



Healthwatch Northamptonshire

**A summary of parents' experiences of using the
health visiting service in Northamptonshire**

March 2015

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Summary

In January 2015, Healthwatch Northamptonshire volunteers did a street survey of parents with children from 0 - 5 years old in 8 locations across the county. We spoke to 221 parents to find out about their experience of the local health visiting service

Key findings

The majority of parents we spoke to were positive about the advice and support they received from their Health Visitor in general and when there were specific concerns about their babies.

Some parents were critical about the quality of care, including a lack of consistent advice between health visitors and midwives and not enough visits at key stages in their child's development.

Only 44% of parents said they had received advice on weaning and there were significant variations in the county ranging from 61% of parents in Brackley/Daentry location to only 22% interviewed at the Northampton Weston Favell Shopping Centre receiving advice.

There is a lot of variation between areas on whether mothers had been asked how they were feeling before

and after the birth. In Kettering, a third of new mothers (34%) had not been asked how they were feeling after the birth.

Recommendations

Variations in care should be addressed so that all parents and their children have access to the same level and quality of advice and support in Northamptonshire. This should include ensuring that all parents and their children have access to the same level and quality of advice and support in Northamptonshire including ensuring full access to weaning and dietary advice, and psychological support for new mothers who may be experiencing difficult emotions.

All parents should expect to have the number of Health Visitor appointments set out in the national service specification - as a minimum.

The role of Health Visitors should be clearly communicated and understood across the NHS, and with families, to ensure their crucial role in promoting child health and wellbeing is understood.

As responsibility for commissioning Health Visiting moves to Northamptonshire County Council in October 2015, there should be a full review of the service and further involvement of local parents in shaping the service for the future.

About Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Healthwatch Northamptonshire (HWN) 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.

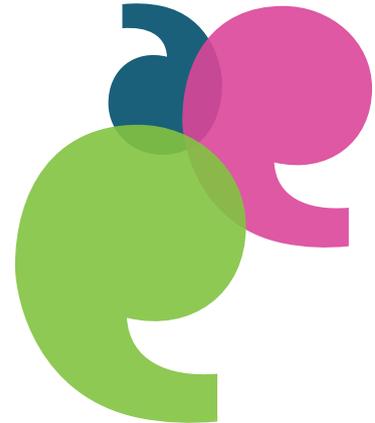
Health Visitor Service in Northamptonshire

Information about the service

There are approximately 46,000 babies and children aged 0-5 years in Northamptonshire and 42 Child Health Clinics are provided at sites across the county. The Health Visitor Service is provided to parents in Northamptonshire by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Health visitors are based at GP practices and health centres. The service aims to help give children the best start in life. It promotes physical, mental, social and emotional health for individuals, families and communities. Health Visitors are qualified nurses with additional specialist training. They work collaboratively with other agencies to provide the best possible care for children and families. They work to give all children a bright and inspired future, full of opportunity, dignity and pride, to grow to be the best that they can be. This is done by focusing on prevention, facilitation and referring or signposting to other services.

The Northamptonshire service specification is based on the national specification for Health Visiting 2014-15, published by NHS England, which focuses on the delivery of the 0 -5 healthy child programme and includes:

- All children age 0 - 5 in Northamptonshire will have an allocated health visitor.
- When a child is born or moves to the area, the local health visiting teams are informed and will make contact with the family.
- Contact numbers for health visitors can be obtained from GP practices.
- Children are offered a review of growth, emotional and physical development at regular intervals. Health visitors will provide details of other clinics and services that are available in the area. Parents can contact their health visitor for information and advice on request about their own health, the child's health and development or parenting issues. For example, sleep, eating, introducing solids, minor illness, behaviour and routines, parental mental health or information about local children's services.
- Frequency of visit by health visitors is based on the mandated elements of the national healthy child programme and the level of universal health visiting which may be restricted to single visits in the first weeks of life based on an assessment of the family needs. The service provided may also be dependent upon the age of the children in the families when their last contact was with the service. Therefore, if a child is receiving the universal programme only and does not have additional needs, their last contact may have been in line with the programme: for example at 8 months or 2 and a half years.



The survey

We developed a survey aimed at identifying parents' experiences of accessing and receiving health visitor services. It was undertaken as street interviews with parents of children aged between 0-5 years at eight different locations throughout Northamptonshire during January 2015. We spoke to 221 parents. 94 parents (43%) talked about a child under 12 months and 127 parents (57%) talked about their child aged between 1 and 5 years.

