

FM's Hot Issues Brief: Health & Social Services

6 February 2024

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6. **Swansea Bay UHB: Independent Review of Maternity and Neonatal Services – Updated**

Background

On 12 December 2023, the Minister for Health and Social Services confirmed her decision to escalate Swansea Bay University Health Board's maternity and neonatal services to enhanced monitoring. This followed twelve months of officials undertaking support, scrutiny and challenge within routine arrangements, as well as an unannounced inspection by Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) of the maternity services provided at Singleton Hospital. Officials were not assured the health board was making sufficient progress and therefore recommended service escalation to the Minister, who agreed to this escalation.

On the same day, the health board announced it would be commissioning an independent review of its maternity and neonatal services. It confirmed that an independent Chair and oversight panel would be appointed, supported by a clinical review team. The focus of the review team would be on quality and outcomes in the service between 2021 and 2022 using MBRRACE-UK (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK) data and cases, which includes maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths. This would be supported by service user feedback dating back to January 2019 and staff feedback dating back to 2021.

The review will be led by an independent Chair who will be responsible for appointing members of an oversight panel, including an independent patient representative. An experienced multidisciplinary clinical review team will also be established to support this work.

Coinciding with their board meeting, the health board announced it has appointed Margaret Bowron KC as chair of the panel. Her appointment has drawn criticism from the families affected.

The draft Terms of Reference for the Review will be considered by the Oversight Panel and will be amended in order to enable a robust review of the services in a way that allows necessary lessons to be learnt and for there to be confidence that

the Health Board can and will deliver safe care in future. The clinical review team will start its work as soon as the final Terms of Reference have been approved. The review is expected to take a minimum of ten months to complete.

The Minister has and continues to receive correspondence from families and Members writing on their behalf to raise concerns about the proposed scope of the independent review, the lack of family input into the draft terms of reference and the review itself, as well as to request that their care be explored as part of the process. One of these families has been in regular contact with officials for the past 18 months, has been publicly named by Members during Plenary on multiple occasions and appears to be forming a group of affected and interested families.

The health board has issued open invitations to all local MSs and MPs to visit its maternity and neonatal service. <Redacted> MS visited on 19 January and further visits are planned for 2 and 9 February. The Minister has not yet visited the services, but officials have suggested the health board may wish to invite her.

Lines to take:

- The health board has recently announced the Chair for the independent review, as Margaret Bowron KC with announcement on the independent member appointments likely be confirmed soon and information on how individuals can provide information / feed-in to the engagement process will be provided thereafter.
- Safe care is fundamentally intertwined with listening to and acting on the family voice. I am therefore glad to learn that the independent review will involve a comprehensive engagement process.
- I understand the health board is in discussion with Llais Cymru to explore opportunities to further strengthen the support provided to families who engage with the review process.
- Welsh Government officials have not been directly involved in the process of appointing the independent review Chair nor panel members.
- This review is independent of both the Welsh Government and the health board. For this reason, the independent panel members will be appointed by the Chair, including an independent patient representative. The review will 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.

Reviewed and updated by <redacted> -1 February 2024

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