



UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE INFOSHEET

**ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY: THE BABY FRIENDLY  
GUARDIAN**

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**Introduction**

In 2016 the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative introduced new [Achieving Sustainability \(AS\) standards](#) which are intended to support all services working towards or maintaining Baby Friendly accreditation to sustain the changes made over the longer term. The AS standards are divided into four interlinking themes – Leadership, Culture, Monitoring and Progression. Under the Leadership theme is a standard requiring the appointment of a Baby Friendly Guardian. The following provides detailed information on the role of the Guardian and a sample letter which you can send to potential Guardians in your service if you wish, along with details of your service’s progress with Baby Friendly.

**What is a Guardian?**

A Baby Friendly Guardian is intended to be a high level member of staff, for example a senior manager or board member, who has taken on the responsibility of promoting, protecting and supporting the Baby Friendly standards, including compliance with the [International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes](#) (the Code). The role and responsibilities of the Guardian will include:

- Understanding and supporting the implementation of the Baby Friendly standards and the Code
- Having an awareness of the cultural context around infant feeding in the UK, including why breastfeeding is a contentious issue and how it needs to be protected
- Being an advocate and spokesperson for the Baby Friendly Initiative at a senior level and externally as required
- Receiving and evaluating relevant data and progress reports as appropriate (e.g. every 3-6 months)

- Looking for opportunities and threats within the service and beyond and communicating these to the Baby Friendly leadership team
- Being available to provide support to the leadership team when required.

More details on these can be found in the Achieving Sustainability Standards and Guidance document: [unicef.uk/sustainability](https://www.unicef.uk/sustainability)

### **Why do we need a Guardian?**

The Baby Friendly Initiative is an improvement programme that requires an advocate at a senior level because of the [complexities surrounding breastfeeding in the UK](#). Despite a compelling evidence base for its importance to child and maternal health, breastfeeding is seen by many in the UK as largely unnecessary because formula milk is viewed as a close second best. It is also a highly emotive subject because so many families have not breastfed, or have experienced the trauma of trying very hard to breastfeed and not succeeding. Additionally, new understanding of neuroscience and early infant development highlights the importance of responsive parenting and building close and loving relationships with babies. These can be very sensitive issues, as many people in the UK were not parented (or do not parent their own children) in this way.

As well as this, the UK has one of the most successful formula feeding industries in the world, with sophisticated marketing and public relations constantly targeting parents, health workers, policy makers and the general public in order to maintain a \$900 million industry. More details on the UK context can be found in our Call to Action campaign: [unicef.uk/bficaltoaction](https://www.unicef.uk/bficaltoaction)

For the Baby Friendly standards to be maintained and progressed over the longer term, there needs to be a high level of understanding, support and vigilance across the organisation. Up until now, there has been a tendency for the Baby Friendly standards to be largely the responsibility of the Infant Feeding Specialist/team, with general oversight coming from their line and senior managers. This arrangement has only been successful because of the commitment of the infant feeding teams and the structure and discipline imposed by periodic external assessments carried out by Unicef UK. For true sustainability over the longer term, this responsibility now needs to be spread more evenly across all tiers of the organisation with well-informed and consistent leadership, backed up by vigilant monitoring and a desire to keep improving over time.

### **Who should be the Guardian?**

The role should be carried out by a senior member of staff, for example a non-executive director, clinical director, director of public health or a senior manager role (director level), who has a real interest in and enthusiasm for the Baby Friendly standards.

### **Can our clinical Head of Service be the Guardian?**

No, the Head of Service already has an important leadership role in maintaining and advocating for the Baby Friendly standards. The Guardian will be an extra senior

member of staff in a position to support the Head of Service at board level and to horizon scan for opportunities and threats as these arise.

### **Does this need to be a paid role?**

No, it is envisaged that the Guardian will accept this role as part of the responsibility of their existing position. The role should not take up a great deal of time, but rather involves developing an understanding of the issues that may affect the implementation of the Baby Friendly standards and then being vigilant to these when carrying out their normal role.

### **What will be the expected time commitment?**

The Guardian will be expected to attend Baby Friendly manager training along with the rest of the leadership team (approximately half a day). Manager training materials are provided as part of our Achieving Sustainability course: [unicef.uk/sustainability](https://unicef.uk/sustainability). They will then commit to keeping abreast of the monitoring results and progress with action plans to maintain and progress the standards. They may also commit to attending the leadership strategy group (or similar) if appropriate.

However, the Guardian's main role will be to consider the standards (including Code compliance) as they go about their everyday business. Examples would include considering the effect on the standards when there are internal reorganisations, larger national or regional changes, budget considerations or proposed sponsorship or other deals with the commercial sector. The Guardian will also be available to support and advise the Baby Friendly leadership group and infant feeding team when issues arise that need a higher level perspective.

### **Can we have one Guardian to cover our midwifery and neonatal service and/or health visiting and children's centre service?**

This will depend on the size and structure of the services. In smaller, fully integrated services it may be appropriate to have one Guardian covering all services working towards or maintaining Baby Friendly accreditation. However, many services are in different directorates, with different management structures and/or are highly complex and busy environments with their own particular needs and challenges. When this is the case, it is best to have separate Guardians in order to spread the work and influence as much as possible. The Guardians can still attend joint training and meetings and work together as appropriate to help protect, promote and support the Baby Friendly standards across the Trust / Health Board area.



Thank you for considering becoming your service's Baby Friendly Guardian.

The Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative is based on a global accreditation programme of Unicef and the World Health Organisation, and is designed to improve practice for infant feeding and early parent-infant relationships within our public services.

Your service is now starting to incorporate the new Achieving Sustainability standards around leadership, culture, monitoring and progression in order to help sustain the standards over the long term.

The role of Guardian is intended to enhance and strengthen the Baby Friendly leadership team. Your role would include:

- Being an advocate and spokesperson for the Baby Friendly Initiative and the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes at a senior level and externally as required
- Receiving and evaluating relevant data and progress reports and supporting the leadership team with developing and implementing action plans as required
- Looking for opportunities and threats within the service and beyond and communicating these to the Baby Friendly leadership team and offering support as required
- Being available to provide support to the leadership team when requested.

In order to fulfil this role, you will be asked to undertake some education so that you have a full understanding of the:

- Baby Friendly Initiative standards: [unicef.uk/babyfriendly-standards](https://www.unicef.uk/babyfriendly-standards)
- International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, including the rationale for the Code and implementation within your service: [unicef.uk/code](https://www.unicef.uk/code)
- Cultural context of infant feeding within the UK, including why breastfeeding is a contentious issue and how it needs to be protected: [unicef.uk/bficaltoaction](https://www.unicef.uk/bficaltoaction)

It is envisaged that the time commitment will be modest and the role fitted around your existing position. However, it is hoped that your vigilance, knowledge and enthusiasm for the Baby Friendly standards will give them value within the service and so support their sustainability and progress over time. Further information can be found in the Achieving Sustainability Standards and Guidance document: [unicef.uk/sustainability](https://www.unicef.uk/sustainability)

We at Unicef UK are dedicated to achieving the best possible outcomes for all babies, their mothers and families, and we are very grateful for your commitment to sharing that goal.

We wish you every success in your new role and look forward to working with you in the future.

Best wishes,

**Sue Ashmore**  
**Programme Director, Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative**

The Baby Friendly Initiative is a worldwide programme of the World Health Organization and UNICEF. We work with UK public services to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and to strengthen mother-baby and family relationships.

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