

Health & Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee

**Thursday, 18 April 2024 at 6.30 p.m.
Committee Room - Tower Hamlets Town Hall,
160 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1BJ**

Supplemental Agenda

4.2 Maternity Services in Tower Hamlets (Pages 3 - 10)

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Maternity update

Page 3 Tower Hamlets Health and Adults Scrutiny
Committee

April 2024



Agenda Item 4.2



Background

- North east London has the **highest** birth rate in the UK
- The Royal London Hospital is London's leading maternity hospital and we care for **over 5,000 women** and babies a year.
- We offer three different birthing options:
 - Labour Ward, obstetrician led – 82 births per week
 - Lotus Birth Centre, midwife led - 9 births per week
 - Home Birth - 0.75 births per week
- We also provide specialist services to improve health and care for mothers and their babies including:
 - **Maternal medicine unit** offering care for women with medical conditions: renal, hypertension, maternal cardiac, neurology
 - **Fetal medicine unit** offers scans for congenital or genetic conditions and complex pregnancies
 - **Fetal echocardiography clinic** offers scans for heart conditions
 - **Maternal fetal assessment unit** offers support for pregnancy problems which require follow up
 - **Diabetes clinic** supporting management of diabetes in pregnancy
- As part of NHS England's three-year delivery plan for maternity services across the country, we have been working with across the north east London system to make care safer, more personalised and more equitable.



Improving patient experience and equity of care

- We are committed to the inclusive voice and experiences of all women.
- **Access to care:** we have digitised our referral process, so expectant mothers can fill in a short online form to self-refer to our maternity services. This form can be translated in over 100 languages.
- **Working with community partners:** our Patient Experience Midwife joined us in September 2023. Since then her main priority has been building relationships and working closely with community partners including our Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP), Women's Inclusive Team, Praxis and Sister's Circle.
- We hold **monthly community antenatal education classes**, with Bengali and Somali interpreters at each session. Patients can join in person or virtually. Topics include: learning about C-sections, diabetes - where women were provided with a recipe book to support them, and birth planning - from how to prepare for appointments, to birthing options and pain relief.
- These forums invite pregnant women into a peer-led group to discuss common pregnancy concerns, questions and queries in a safe space with a midwife from the same background as them.
- We also run a special **high-risk antenatal** class with a maternal medicine midwife. As part of this session we provide information for women on how they can raise concerns when they feel they are being discriminated against or about their care.
- We have a **Health Inequalities Task Force** with a particular focus on equity, in line with MBBRACE and Donna Ockenden's findings.
- **Language support:** Our Labour and Maternity triage units have designated phones for translation services. We are currently trialling a new digital tool called Card-Medic to assist in translation. Staff are also encouraged to use the in-house advocacy service for Bengali-speaking women.



[Link to book our education classes](#)

Access to maternity services for Somali women

- East London has one of the **largest and fastest growing Somali populations** in Europe. However language, cultural barriers and discrimination mean that Somali people's access to and experience with maternity care can often be negative.
- This cohort are a **high-risk group** in terms of their maternity outcomes, and the 2021 MBRRACE report says Black women are still four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth.
- Thanks to funding from Barts Charity, we welcomed a Somali-speaking **Community Engagement Officer** to engage with Somali women and gain a deeper understanding of their needs.
- Working with the Women's Inclusive Team (WIT) we held **bi-weekly maternity drop in sessions** for Somali women. Community members said they felt **more welcome** in the healthcare system, and they had greater awareness of what services were available to them.
- Our staff said they have **improved their communication skills** and understanding of working with people from other cultures.
- We are currently working to expand this service further across East London.

Within the first year:



More than **100** Somali women engaged with the team



10 health awareness events were delivered



25 women accessed antenatal care and support through maternity drop-in sessions, after which **10** said they engaged with hospital maternity services directly after sessions



60 women attended breast cancer awareness sessions, after which **two** went to their first ever breast cancer screening appointment

"We don't normally get the chance to speak to a midwife at a community centre we consider home. I've never seen a service that offers translation and healthcare advice at a local community"

"I wish this existed when I was pregnant with my first son, I was so overwhelmed and in our community we are expected to just get on with things and see daily struggles as a blessing from God. A real blessing from God is walking down the road and having direct access to a midwife you can ask questions to and learn from, with a cup of tea!"

