

National Review of Maternity Services

Following the publication of the Morecambe Bay Investigation report in March 2015 it was announced by NHS England that there would be a national review of maternity services. Its terms of reference included paying particular attention to the challenges of providing safe and responsive maternity services in rural areas and the team visited maternity units across Cumbria, including Helme Chase as part of its work programme.

The report, called Better Births. Improving outcomes of maternity services in England, said: *“Our vision for maternity services across England is for them to become safer, more personalised, kinder, professional and more family friendly; where every woman has access to information to enable her to make decisions about her care; and where she and her baby can access support that is centred around their individual needs and circumstances.*

“And for staff to be supported to deliver care which is women centred, working in high performing teams, in organisations which are well led and in cultures which promote innovation, continuous learning, and break down organisational and professional boundaries.”

The report included a table of recommendations for action, who should take responsibility and timescales, based on the following:

- Personalised care, centred on the woman, her baby and her family, based around their needs and their decisions, where they have genuine choice, informed by unbiased information.
- Continuity of carer, to ensure safe care based on a relationship of mutual trust and respect in line with the woman’s decisions.
- Safer care, with professionals working together across boundaries to ensure rapid referral, and access to the right care in the right place; leadership for a safety culture within and across organisations; and investigation, honesty and learning when things go wrong.
- Better postnatal and perinatal mental health care, to address historic underfunding and provision in these two vital areas, which can have a significant impact on the life chances and wellbeing of the woman, baby and family.
- Multi-professional working, breaking down barriers between midwives, obstetricians and other professionals to deliver safe and personalised care for women and their babies.
- Working across boundaries to provide and commission maternity services to support personalisation, safety and choice, with access to specialist care whenever needed.
- A payment system that fairly and adequately compensates providers for delivering high quality care to all women efficiently, while supporting commissioners to commission for personalisation, safety and choice.

In a section about remote and rural areas, the report said that such areas should think about how they can use their workforce innovatively, including sharing staff across multiple sites. They can also introduce innovative working practices including robust triage to ensure that women are transferred to the appropriate level of care at an appropriate time in the pregnancy, defining which women should be advised to give birth at which units, providing transport facilities for women needing to travel to more specialist units, and making use of technology e.g. consultations by video link between the centre and smaller unit.