

## **FM's Hot Issues Brief: Health, Social Care & Early Years**

**23 April 2024**

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7. **Swansea Bay UHB - Maternity Services Independent Review - new**

### **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.

On 31 January the health board announced 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 Cabinet Secretary has and continued to receive correspondence from families 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. 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.

On Friday 19 April, the chair of the independent review announced the remaining members of the oversight panel and also issued an expanded terms of reference for public consultation until 10 May 2024.

### **Lines to take:**

- Members of the public, including families who may be affected are able to comment on the expanded terms of reference until 10 May 2024. A copy of the terms of reference and how to respond can be found on the Swansea Bay university Health Board website.
- 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 has had 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 have been 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.

**Provided by <redacted>: 19 April 2024**

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