**Celebrating World Breastfeeding Week across the south west**

Families, healthcare professionals and local businesses across Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) are coming together to celebrate World Breastfeeding Week this week (1-7 August).

The aim of this year’s global campaign is to empower mothers and birthing people to breastfeed when they are out and about, and the BSW system is joining forces to create a breastfeeding-friendly environment across the region, to protect, promote and support breastfeeding in all communities.

With COVID-19 restrictions lifting, it is more important than ever for people to feel confident to get outside, and this includes being able to breastfeed when they need to.

Breastfeeding has a number of health benefits for mother and baby, but some people chose not to breastfeed or stop breastfeeding early; often because they feel uncomfortable to do so in public.

People have a legal right to breastfeed wherever they like, including in public places, and sometimes small gestures such as a smile from others or somewhere comfortable to sit can make all the difference.

The BSW community are encouraged to play their part by simply supporting mothers to breastfeed. Local businesses, organisations, charities and other community groups can also sign up to the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme or Whenever Wherever campaign, which include pledging to support breastfeeding in venues by displaying ‘you are welcome to breastfeed your baby here’ stickers and other supportive material.

Kath Townsend, Infant Feeding Specialist Midwife at Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Swindon, said: “It’s really important that mothers get the support they need to breastfeed their children, including in public areas. Breastfeeding has lifelong benefits for mother and baby and many health benefits, including a lower risk of infection. It also improves bonding between mother and baby.​

“Everybody should feel comfortable to breastfeed in public, and we work with new families to help them feel supported to do so. I’m glad to see that more places across the area are signing up to the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme.”

Steve Maddern, Director of Swindon Public Health, said: “We know breastfeeding has many health benefits for both mother and child. We want mums to feel safe and comfortable whilst breastfeeding so it is important that we come together as a community to support mums to breastfeed when out and about. This is especially important as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, as this may be the first time for many new mums to be feeding in public.

“We, at Swindon Borough Council, are proud to be Breastfeeding Welcome at our Council venues and we encourage our local businesses to join the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme too.”

Becky Reynolds, Director of Public Health at Bath & North East Somerset Council, said: “It’s important for the health of babies and mums that together we create a culture in which mothers who choose to breastfeed when they are out and about feel supported to do that anywhere. We are very pleased to support World Breastfeeding Week. We hope the positive benefits of breastfeeding that it highlights will encourage more premises in Bath and North East Somerset to sign up to the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme.”

If you are interested in signing up to the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme, please visit <https://www.breastfeedingwelcomescheme.org.uk/>.

Supporting breastfeeding is everyone’s responsibility.

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