

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

16 July 2024

Contents

1. Maternity and Neonatal Services (Swansea and <Redacted>)

Background

There has been media coverage over the last 10 days of maternity services in both Swansea and <Redacted>, the briefing below covers the issues raised.

Update on independent review into maternity and neonatal services in Swansea

On Tuesday 25 June, Swansea Bay UHB announced a new interim chair of the oversight panel for the Independent Review of maternity and neonatal services in Swansea following the announcement that Margaret Bowron was standing down from her role of Chair with immediate effect. The health board responded quickly and appointed Dr Denise Chaffer on an interim basis, whilst a substantive appointment process is undertaken.

The role of the oversight panel is to undertake an ongoing assurance process of the review process, providing independent scrutiny to ensure the Review is completed in line with its Terms of Reference. The Review has three parts: a review of clinical outcomes, a review of patient and staff experience and a review of leadership and governance. The Review is supported by an engagement lead who will ensure that service user and staff voices are heard throughout the review process.

On the 12 June, the revised Terms of Reference for the review were published following the input of service users and staff during an extended listening period.

The health board have assured us this that the changes to the Chair of the oversight panel will not affect the review.

Lines to take:

Swansea maternity and neonatal services

Independent review

- The health board has commissioned an independent review to assess the quality and safety of its maternity and neonatal services.
- We are aware that Margaret Bowron resigned as Chair of the oversight panel for independent review of maternity and neonatal services in Swansea and noted the appointment of Dr Denise Chaffer as interim chair.
- Dr Denise Chaffer is a highly experienced midwife and existing member of the panel overseeing the review. Her appointment will ensure the oversight panel can continue to make decisions and discharge its responsibilities until the role is appointed to on a substantive basis.
- The terms of reference for the review have been published on the health board website and members of the public have been invited to submit comments to the review team during a listening period. Llais has also been asked to support individuals to provide comments.

- Representatives from the oversight panel and the workstream leads held an engagement event with families about the terms of reference and an opportunity for families to raise any questions.

Escalation of maternity and neonatal services in Swansea

- The Cabinet Secretary escalated these services to enhanced monitoring following a number of concerns she had about the service. Welsh Government officials continue to maintain oversight of the health board's maternity and neonatal services. This includes workforce data alongside other quality metrics as part of the enhanced monitoring escalation arrangements.

Birthing unit and home birth services

- In May 2024, the health board's management board approved the reopening of the Neath Port Talbot birth centre and the home birth service subject to final approval by the Board. This followed a comprehensive review process involving a number of formal 'gateways' and significant staff input and engagement. As a result of issues raised by one of their recognised Unions, there will be a short delay in bringing the formal proposal for the reopening to their Board.

HIW inspections – Singleton hospital

- Healthcare Inspectorate Wales conducted a follow-up unannounced inspection of the Singleton maternity unit in April 2024 and raised three immediate assurances, two of which were completed at the time of the visit. The health board has responded appropriately to the inspection findings which HIW has accepted. The inspection report is scheduled to be published on 18 July.
- We continue to maintain oversight of the health board's delivery of required improvements through the enhanced monitoring escalation arrangements, which includes any actions identified through HIW inspections. The health board has indicated a significant number of actions have been completed but there are a number of actions where work is ongoing from the national review of maternity services in 2020 and the inspection of services in Singleton hospital in 2019 and 2023.

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Reviewed by <redacted>: 11 July 2024

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