The questions

We asked people to tell us about their contact with their Health Visitor by focusing on 6 questions. The full questionnaire is in the Appendix. We also provided the opportunity to make any further comments and to tell us which GP practice they were registered with so we could look at any differences in experiences across the county. Surveys were conducted in the following 8 locations around the county:

1. Northampton - 2 sites
 - a) Weston Favell Shopping Centre - Northampton East
 - b) Grosvenor Shopping Centre - Central Northampton
2. Kettering
3. Corby
4. Wellingborough
5. Brackley
6. Daventry
7. Towcester



What we heard

“We know they are there when we need them”
“Not enough visits with my second child”

Findings

Frequency of visits

We were keen to identify whether parents or carers are offered regular reviews as their children develop and we asked when their children were last seen by a health visitor.

Across the county the responses showed:

At birth	4%
At 6 weeks	31%
8 months	43%
2.5 years	20%
4.5 years	2%

The responses to the survey show some differences between areas within the county. At the Grosvenor Centre in Northampton, in Kettering and in Corby the greatest number of respondents reported that they had last seen their health visitor at 6 weeks, and no one surveyed at the Grosvenor Centre or in Corby had seen their health visitor when their child was 4.5 years. However, at the Weston Favell Centre, in Brackley and in Daventry, it was more common for the respondents to report that they had last seen their health visitor at 8 months and 2.5 years.

We spoke to over 200 people with 1 or more children aged 0-5 years
Most people were satisfied or happy with the service they received from their Health Visitor



Provision of dietary or weaning advice

We asked whether health visitors had provided dietary or weaning advice as this a core aspect of their role in providing support for new mothers. In total, 44% respondents had received dietary or weaning advice. However the percentage was markedly different when we looked at the responses based on the areas of the county.

Breakdown of information by area:

	Dietary or weaning advice provided?	All Children	Yes %
Northampton - Weston Favell	<i>Last seen</i>	35	23%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>		
	At Birth 1		
	8 months 1		
	<i>1-5 years</i>		
	8 months 4		
	2.5 years 2		
	Total 8		
Northampton - Grosvenor Centre	<i>Last seen</i>	23	48%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>		
	6 weeks 4		
	8 months 2		
	<i>1-5 years</i>		
	8 months 3		
	Total 9		
Kettering	<i>Last seen</i>	37	38%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>		
	Birth 1		
	6 weeks 4		
	8 months 1		
	Other 1		
	<i>1-5 years</i>		
	6 weeks 1		
8 months 1			

	2.5 years	4		
	Other	1		
	Total	14		
Corby	<i>Last seen</i>		40	47%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>			
	Birth	1		
	6 weeks	6		
	8 months	3		
	<i>1-5 years</i>			
	6 weeks	6		
	8 months	3		
	Total	19		
Wellingborough	<i>Last seen</i>		28	43%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>			
	6 weeks	1		
	8 months	1		
	Other	1		
	<i>1-5 years</i>			
	6 weeks	1		
	8 months	2		
	2.5 years	1		
	4.5 years	1		
	Total	12		
Brackley/Daentry	<i>Last seen</i>		36	72%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>			
	6 weeks	4		
	8 months	2		
	<i>1-5 years</i>			
	8 months	9		
	2.5 years	6		
	4.5 years	2		
	Other (foster)	1		

	<u>Total</u>	26	
Towcester	<i>Last seen</i>	19	74%
	<i>Up to 1 year</i>		
	6 weeks	5	
	8 months	7	
	<i>1-5 years</i>		
	8 months	2	
	<u>Total</u>	14	

We are particularly concerned to note the relatively low percentage of parents receiving this advice in Northampton (Weston Favell Centre) and Kettering. We are also concerned about the low numbers in Wellingborough, Corby and Northampton Grosvenor Centre.



Use of other services

We asked the respondents whether they had visited Accident and Emergency Services (A&E) with their child/children and if so, whether they had spoken to their health visitor before their visit. Whilst 38% respondents had been to A&E with a child, only 9% of these had discussed their concerns with their health visitor before visiting the hospital. We did not record details of the reason for the A&E visit but this appears to be a low figure given the role of health visitors in providing advice and support parents and young children.

When we compared attendance at A&E between the different areas of Northamptonshire we found that the highest percentage of A&E attendees came from Brackley/Daventry (55% of children from this area), and Northampton (Weston Favell Centre) (43% of children from this area), with just under 40% of the children recorded from the Wellingborough area attending A&E and 37% from Towcester.

