



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Diary case advice

Advice template

Details of the invitation

A family from the Swansea Bay University Health Board area wrote to the Minister on 12 January 2024 to highlight their concerns regarding the independent review commissioned by the health board into its maternity and neonatal services, and to request a meeting to discuss further.

On 12 December, the Minister confirmed her decision to escalate the health board's maternity and neonatal services to enhanced monitoring. On the same day, the health board announced it was commissioning an independent review to inform levels of assurance and confidence in the quality and safety of its maternity and neonatal services.

Advice

It is advised the Minister declines the meeting request.

The health board has published a draft terms of reference for the review, which confirms it will comprise three primary strands, namely (i) clinical review, (ii) governance review, and (iii) family and staff engagement. The terms of reference will be ratified by an independent chair and oversight panel. Officials met with the health board's Executive Director of Nursing on 22 January who confirmed the health board's intention to announce the Chair and oversight panel membership in the coming weeks.

The currently available draft terms of reference confirms an engagement process will be undertaken to consider feedback provided by families and staff, alongside clinical information and other evidence to develop an assessment of the health board's maternity and neonatal services. The details regarding the approach to engagement will be finalised once the oversight panel has been established, but officials understand families will have an opportunity to share feedback regarding their experience of care since 2019.

The review has been commissioned by the health board but will be delivered independently of both the organisation and the Welsh Government. Officials understand the Chair of the review will report directly to the Board, initially on a monthly basis. Given this, and the fact that the membership and terms of reference has not yet been finalised, it would not be appropriate for the Minister to meet with the family to discuss its scope.

SBUHB have informed officials that they have open invitations to all local MSs and MPs to visit their maternity and neonatal service. Russel George visited on 19 January and there are other visits being planned. The health board are also happy to arrange a formal Ministerial visit at a future date.

Priority: Urgent

Redacted

Redacted

Lines to Take

- Officials have worked closely with the health board over the last 12 months and gained insight into the issues that the health board is facing. I took the decision to escalate maternity and neonatal services in Swansea to enhanced monitoring prior to Christmas following an assessment of emerging issues and existing concerns related to staffing levels, quality and safety issues including those arising from the HIW inspection report.
- Swansea Bay University Health Board have confirmed that an independent review of its maternity and neonatal services is about to commence which I welcome.
- Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published its final report following the unannounced inspection of the maternity services at Singleton Hospital on 15 December. It will be important that the health board now robustly addresses the issues identified.
- The escalation will support the health board during this independent review ensuring that issues that are escalated are acted upon and will track and challenge progress against the HIW action plan.
- I am aware the health board are appointing an independent Chair to lead a review to inform levels of assurance and confidence in the quality and safety of its maternity and neonatal services. It will be the responsibility of the Chair to ensure the voices of the families are heard by ensuring an engagement process is in place to consider all feedback provided by families and staff, alongside clinical information and other evidence to develop an assessment of the health board's maternity and neonatal services.
- I understand that the health board are in discussion with Llais about their engagement with the Independent Review.
- I am aware that colleagues have visited the maternity and neonatal unit and a briefing has been provided to local MSs and MPs. There is the opportunity for any colleagues to visit in person if they so wish.
- This review is independent of Government and the health board. For that reason, the members of the independent Panel will be appointed by the Chair of the Panel and include an independent patient representative.

- The Chair and the independent panel will have the authority to review, modify and agree the terms of reference which are currently in draft form.

Maternity Services

December was a difficult month for staff in our maternity and neonatal services, with significant negative media interest. We gave a verbal update at last month's briefing, but I thought it would be helpful to set out clearly the different issues and what is happening.

HIW review

Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) undertook an unannounced visit to our maternity service in September last year, when they identified a number of improvements that needed to be made. These are set out in HIW's report, made public in December, and are being addressed through a comprehensive action plan that has been accepted by HIW. Progress against this plan is being overseen by our Quality and Safety Committee. A majority of the actions have now been completed and others are well underway, significantly helped by the fact that over 20 new midwives joined us at the end of September following planned recruitment.

