



Andrew Gwynne MP
Minister for Public Health and Primary Care
Department of Health and Social Care,
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Dear Andrew,

As Officers of the newly formed All-Party Parliamentary Group for Babies (Pregnancy to Age Two), our joint purpose, working across political boundaries, is to champion the needs of vulnerable babies. We request an urgent meeting with you to discuss the future of the Start for Life Programme.

As you will know, the Start for Life programme is limited in funding and scope. Nevertheless, it addresses an important policy gap. The programme was the result of numerous parliamentary select committee and all-party reports that recommended investing in babies. These too were the result of cross-party working, and we are keen that these insights are not forgotten.

The first 1001 days (during pregnancy and the first two years) is a key phase of brain development, when neural pathways are formed that impact a baby's development and their future outcomes. So the care babies receive during those months affects them profoundly.

Sadly, the government estimates¹ that at least one in ten babies is not receiving the sensitive care and support they need during this crucial time. These babies need help to develop healthily and thrive.

Sitting alongside the Healthy Child Programme, Start for Life aims to improve access to help for new parents who are struggling, through Family Hubs. Also it bolsters services including infant feeding, perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship services.

In copies of your correspondence with charities including the Parent-Infant Foundation, Home-Start UK and the National Children's Bureau, we note your commitment to meet to discuss the Programme, following the Budget.

As the Budget did not provide the clarity sought by local authorities and stakeholders, this is now a matter of urgency.

We appreciate the Budget confirmed an additional £69million for Family Hubs, but saw no mention of the DHSC element of the programme. For example, the £50m for infant feeding or £100m for perinatal and parent-infant relationship support.

Participating local authorities have said they cannot provide these services if funding ends on 1st April 2025. Local authorities that were excluded from the initial phase of the programme are asking when it will be rolled out to them also.


Appreciating your understanding of these issues in [comments you made](#) to the House in March, we hope to work constructively with you to find a way forward.

We hope to discuss this in person at your earliest convenience, in the next few weeks.

Yours sincerely,



Maya Ellis MP for Ribble Valley, Chair APPG for Babies (Pregnancy to Age Two)



Elsie Blundell MP for Heywood and Middleton North, Vice-Chair APPG for Babies (Pregnancy to Age Two)



Patrick Spencer MP for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, Vice-Chair APPG for Babies (Pregnancy to Age Two)



Freddie van Mierlo MP for Henley and Thame, Vice-Chair APPG for Babies (Pregnancy to Age Two)