



Eastern and Coastal Kent

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Dear Paul,

Re: Task and Finish Group – Maternity Services

Many thanks for your letter of 08 December regarding the above.

Taking your queries in relation to the stand alone birthing units in East Kent in order, we can confirm the following:-

1. Where are they located and how long have they been in operation?

The birthing units are located in Kent and Canterbury Hospital (CBC) and Buckland Hospital, Dover (DFBC). They have been in operation for 5 and 10 years respectively.

2. What services do they provide and when are they open?

Both units provide 24 hour service for low risk women who have concerns or who are in labour. Women attend the unit(s) to be reassured and assessed during pregnancy in the day care areas whilst in labour. Partners are encouraged to stay for both the birth and during the postnatal period. There are rooms with double and twin beds to enable partners to stay. Both units have pools for women to use as pain relief and many women chose to birth in the pools.

Both units accommodate midwifery clinics and consultant led high risk clinics, Monday to Friday during working hours. This enables services to be provided closer to home. Parent education classes which include water birth and active birth workshops are held within both units. Yoga classes are also provided by qualified yoga professionals and breastfeeding workshops are facilitated by midwives, with breastfeeding support groups run by the women themselves.

Following the birth, women and their babies can stay in the unit for anything between 6 hours and 3 days. Women who are high risk and have had to attend an acute unit to birth are able to return to one of the birth units for support in the immediate postnatal period which is particularly helpful for women who wish to establish breastfeeding.

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3. What are the staffing levels?

The staffing levels comprise of a midwife and maternity care assistant 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. When a birth is expected, a second midwife is on call. If a women requires transfer to an acute unit, the same applies hence there is always a midwife available within the unit. There is a robust on-call service available 24 hours a day.

4. How far are they from the nearest consultant-led maternity unit?

See number 8. below.

5. How many births has each unit delivered each year for the past three years?

Canterbury:	2006 – 453, 2007 – 415, 2008 – 387
Dover	2006 – 422, 2007 – 397, 2008 – 347

6. What percentage of births in the area does this account for?

This accounts for 10% of births

7. How many women each year for the past three years entering these units to give birth were transferred to the consultancy-led units?

Unfortunately we are unable to collate figures for 2006 as these were not recorded at the time although audits were carried out, they do not reflect the full year.

2007:- Canterbury – total number of women attending the unit was 465. The total transfers (including neonatal) is 135. In-utero transfers totalled 123.

Dover – total number of women attending the unit was 426. The total transfers (including neonatal) is 126. In-utero transfers totalled 104.

2008:- Canterbury – total number of women attending the unit was 466. The total transfers (including neonatal) is 155. In-utero transfers totalled 137.

Dover – total number of women attending the unit was 361. The total transfers (including neonatal) is 117. In-utero transfers totalled 100.

2009:- These figures will be available mid-end January and will be forwarded onto you as soon as they are available.

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8. Where are these women transferred to, how long do these transfers take and what are the procedures around ensuring these transfers are safe?

The acute units are based at William Harvey Hospital, Ashford or the Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother Hospital, Thanet.

The time taken for a transfer is as follows

DFBC to WHH range is 20-40 minutes

DFBC to QEQM range is 30-45 minutes

CBC to WHH range is 20-40 minutes

CBC to QEQM range is 30-50 minutes

When a women requires transfer an ambulance is arranged (999 called if this is an emergency) the second midwife is called to stay within the birth unit and the women is accompanied by the first midwife who would have provided labour care up to the point of delivery. Women are given full information about transfer rates and how long transfer takes prior to them making a decision to attend either the Canterbury or Dover birthing units.

9. What information can you provide about the number of comments / complaints / compliments received each year by the NHS in East Kent relating to the stand alone birthing units, in particular relating to transfers?

The birthing units are very popular and we have compliments and cards on a daily basis. Complaints have been very few over the last three years and none of them were in relation to transfers.

Yours sincerely,



Ann Sutton
Chief Executive

c.c. Ingrid Cobourn, Lead Commissioner