Breastfeeding

Written Answers

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what plans he has to continue monitoring breastfeeding rates following the abolition of the infant feeding survey; and if he will make a statement.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what the implications for his policies are of the findings in The Lancet Series on breastfeeding, published in January 2016; and what steps his Department is taking to increase breastfeeding rates.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many full-time equivalent staff in his Department were working on breastfeeding in each year from 2010 to 2016.

Ben Gummer The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health

Following the discontinuation of the Infant Feeding Survey, the Department has been exploring with Public Health England (PHE) and other key stakeholders alternative methods and sources of information to monitor the impact of its policy on infant feeding.

In future, the Maternity and Children's Dataset will regularly capture data on breastfeeding initiation and prevalence from all women using NHS services rather than using a survey sample. This means that local service providers and commissioners can have up-to-date (e.g. quarterly) information about outcomes for their local populations, enabling service provision to be more agile, responsive and targeted.

The Government is committed to supporting breastfeeding through the Healthy Child Programme. Breastfeeding is also included in the Public Health Outcomes Framework so that the improvements can be tracked, and action taken as needed.

Since 2010, we have recruited more than 2,100 additional midwives who will provide women with the information, advice and support they need with breastfeeding. A further 6,000 midwives are in training. There are also 3,400 more health visitors than in 2010.

The Department is working with PHE, NHS England and UNICEF to try and encourage women to breastfeed for the first six months, although we recognise that not all mothers choose to or are able to breastfeed.

Support and information is currently available to health professionals and parents through NHS Choices, the National Breastfeeding Helpline, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, the Start4Life Information Service for Parents and local peer support programmes.
The Department has not retained a record of how many full-time equivalent staff there were with a specific focus on breastfeeding between 2010 and 2016; breastfeeding policy has always formed part of the larger maternity policy for which the Department has the policy lead. Resources to cover this policy area would have fluctuated according the level of work required at any one time.

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