

Maternity Information Event

31 May 2022

Due to staff shortages the RUH is currently not able to support home births or births in our midwifery units in Chippenham and Frome. Whilst this difficult decision was made to ensure we can continue to provide a safe service, we know how disappointing this is for many in our community.

Our Deputy Chief Nurse and Director of Midwifery Sarah Merritt hosted an open, virtual session on Tuesday 31 May where attendees could hear more about the challenges facing maternity services nationally and locally and the steps we are taking to reinstate community and home births as soon as it is safe to do so. You can view that presentation [here](#).

The questions below were raised during the session or sent in advance by those who could not attend the live session.

Question and answer summary

Decision to temporarily suspend community and homebirths

The position of 'constant review' of homebirth services prevents women from planning for birth. Why, as a Trust, can you not give a set date as opposed to a rolling review which keeps women in suspense?

We recognise this is difficult for our community but we have opted for a rolling review because we hope to reinstate services as soon as possible. We know that the picture is improving with staff returning from sick leave and maternity leave and new staff joining us. We are committed to reinstating our services as soon as possible.



Why has the decision been made to suspend all services not related to Bath, rather than allowing for a limited homebirth service as a minimum? Why have community birth centres and homebirth services been linked in this way?

Our home births and community birthing centres are both staffed by community midwives which is why both services are affected. We keep our staffing levels under regular review to assess whether we can reinstate any of these services.

Can you not provide a limited service for those with a history of quick birth or precipitate labour?

Please talk to your community midwife in the first instance about how we can safely support you if you are likely to have a very fast birth.

Why is there no personalised approach that takes into account individual circumstances, or consideration on a case-by-case basis of how home birth services can be provided?

Safety is our number one priority. Our current staffing levels mean we would not be able to guarantee a midwife would be available to support a home birth when you need them. Therefore, in order to keep our mums, birthing people, babies and families safe we have taken the decision to focus our resources in one area.

Could a specific Pathway be developed for those who were planning a community birth but are now having to birth at Bath Birthing Centre so both parents and midwives understand the process, changes etc?

We are making sure that mothers, birthing people and their families who are impacted by the temporary suspension, as well as our staff are all communicated with regularly to ensure everyone is well informed.

Staffing and recruitment

What is being done to recruit more midwives so that community and homebirths can resume?

We have a plan in place including an on-going recruitment campaign which includes partnering with local universities, using social media and other advertising avenues and attending recruitment fairs. Despite a national shortage of midwives, we are really pleased to have welcomed 41 new midwives to the RUH since September 2021.



Other trusts have hired in private/independent midwives and agency to keep their community services open - why hasn't Bath done this sooner throughout the weeks of closure?

We do employ agency midwives and we are exploring partnering with a private midwifery service at the moment.

Do you provide incentives or additional payments for staff undertaking bank or overtime?

Yes, we have been offering financial incentives since July 2021 for staff undertaking additional shifts.

Why can't Bath offer a limited home birth service with a midwife and band 3/4 maternity support worker with PROMPT training?

We want to ensure we provide the safest possible service, therefore we are not currently considering this option.

Other trusts are managing to keep birthing centres and home births open and available, why can't the RUH?

Unfortunately, other Trusts in the area also experiencing similar challenges due to the national shortage of midwives. The RUH also provides a wide variety of maternity services across multiple locations, including four community units, which means we have more areas to staff than many other Trusts. We have also seen high rates of sickness and maternity leave which have impacted on our staffing situation. Recruiting more staff remains a top priority for us.

Birth preferences

Could you explain how midwives ensure parents know that they have read these carefully prepared ideas and feelings?

We welcome birth plans and strive to ensure all women and birthing people get the birth experience they want. Please do talk to the midwives when you come in about your birth plan.

Can a mother/birthing person have her partner and an additional support person when they arrive at Bath Birthing Centre?



Yes, women and birthing people can have two people with them during labour.

If a mother is on a Continuity of Carer pathway, can she ask whoever she is greeted by at Bath Birthing Centre to call her midwife in case she is able to attend and support her for the birth?

Although we cannot guarantee your midwife will be available, we do encourage you to ask.

How can people who wanted homebirths ensure that they are supported to have an alternative, un-medicalised, water birth at RUH?

Provided there are no complications during labour, this type of birth is very possible at the Bath Birthing Centre. We have two birthing pools and each room also has an ensuite with a bath should a mother or birthing person wish to use water during their labour. The Bath Birthing Centre at the RUH provides a relaxed environment for labour and birth, you can read more about the facilities [here](#) or view the virtual tour [here](#)

Do you support hypnobirthing mothers especially in the current climate of limited staff?

Yes. Our midwives continue to fully support hypnobirthing.

Support for women and birthing people

What is being done to support people who have planned a home water birth but now need to attend the Bath Birthing Centre?

The Bath Birthing Centre has two rooms with birthing pools and every room has an ensuite which includes a bath.

We understand how disappointing a change of plan can be, and we are sorry if you are not able to have the home birth you had planned, however safety is our priority. In the first instance, please discuss any concerns you have with your midwife who will be able to provide more information about Bath Birthing Centre and your options.



Will parents who had planned a home or community birth be able to come into Bath Birthing centre before labour begins to have a look around and reassure themselves that it isn't like a 'busy labour ward' seen on TV dramas?

Yes, we are happy to facilitate visits to the Bath Birthing Centre. Please talk to your midwife about arranging this. We will also add details to our website about booking visits as soon as we can.

Our rooms have been specially designed to provide a relaxing environment which includes soft lighting, fairy lights and music. You can read more about the facilities [here](#) or view the virtual tour [here](#)

Could a midwife attend the Bath Homebirth Support group each month as this is really important for building trust and relationship between our midwifery teams and parents, as well as an opportunity for updates?

Yes. Our midwives have recently attended this group and we are happy to attend future sessions too.

Interventions

RUH's self-published birth intervention rates are very high compared to other trusts. Is there a reason for this and is there an action plan to reduce this?

Our birth intervention rates are in-line with other Trusts. We would only intervene when there is a concern for the safety of the mother/birthing person and/or baby.

With community and homebirth closed you must be receiving many more low risk birthers into hospital - yet intervention rates are still high for April. Do these rates remain consistent with your previous statistics despite the increase in low risk births?

Our birth intervention rates are in-line with other Trusts. On average there is one community birth every 24 hours which will now be birthing in the RUH - these numbers are too small statistically to show a difference.



Doctors would not ‘just pop in’ at a homebirth – what reassurance can you give those planning a home birth that this will not happen because they are in a hospital?

If labour is progressing well and both mother/birthing person and baby are safe, there is no reason that there would be a visit from a doctor, unless invited by a midwife.

Other

What if labour happens very quickly and there is no time to get to Bath RUH?

We know that some babies are born very quickly and if this happens please dial 999 for an ambulance. You can also call the community birthing unit to see if a midwife is available to come and support you or to attend after the birth but we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

In future correspondence will you make it clear that the trust acknowledges the evidence supporting the advantages of planned homebirth?

We understand the advantages, if you have a low risk pregnancy, of having a community birth. We really do want to support this but safety is our priority and we cannot support homebirths at the moment due to our staffing situation.

Will you be keeping a record of all requests for home births and MLU provision during these closures and making that record public?

We do keep a record of this however we would have to check with our Information Governance Team about the possibility of sharing this without breaching confidentiality.

Could partners be given food at meal times if they have forgotten to bring enough?

Meals are provided for mothers and birthing people at Bath Birthing Centre but not partners. However, there are shops and cafes on the hospital site.