Enhanced Monitoring

The "enhanced monitoring" arrangements with Welsh Government are being finalised with a set of qualitative and quantitative data being agreed. This data will then be reviewed in the regular monthly meetings between Swansea Bay executives and Welsh Government officials, as well as being reported to the health board Quality and Safety Committee.

Re-opening of NPT birthing centre

We have been working hard to develop proposals to revise midwifery staffing models so that the Birthing Centre at Neath Port Talbot Hospital and the Home Birth Service can be reopened. These services were temporarily closed in July 2021 due to the lack of midwifery staff to run all of our services and the need to ensure safe services at Singleton Hospital. These plans have been finalised and will now be subject to our internal scrutiny processes to establish and assure that any reopening will be safe. This is an important step, given the changes we will be making to the service model, workforce modernisation and expansion of community midwifery birthing numbers.

We are investing £750,000 in these services over two years to secure this, which will deliver:

- Compliance with birth-rate plus
- Further development of antenatal services
- Full establishment for registered midwives (we currently have no vacancies in the Singleton unit)
- Releasing community midwives, who have been supporting the Singleton unit when staffing is low, so that they can support the reopening of the Birthing Centre at Neath Port Talbot and restarting the Home Birthing Service.

We are also recruiting over the funded establishment within maternity services overall to give us a buffer should we require (e.g. if maternity leave / sickness

increases) and recruiting Band 7 midwives to oversee the Neath Port Talbot Birthing Unit. This is continually under review and the Service Delivery Group have developed a Gateway Review process to oversee the reopening.

Independent review of maternity services

Over the past few years, there have been several reviews of maternity services, both internal and external. Each of these reviews has reflected favourably on the culture and approach to patient safety and learning within the service. The Health Board is therefore confident that the service is a good one with a strong safety culture. However, we also know the service has been under significant staff pressure over the past few years, and we are always seeking to improve the quality of the care provided. The independent review announced in December 2023 into Maternity and Neonatal Services will provide Swansea Bay UHB with an opportunity to reassure ourselves and stakeholders about the quality and safety of services, to implement any necessary improvements and to address any misperceptions, thereby maintaining confidence in the services and learning any lessons that might be identified.

More details on the review can be found in the press release, frequently asked questions and the full Terms of Reference, subject to review and sign off by the Chair of the Independent Panel, which can be accessed [here](#).

The review will consider three areas: clinical outcomes, patient experience and leadership and governance, each led by relevant independent experts.

The review will involve a comprehensive engagement process with service users who will have the opportunity to input and provide details of their own experiences as per the draft Terms of Reference. The patient voice is an important part of the overall process and the Health Board is committed to ensuring it is heard. Information on how this will be facilitated will be provided once the Oversight Panel and review teams are established.

For clarity, the appointment of the external review teams who will consider the 3 strands set out above and the establishment of the independent Oversight Panel are precursors to that engagement.

An expert and experienced team of maternity and neonatal clinicians from outside Wales has already been appointed to carry out the review of clinical cases and feedback received from the engagement process. At the heart will be an in-depth analysis of the mortality figures published as part of the MBRRACE (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK) report for 2021 as well as their 2022 report that is expected to be published later this month. Preliminary internal data for 2023 will also be reviewed. Recent users of Swansea Bay's maternity and neonatal services will be invited to share their experiences as part of the review as will staff within the service. Finally, experts on leadership and governance will review how the service is run and how it reports to the wider health board.

The independent review will be overseen by an Oversight Panel, chaired by an individual who is independent of, and unconnected to, the Health Board. The

members of the independent Oversight Panel will be appointed by the Chair of the Panel rather than the Health Board and will include an independent patient representative to ensure patient voices are heard within this forum. We will be announcing the Chair and makeup of the Oversight Panel shortly and information on how individuals can provide information / feed-in to the process will be provided thereafter.

The Oversight Panel will oversee the progress of the review and ensure that appropriate plans are put in place to address its findings, reporting back directly to formal Health Board meetings. The membership of the Oversight Panel is being finalised and will be shared with you when confirmed.

At the December MS / MPs briefing a visit to our Maternity and Neonatal services was requested. An email has been sent offering visits on 2nd and / or 9th February, asking Members to confirm which time / date would be better for them. Once responses have been received arrangements will be confirmed.