

## **East Kent Hospitals Update for Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Maternity Services Update: 17 January 2022**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 East Kent Hospitals is on a journey of improvement to provide high quality maternity care for women and their families, and to learn the lessons from past failures.

1.2 Over the last two years the Trust has introduced significant improvements to its maternity services including:

- a new and expanded leadership team for the service
- more staff, including consultants, midwives and support staff
- increased consultant presence on the labour wards
- improved staff training
- improved how we recruit and supervise temporary and junior doctors
- introduced centralised cardiotocographic (CTG) monitoring which allows babies' health during labour to be displayed on monitors in the labour ward and viewed by consultants elsewhere in the hospital or on call
- Stronger governance arrangements.

1.3 This paper outlines further improvement work underway, in response to feedback from women and families, our staff, national clinical experts and our regulators.

1.4 The Trust is determined to take all necessary steps to improve services so that everyone who uses our maternity service has an excellent standard of care.

#### **2. Maternity Strategy**

2.1 The Trust's [Strategy for Excellence in Maternity Care](#), sets out the Trust's commitment to the women and families of east Kent to work tirelessly to provide high quality maternity care, which is safe, effective and centred on the women that need it.

2.2 The strategy incorporates feedback from women and families – to those who have received excellent care, and those we have failed by not providing the right standard of care – and also from our staff, on what they need to be equipped with to deliver a safe high-quality service.

2.3 It also incorporates recommendations from independent investigations, findings and feedback into maternity care at the Trust, to ensure the recommendations and lessons learned from these are fully embedded.

2.4 The recommendations include those from the NHS England maternity support programme, NHS Improvement, the Care Quality Commission, Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, Kent and Medway Local Maternity Systems, the Maternity Voices Partnership and Healthwatch Kent.

### **3. Care Quality Commission visit**

- 3.1 The Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected the maternity units at William Harvey Hospital and QEQM Hospital, and the Trust's community midwifery teams in Canterbury and Dover in July 2021 and published their reports into the inspection on 15 October.
- 3.2 The overall CQC rating for the service remains 'requires improvement'. As this was a focused inspection, no ratings were produced for safe, caring, effective, responsive and well-led, and the previous ratings (good for caring, effective and responsive, requires improvement for safe and well-led) remain in place.
- 3.3 The inspection did not identify issues with the hospital service and labour ward but identified the stretched staff resources in the community service, and the need to have in place robust ways to escalate staffing issues.
- 3.4 Like many maternity services around the country, the service has experienced significant staff shortages, compounded by staff absences associated with Covid-19 during all three waves of the pandemic, in addition to high demand. Traditionally, community midwives have been asked to support the hospital maternity units at busy times.
- 3.5 The Trust carried out a comprehensive staffing review and temporarily reduced the number of midwifery services it offers by suspending the home birth service until staffing is in a more sustainable position.
- 3.6 In September 2021, the Trust Board approved £1.6 million investment, in addition to national funding received, to fund an additional 38 midwives. Recruitment is underway. As midwives start there is period of induction and training before substantively joining the service.

### **4. Governance and Leadership**

- 4.1 In September 2021 the Trust Board established a Maternity and Neonatal Assurance Group to provide continued and targeted oversight of Maternity and Neonatal Services across the Trust.
- 4.2 The Maternity and Neonatal Assurance Group is chaired by the Chief Nursing Officer and reports directly to the Board on delivery of the Trust's Maternity Improvement Plan, to ensure improvement actions are embedded as business as usual.
- 4.3 The Group includes oversight and monitoring of:
- key performance indicators and risks within the service
  - ongoing audits of completed improvement actions
  - triangulating feedback from complaints, incidents, compliments and service user feedback through Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) and Safety Champion to ensure actions delivered have the required impact on patient safety and experience
  - progress against recommendations from external reports e.g. Ockenden and CQC
  - impact of NHS England/NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) supported culture programme.
  - progress against the Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts maternity incentive scheme
  - reports provided by the Local Maternity System.

- 4.4 Trust Board oversight of the service is also provided by an Executive Maternity Safety Champion, the Chief Nursing Officer, and a Non-Executive Maternity Safety Champion and we continue to work closely with the Maternity Voices Partnership.
- 4.5 A new Interim Director of Midwifery joined the Trust in July 2021 and the Director of Operations role is now solely focussed on Women's Health. Recent recruitment has also included a governance lead and two patient experience midwives.
- 4.6 A dedicated Freedom to Speak Up Guardian for maternity services has been recruited, in addition to existing Trust-wide roles, to further embed a culture where staff feel able to speak up when they have concerns. The roles provide confidential advice and supports staff to raise concerns and with ensuring that concerns raised are handled effectively.
- 4.7 A service-wide meeting takes place daily to assess any new or emerging staffing challenges, or issues related to activity across the service, including hospital and community teams, to agree plans, as required, to maintain safety for all areas.

## **5. NHS England and NHS Improvement Assurance Visit**

- 5.1 The Trust continues to work closely with some of England's leading maternity experts and with our regulators to ensure that we have done - and we are continuing to do – everything we can to improve care.
- 5.2 Members of NHS England's national maternity team and NHS regional team conducted a joint virtual and onsite visit on 10 December 2021. They met with service leaders and held focus groups with staff at both William Harvey and QEQM hospitals.
- 5.3 The team recognised positive progress including increased staff training levels and staff feedback was positive, focussed on the improvement work and the additional support for staff wellbeing.
- 5.4 Areas identified for further improvement included having access to a second, fully equipped operating theatre at QEQM Hospital, and improving communications with staff. Planned c-sections now take place in the main operating theatres at QEQM Hospital and an additional resuscitaire has been purchased.
- 5.5 Work is also underway to review the estate and identify options to expand the size of the delivery rooms at both hospitals.

## **6. Current services**

- 6.1 Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, all NHS Trusts have had to make difficult decisions to limit visitors to hospital to prevent the spread of infection.
- 6.2 With the easing of restrictions, a partner or support person can attend every antenatal appointment and scan with a pregnant women throughout their pregnancy. A birth partner can

also be present for the duration of the labour and birth and only the birth partner can visit while in hospital.

6.3 Due to continued staffing pressures arising from the Covid pandemic, the home birth service remains restricted. As staffing levels improve as a result of the additional recruitment we will be able to provide more birthing options.

## **7. Independent Investigation**

7.1 An independent investigation into the maternity and neonatal services provided by the Trust is underway, led by Dr Bill Kirkup. It is expected to cover the period since 2009.

7.2 The Trust has welcomed this independent investigation and continues to do all it can to assist and support the investigation team.

7.3 The Terms of Reference for the investigation were published in Parliament on 11 March 2021 and can be found on the [investigations' website](#).

7.4 The investigation is expected to report later this year.

Ends.