
<i>More support after one year</i>	1
<i>Help adjusting back to daily life</i>	1
<i>Support for all, not just those who meet criteria</i>	1
Less stigma about bottle feeding/pressure to breastfeed	2
Mental health consultant for mothers with pre-existing mental health issues	1
Continuity of midwife	1
Longer/better midwife visits	1
Better post-labour aftercare	1



Group B strep testing	1
More promotion of home/hypnobirthing	1
More activities at Children's Centres	1
Total	61

Most suggestions were for **more information and advice**, particularly making sure it was **all in one place or easy to obtain**, e.g.:

“More information combined in one place. You get given a lot of leaflets. Hard to keep track while getting ready for baby”

“A list of where to go for different resources would have been amazing!! Something other than the official NHS opinion”

“I have met many mothers who didn't know about children's centres or local breastfeeding support. I also didn't know much about what was on offer to us so information in your birth/pregnancy pack would be good. I had information on children's centres that were out of my area!?”

“One place that lists everything going on for new mums and the support available, something like the county council events calendar that details all children's under 5 events run by them, that's such a brilliant resource”

“Links to social media self-help groups locally”

“Tell them how to access groups”

Five parents wanted **advice to be more honest/realistic**, e.g.:

“A realistic view on breastfeeding. It's [very] painful and when people are telling you it shouldn't be painful if you're getting it right makes you feel like you're doing something wrong”

“More information on post birth. That it's normal to feel overwhelmed, inadequate and out of depth. That parenthood isn't all joy and smiles. That it is hard jobs with magic moments that make it all worthwhile!”

Other suggestions of **more or better advice** included:

“Information on pain relief, I found the information given in 3 years completely different in different trusts. In Buckingham information is given out about bronchitis and registering baby on discharge. Further information on birth choices and breastfeeding”



“Advice on sun protection”

“Give mums information on relaxation and alternative therapies”

Peer support suggestions included:

“Importance of how good it is to meet other mums in same situation in those early months. Helps you realise you are not only one feeling like a zombie/worrying you are doing the right thing”

“Perhaps a buddying programme?”

“My friends and myself were really disappointing that a group called First Timers run by health visitors had stopped. It was a great way for new mums to get out of the house, meet other mums and also speak to the health visitor. It was great for myself, have made a group of friends and got me out of the house”

“Parents support groups would be great. A chance to meet other and natter. It would be great to have a health visitor there to ask questions and ability to weigh/health check baby as well as keep mentally well”

Breastfeeding/bottle feeding support suggestions included:

“More breastfeeding support throughout given by breastfeeding mums who are qualified breastfeeding supporters. The magazines and leaflets given by the midwife don’t always explain the reality of early breastfeeding problems when most people give up”

“Breastfeeding support on both before and after, not just leaflets. I attended a class on breastfeeding when I was pregnant five years ago which was very informative”

“Breastfeeding support available in the county. Feels like you have to chase down what support you can get all the time”

“I think there is a stigma around breastfeeding/bottle feeding which isn’t necessary - I felt like a failure because we tried and failed to breastfeed - my son is perfectly healthy being bottle fed”

Additional access to health visitors/midwives suggestions included:



“I was unsure how to go about seeing a health visitor. The health visitor is at a school which I feel uncomfortable about going to. Would prefer to see a health visitor at the doctor’s surgery not a school with lots going on”

“Midwife to health visitor transition could be smoother”

“New mums groups with health visitor running”

“Longer visits from midwives - check you over correctly as one midwife didn’t with me”

“See the same midwife the whole way through and the health visitor should be at the doctor’s regularly not at the mums and tots four weekly!!!”

