

Women & Children's Division**Briefing paper****Temporary transfer of care of women planning to give birth in Wycombe Birth Centre: 25 July to 31 October 2016****1. Introduction**

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust provides a range of maternity services across the county, including antenatal clinics, community midwifery, home birthing service, midwifery-led birthing units (in Wycombe and Aylesbury) and an obstetrician-led labour ward (in Aylesbury). The service provides care for over 5,500 women and babies every year.

Due to an unanticipated number of midwifery vacancies, the women and children's division have had to review levels of staffing in all areas of the maternity service during August, September and October. Following a full risk assessment the clinical team have therefore recommended – as the safest and least disruptive option - that a temporary transfer takes place for the care of women who are planning to give birth at Wycombe Birth Centre, to enable some staff from that unit to be deployed to cover vacant shifts across other parts of the service. Antenatal and outpatient postnatal care will still continue to be offered at Wycombe Birth Centre.

This was a difficult decision to make and we recognise that it will be very disappointing for women who may have been considering choosing Wycombe Birth Centre for their delivery over the next 3 months, and for this we are very sorry. Our clinicians have done everything possible to keep disruption to a minimum, ensure a full range of birthing choices continue to remain available to women and to maintain the high standards of quality and safe care it provides.

This paper outlines the reason for this recommendation and the action being taken to minimise disruption to women planning their delivery.

2. Maternity staffing

The maternity service employs 169 whole time equivalent (WTE) midwives. Over recent months 24.8WTE midwives have resigned or retired, including 4.6WTE who will leave in July, and - although the department are continuously recruiting throughout the year - as at the end of June there remains a 14.09WTE vacancy gap. Nationally, there is an estimated shortage of 2600 midwives.

The team have taken a number of measures to maintain safe staffing whilst recruiting, including:

- Staff working extra shifts and volunteering to work during annual leave
- Using agency staff to support postnatal care
- Cancelling study leave.

The team are interviewing 24 midwives in early July. If successfully appointed, new starters would not be able to commence until October due to national registration

requirements. Until that time there remains over 40 shifts a month (equivalent of 8WTE) that cannot be filled over the next three months.

The team are also working on longer term workforce planning, focussing on recruitment, retention, and adapting staff shift patterns to meet the future demands of the service.

3. Maintaining a woman's choice

There are approximately 20 births per month at Wycombe Birth Centre. Any woman who was considering or had planned to give birth at Wycombe Birth Centre over the next 3 months will be given an alternative choice of a home birth (with a community midwife) or to use the midwifery-led service at the Aylesbury Birth Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital or the consultant-led labour ward at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Aylesbury Birth Centre provides the same midwifery-led care as Wycombe Birth Centre and, with between 50 and 80 women giving birth there every month, is large enough to accommodate those transferring from Wycombe.

All other services, including antenatal and outpatient postnatal care, will continue to be offered from Wycombe Birth Centre during this time. This equates to over 700 visits from women and their babies.

4. Next steps

The maternity team have worked hard to ensure they maintain a commitment to delivering the national recommendation regarding choice of place of birth options (Maternity Matters).

Women in Buckinghamshire who were planning to give birth at Wycombe Birth Centre over the coming three months will still be able to choose between a home birth, midwife-led delivery at Aylesbury Birth Centre and a consultant-led delivery at Stoke Mandeville Hospital's labour ward. They are being contacted directly by their community midwife to discuss their personal birthing plans and options.

With new recruits due to start in October, we are confident that Wycombe Birth Centre will be able to re-commence offering care to women in labour from 1 November.

Audrey Warren, Divisional Chief Nurse & Head of Midwifery
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