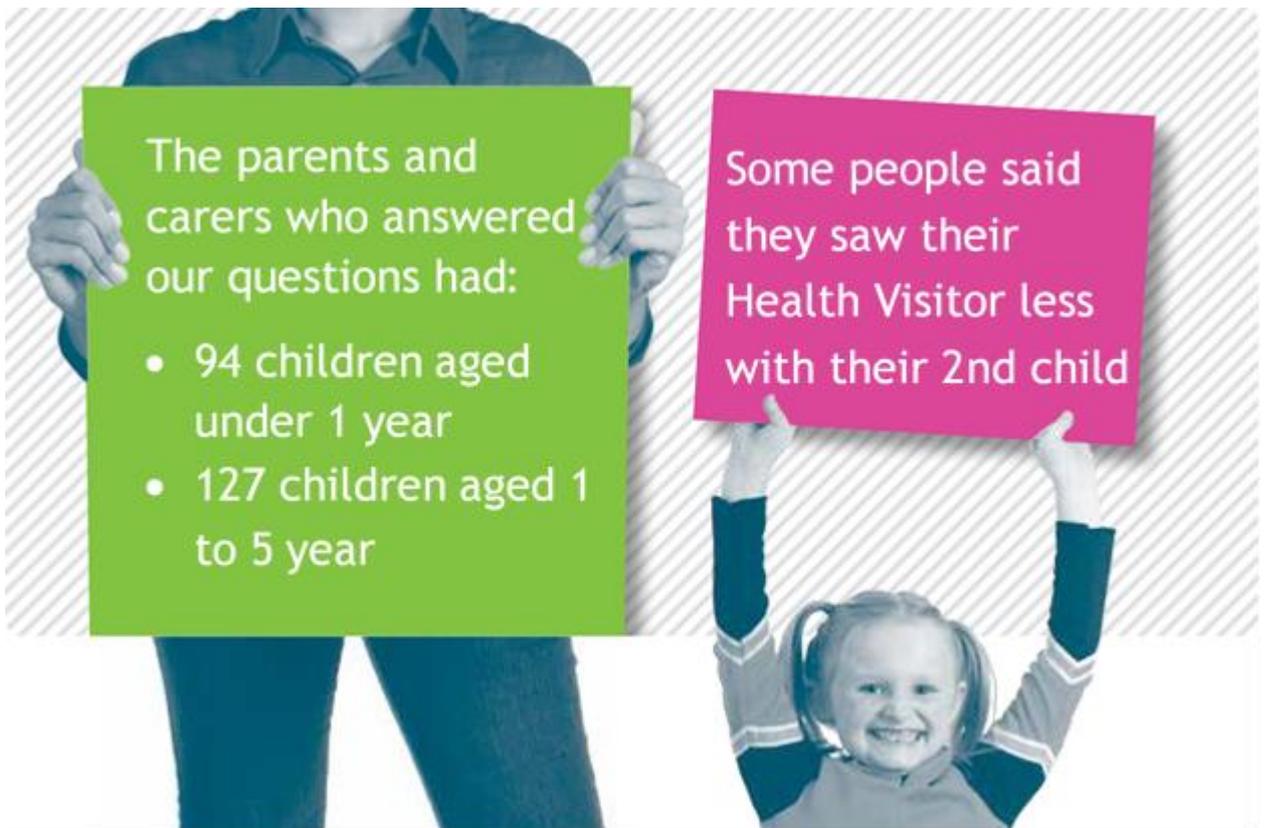
We also asked whether the respondent's child used specialist services, e.g. speech therapists or opticians services, and if so who referred the child to the service. 10% respondents reported that their child used a specialist service and almost all of the referrals (99%) were made by GPs, with 6 referred jointly by GP and HVs. One parent commented that she had been concerned about her child's speech but the health visitor had reassured her all was well. Her child was later referred for speech therapy.

We asked the respondents whether their health visitor asked how they were feeling before childbirth and after. Only 66% of the respondents in Kettering stated that they had been asked how they felt either before or after the birth of their child; whereas in Towcester 89% of mothers had been asked. Just over a third of those interviewed had been asked before birth (37%) and almost three quarters had been asked after their child was born (73%). We heard some positive comments about how these discussions were helpful and supportive, but also received criticism that the discussions had been rushed and less useful. A couple of participants also commented that they had less contact or opportunity for discussion with their health visitor after their second child was born. We are concerned to note that 34% of respondents in Kettering and 29% in Wellingborough areas were not asked how they were feeling after childbirth.

“I saw my health visitor and she helped me with my post natal depression”

“It was a vague appointment - she was in a rush so didn't explain the questionnaire I had to fill in”

Our final question asked was whether the respondents attended a clinic and if so, which one. Across the county, 25% were attending a clinic, although the percentage ranged from 36% in Wellingborough to 10% Corby. The respondents didn't provide much information about the clinic they attended and we did not ask for personal medical information.



