

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

17 September 2024

1. Independent Review of Maternity and Neonatal Service in Swansea Bay UHB - updated

Background:

On 25 June 2024, Swansea Bay UHB announced an interim chair Dr Denise Chaffer for the oversight panel for the Independent Review of maternity and neonatal services in Swansea following the resignation of the appointed chair. The interim appointment was initially for three months but has subsequently been extended, until the year end.

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.

The final Terms of Reference for the review were published on 12 June 2024 following the input of service users and staff during a listening period. The health board has recently written to stakeholders including the Welsh Government and member of the Senedd with an update on progress, which highlighted:

- Family and Community Voices Steering Group is in the process of being established.
- Communications between the review team and Llais are being enhanced for the duration of the review.
- New independent website and dedicated email address has been established.
- Clinical Review Team – first tranche of review letters were sent out in August to the individuals and families involved in 2022 cases with further tranches of letters will be sent out during September.
- Bereavement and emotional / psychological support is being put in place to support those currently being contacted and those who self-refer.
- Self-referral process for anybody who believes their case should be reviewed is now available (although this has not been publicised yet)
- Comprehensive governance pack has been developed
- Regular updates to be provided to stakeholders and shared on health board and review websites.

Llais are undertaking a survey of service users' experiences of Maternity Services in Swansea Bay until the end of September 2024. An external company will also be facilitating three face-to-face workshops with up to 20 women in each focusing on their experiences of maternity care. The data gathered from the workshops and the survey results will be used by Llais to produce a report in October 2024. Llais wrote to the health board on 3 September outlining a number of concerns about the review process including the engagement with families.

There continues to be strong criticism of the review process from a number of affected families and in the media. Welsh Government recently received correspondence from one of the families indicating the families are not willing to engage with the current review and are looking to undertake their own review using

their stories and the evidence they have gathered. **They have not yet announced their intention publicly, but we anticipate they will do so soon.**

There has also been recent media coverage about one of the families asking the South Wales police to undertake a criminal inquiry into the events surrounding the maternity unit. The police have indicated they are undertaking a fact-finding exercise to identify if there are any potential criminal offences to investigate. We understand the police have been in contact with the health board.

Escalation of maternity and neonatal services in Swansea

- Maternity and neonatal services were escalated to enhanced monitoring by Welsh Government in January following a number of concerns about the service. Welsh Government officials continue to maintain oversight of the health board's maternity and neonatal services. This includes workforce data alongside a number of quality metrics as part of the enhanced monitoring escalation arrangements.

Birthing unit and home birth services

- At a special Board meeting on 10 September 2024 the health board approved the reopening of the Neath Port Talbot birthing centre and home birth service having reflected on months of careful analysis, engagement with staff, and feedback from service users.
- The re-opening of the midwife-led Birth Centre at Neath Port Talbot Hospital will take place on Monday 16 September, as well as the reintroduction of the Home Birth Service from Monday 21 October 2024.
- They are also reintroducing home labour assessments and antenatal education classes provided by our community midwives. Families are being urged to discuss their birthplace options with their midwife, who can recommend the safest setting according to each mother's individual needs.

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 was 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 and provide a full update on progress to their Board in July.

Lines to take:

- There is considerable focus and oversight on the maternity and neonatal services in the health board and we have oversight of the current service which has been reinforced by the appointment of a new Director for the service.
- The decision to reopen the home birth centre with immediate effect following a special meeting of the Board is welcome and I am sure will be well used by expectant mothers.
- The health board has commissioned an independent review to assess the quality and safety of its maternity and neonatal services, and the terms of reference for the review have been published on the health board website, following a listening period with families and staff

- Dr Denise Chaffer is a highly experienced midwife and her appointment as interim Chair ensures the oversight panel can make decisions and discharge its responsibilities in line with the published terms of reference.

Updated by <redacted>: 10 September 2024

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