Mental health and wellbeing suggestions included:

“Wellbeing practitioner was only available during limited periods on a Monday at my GP surgery. If these slots were not convenient then there was no alternative. The practitioner made me feel very uncomfortable and I was unable to open up to her. When I requested an alternative referral nothing was available - I was left to deal with the intrusive and suicidal thoughts alone”

“Better support for wellbeing and guidance to access the correct services”

“Mums with pre-existing mental health issues should be offered consultant with mental health experience”

Additional support suggestions included:

“More advice/referrals to other support services such as chiropractors, cranial osteopathy. Baby two needed their help and I had to search for them myself”

“All funding appears to be being cut unless you are classed as at risk. FULL support and information should be available to all. Healthy eating and weaning support is required”

“More pro-active support offered, perhaps more health visitor home visits, in effort to prevent post-natal depression from occurring, the reactive support has been fine, but not always easy to access”

“Help adjusting and organising shopping, meals, and continuation of life”



“More open links to promote home birthing/hypnobirthing and breastfeeding support available in the county. Feels like you have to chase down what support you can get all the time”

“Better aftercare advice for women post labour, re stitches”





Thanks and acknowledgements

Healthwatch Northamptonshire would like to particularly thank:

- Healthwatch Northamptonshire volunteers
- Northamptonshire Breastfeeding Alliance
- Those play areas that allowed us to visit
- All others who took part in this survey

Thank you for making your voice count!!





About Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Healthwatch Northamptonshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. This involves us visiting local services and talking to people about their views and experiences. We share our reports with the NHS and social care, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (the inspector and regulator for health and social care), with recommendations for improvement, where required.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- We have the power to monitor (known as “Enter and View”) health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.
- We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement
- We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.
- We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using lots of different ways of finding out views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.
- Where we do not feel the views and voices of Healthwatch Northamptonshire and the people who we strive to speak on behalf of, are being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.



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Appendix 1 - Survey

This short survey is designed to ask you your views on services you would have liked and needed as a new parent. Everything you tell Healthwatch Northamptonshire is confidential and your details will not be shared with anyone else.	
1) How old are you?	2) Which town/village do you live in?
3) How many children do you have?	4) How old are your children?
5) Overall, do you feel you had a positive experience during your/your partner's last pregnancy? Yes No Don't know Please tell us more:	
6) Do you feel you received the right support during your/your partner's pregnancy? Yes No Don't know If no, what support would you have liked? If yes what was good about it?	
7) How would you rate the support from your GP during your/your partner's pregnancy? Very poor Poor Ok Good Very good None Please tell us why you gave this rating:	
8) How would you rate the support from the Health Visitor during your/your partner's pregnancy? Very poor Poor Ok Good Very good None Please tell us why you gave this rating:	
9) How would you rate the support from your Midwife during your/your partner's pregnancy? Very poor Poor Ok Good Very good None Please tell us why you gave this rating:	



<p>10) Did you/your partner attend Ante-Natal classes? Yes No Don't know If no, why not? If yes how would you rate your classes? Very poor Poor Ok Good Very good Please tell us why you gave this score: Any other comments about Ante-Natal care?</p>	
<p>11) a. Did you/your partner's suffer from any mental health issues before you/your partner got pregnant? Yes No Don't know If no, go to question 12. If yes, please tell us more: b. Were you/your partner offered any additional support during pregnancy because of this? Yes No If yes, please tell us more:</p>	
<p>12) a. Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues during the pregnancy? Yes No Don't know If yes, please tell us more: b. If yes, what support did you receive because of this?</p>	
<p>13) a. Did you/your partner suffer from any mental health issues after birth? Yes No Don't Know If yes, please tell us more: b. If yes, what support did you receive because of this?</p>	
<p>14) Do you/your partner feel like you had a positive experience during labour? Yes No Don't know Please tell us more:</p>	
<p>15) What kind of support did you/your partner receive during labour?</p>	<p>16) What other support would you/your partner have liked?</p>



17) Did you/your partner breastfeed?

Yes No

If no, please tell us more about why you/your partner chose not to or did not breastfeed:

If yes, how long did you/your partner breastfeed for?

18) a. What support did you/your partner receive when you breastfed?

b. What support would you/your partner have liked?

19) Overall, were the first 6 months after your baby's birth a positive experience?

Yes No Don't know

If no, please tell us more?

20) a. What kind of support did you/your partner receive a year after your baby's birth?

b. What kind of support would you have liked?

21) Overall, how does being a parent make you feel? (Please circle)

Very Unhappy Unhappy Neither happy nor unhappy
Happy Very happy

22) a. Are you aware of what activities are available at your local children's centre?

Yes No Don't know

b. What services do you think should be provided by children's centres?

23) What other help/information do you think should be available for new parents during pregnancy and after?