Recommendations

The National Standards for Health Visiting 2014-15 state that giving every child the best start in life is crucial to reducing health inequalities across the life course. The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development - physical, intellectual and emotional - are set in place in early childhood¹. We are concerned that our research has demonstrated a lack of consistency in implementing the service across Northamptonshire, for example in relation to the provision of weaning advice. Whilst we received many assurances from respondents that they were happy with the service that they received and that they could approach their health visitor with questions when needed, some comments stated that there should be more routine contact and a few parents said that they hadn't seen their health visitor either for years or since the first few weeks after their baby's birth. A number of our respondents had not seen their health visitor since their child was 8 months old. We believe that the following recommendations would provide a more consistent service and, in particular, more effective proactive support.

1. Consistency

We have observed significant differences in the consistency of the health visitor service across Northamptonshire throughout the survey. We are concerned that these should be addressed to ensure that all parents and children have equal access to all health visitor services, regardless where they live within Northamptonshire and recommend that the provider of services ensures that this is addressed.

2. Frequency of visits

Both Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the NHS England national service specification recognise the importance of a health visitor appointment at key stages in a child's development. Our survey indicates that this may not be happening across the county. We also received some comments which suggest that less visits may be offered to parents with their second child. National and local policies since *Every Child Matters* was published in 2003 emphasises the need for babies and young children to be assessed at key stages of their development and we recommend that these visits are implemented

across Northamptonshire. Healthwatch Northamptonshire would welcome receiving evidence that the key actions within the universal health visiting programme are met across all parts of Northamptonshire especially in relation to visits and the provision of advice.

3. Communication of roles

The survey has highlighted some confusion about the roles of health visitors and midwives and also the opportunity parents have to discuss accessing other health services, such as A&E and specialist services with their health visitor rather than with their GP. As the commissioning of health visitor services is proposed to be moved to local authority public health departments in October 2015, we recommend that this change is used as an opportunity to communicate more clearly the role of health visitors and the wider advice and support that they can provide on issues of health and wellbeing.

4. Child Obesity

The survey shows there is a lack of weaning and dietary advice being given to parents of children at a very early age. We would like to see the Health Visitors leading and monitoring a continuous programme of dietary advice from birth onwards and also include linked advice about exercise and physical development. This should ensure that parents learn about good, healthy diets from an early stage and be an effective intervention in preventing child obesity.

5. Clinics

Only 19% of parents with children under the age of 5 years mentioned attending a clinic, suggesting that few are aware of the 42 Child Health Clinics in the county. We would like to see parents encouraged to attend these, thus giving another opportunity for Health Visitors to observe and monitor a child and its development.

6. Review of attendance to A&E

We would like to see some consideration is given to the data we collected on attendance at A&E to identify whether additional health visitor support, referral to clinics or accident prevention could reduce the proportion of attendees. We suggest focussing on the areas of Brackley/Daventry, Northampton (Weston Favell Clinic), Wellingborough and Towcester where numbers were highest.

7. Review by commissioners

In response to the outcomes from our survey we recommend that commissioners review the effectiveness of the Health Visitor service and include the involvement of local people in any review and recommendations for improvement.

Thanks and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Healthwatch Northamptonshire volunteers who conducted the survey in cold weather during January and analysed the results and everyone who spoke to us and responded openly and honestly. This report is dedicated to Moya McVicar, one of our longest serving volunteers whose involvement with patient engagement goes back decades. Moya died recently and we are very grateful for her work with Healthwatch Northamptonshire and the predecessor organisations.

Appendix - survey questions

<p>Q1: How old is your child (or children)?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Under 1 year <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Between 1 & 5 years <input type="checkbox"/></p>		<p>Tick as Necessary</p>
<p>Q2: a. How old was your child <u>when last seen by a Health Visitor?</u></p> <p>At birth <input type="checkbox"/> 6 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> 8 months <input type="checkbox"/> 2 ½ <input type="checkbox"/> 4 ½ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>b. Have you had any dietary or weaning advice from your Health Visitor?</p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q3: a. Have you been to A & E with your child/children</p> <p>b. Did you contact your Health Visitor for advice before going to A & E?</p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q4: a. Does your child see a Specialist (e.g. Speech Therapist, optician, etc?)</p> <p>b. Who referred your child? Your GP <input type="checkbox"/> Your Health Visitor <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q5: Did your Health Visitor fill in a form to ask how you were feeling?</p> <p>Before Child Birth Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> After Birth Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q6: a. What is the name of the GP Surgery you attend?</p> <p>b. Do you attend a Clinic?</p> <p>c. What is the Clinic name?</p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Name of Healthwatch Volunteer</p>		
<p>Location of Interview</p>		
<p>Any Further Comments?</p>		



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