"Rachel listened to me talk for hours and validated my feelings, you don't understand the wonders that did for me"



Staffing levels, professional development and recognition

- There is currently a national shortage of midwives and nurses in the NHS, which has impacted the services we provide.
- Despite this challenge, we have welcomed **38 new midwives** in the last four months and are working to ensure they are well supported.
- We hold regular **development and staff training** days for midwives and nurses across all our hospitals.
- One example of how we support our staff is Stella Simon-Brown, a midwife at our hospital for over 20 years, who was awarded a **national silver award** by the Chief Midwifery Officer for England. Stella started her career at Barts Health NHS Trust as a domestic worker, then moved on to a healthcare assistant role, and nurse before completing training to become a qualified midwife in 2005.
- We also have six **professional midwife associates (PMAs)**, with two more in training.
- The role of a PMA is to support and guide midwives so that they can deliver consistent, high quality, safe maternity care and also to support the women and families who journey through the maternity unit. By listening to women and supporting the choices that they make, PMAs ensure that the maternity care provided is responsive and caters to their needs.



We have listened to our communities and their experiences and have a detailed improvement plan



We want to ensure we...

- understand, and adapt our practice, to meet the cultural and social needs of all the pregnant women we care for.
- communicate with pregnant women and their families in a way that is accessible, transparent and kind.
- develop a culture of trauma informed care to better inform our practice and provide more positive experiences for pregnant women and staff.
- support the health and wellbeing of our staff by providing the resources and tools they need to care for their pregnant women.

To view the full strategy and action plan:
[full report](#)
[summary report](#)

Page 8

Our communities

One of the most diverse populations in the country:



2.02 million people live in north east London



30,000 births per year, the highest birth rate in the UK



30% of our population are born outside of the UK



53% identify as Black, Asian or from an ethnic minority



5 of our boroughs are in the 20 most deprived in England

Talking to our communities

By working with Healthwatch and Maternity Mates we spoke to over 1000 people in our communities about maternity experiences:



952 survey responses



87 in-depth interviews



76 advocate survey responses



5 focus groups

What our communities said

From all the rich insight collected, it was evident that some difficult experiences and poor outcomes could have been different with more accessible information, stronger communication, greater cultural awareness and a trauma informed approach. These form the basis of the key themes identified:

Engagement – listening to pregnant women and understanding their needs

Information sharing and trust – providing accessible information for all, with staff having greater awareness of cultural differences

Consent and co-production – pregnant women to be at the centre of decision making and involved in their care

Discrimination – ethnic minorities, some religious communities and young parents feel they face discrimination when using services

Life-saving care excellence – positive feedback regarding lifesaving care and clinical excellence

Pandemic impact and recovery – trauma for both staff and pregnant women

Supporting our communities

From the key themes, an action plan was developed as a commitment to make improvements and positive change, these are focused around:

Trauma informed care
Community signposting
Gathering feedback
Co-production
Tangible information
Digital information
Maternity helpline
Communication support for staff

Actions may change over time as further insight and experience is learnt, but this is the start of improving maternity care that is high quality, safe, equitable and personalised for all.

Delivery of these actions will be a collaborative approach between our maternity units, voluntary and community organisations and our communities.

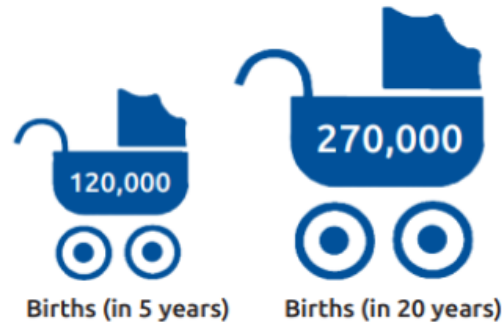
Improving patient outcomes

- **Patient flow and triage:** because of our fast-growing population, we are an incredibly busy unit and experience challenges around capacity and flow i.e. women who are waiting to be seen, assessed or induced.
- Instead of going to A&E we see patients directly in the maternity triage unit when they arrive, ensuring that patients get the help they need as quickly as possible.
- We are in the early phases of making improvements to the facilities in this unit, and have increased the staffing levels.
- **Maternal mental health:** we have dedicated teams to support mothers with their mental health and work across the NEL system to ensure they get the help they need.

Page 9

We have the **highest** birth rate in the UK...

with population expected to grow by 120,000 in the next five years and by 270,000 in the next 20 years. This is equivalent to adding another place the size of Waltham Forest, Havering or Hackney.



Questions?

- We are happy to host a visit for you to meet some of our families and staff in maternity
- We can also share details of upcoming community engagement events should you wish to attend or share among your networks

