

**Housing**  
Executive  
Equality Unit

**Equality Bulletin 36: Breastfeeding Policy and  
Guidance**

March 2012

## **1. Statement of intent**

Breastfeeding has many important health benefits to both mother and child. Women who breastfeed are making an important contribution to health and wellbeing and should be supported to breastfeed whenever they need to and while in public. The Housing Executive welcomes mothers who wish to breastfeed and will maximise opportunities for those who wish to breastfeed in public areas of our premises and provide private areas where reasonable and available.

## **2. Why we have a policy**

To ensure a consistent approach is in place to welcome mothers who wish to breastfeed when accessing our services.

## **3. Scope**

This policy is concerned solely with service provision and delivery and applies to all customers and visitors to Housing Executive premises.

There is separate legislation in place protecting new and expectant mothers in the workplace.

## **4. Where is breastfeeding allowed in Housing Executive premises?**

Breastfeeding is permitted and welcomed in all public areas of Housing Executive premises except where there are overriding health and safety considerations.

## **5. Staff Guidance**

### ***Does my building have to provide a designated room for breastfeeding mothers?***

- No, you do not have to provide a designated room.
- If you do not have a designated room your waiting or reception area should be fine for mothers to breastfeed in.
- If there is a designated room available it needs to be clearly identified and signposted.

### ***What can I do if a private room is requested?***

- If you do not have a designated room you could use any empty office or interview room where one is available so long as it is sufficiently private, clean and comfortable.

Please note: toilets should not be used as a designated room for feeding babies as they are not hygienic.

### ***How should staff support the Breastfeeding Policy?***

- Staff should be aware of the aims and principles of the policy and know where they can access the guidance material.
- Staff should be trained in general customer care.
- Staff should also make themselves aware of the facilities available within their service to support breastfeeding mothers.

- Ideally the above points should be included in the member of staff's induction programme and equality awareness training.

***What do I do if a member of the public objects to somebody breastfeeding on the premises?***

- If a member of the public approaches you and complains about a mother who is breastfeeding you should tactfully and politely explain that the Housing Executive supports and encourages breastfeeding on the premises.
- You could ask the complainant to move to an area where they are no longer able to 'view' the mother.
- If they continue to object you could suggest to the customer that they come back at a later time.
- Please be aware that you are not expected to place yourself at risk by getting into conflict with a customer and you are not obliged to approach a member of the public who is complaining if you do not feel comfortable in doing so. You would however be expected to quietly withdraw and inform your line manager or supervisor of the situation.

## **6. Legal considerations**

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act the Housing Executive has a duty to promote equality of opportunity between men and women and for people of different ages including children. This policy had been

implemented to accommodate the needs of women and children in accessing our premises.

Legislation is also being proposed for Northern Ireland which will protect a mother's right to breastfeed in public.

## **7. Publicity**

This policy is available on the Housing Executive's internet and intranet.

## **8. Where can I find more information about breastfeeding?**

There are a number of support services and organisations that offer advice and guidance about breastfeeding.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) website [www.breastfedbabies.org](http://www.breastfedbabies.org) provides information on breastfeeding. The PHA Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme have over 300 members including councils and businesses which welcome breastfeeding families.

A leaflet on breastfeeding while out and about from PHA can be downloaded on

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/breastfeeding-out-and-about>

Further information on the importance of breastfeeding is available on [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)

## **9. Contact numbers for breastfeeding support**

### **include:**

- National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212 (9.30am-9.30pm)
- Association of Breastfeeding Mothers 0844 412 2949 (open 9.30am-10.30pm)
- La Leche League 0845 120 2918 (24 hours)
- National Childbirth Trust 0300 330 0771 (8am-10pm)

s 028 9031 8535 [stephen.reynolds@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.reynolds@nihe.gov.uk)