



Access to Public Information Request

Date of receipt: 01 February 2022

Date of response: 02 March 2022

Access to Public Information request regarding the provision of home births in Guernsey

Request:

I am requesting your department provide more precise data and details of the midwife staffing shortages affecting homebirths and used to justify the cancellation of homebirths and to set out how exactly the staffing shortages are affecting homebirth provision, given the very small number of homebirths per population in Guernsey.

Response provided by The Committee *for* Health & Social Care:

The Committee *for* Health & Social Care is responsible for ensuring that the Maternity Service is adequately staffed so that it can provide safe, high-quality care to all women throughout their pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period, and endeavours to meet the expectations of women in relation to their pregnancy and birthing experience.

While it recognises that some women may wish to give birth at home, and echoes the Maternity Team's desire to be able to provide a home birth service locally, the Committee is mindful to note that the majority of women choose to give birth in hospital and is therefore duty-bound to ensure the core services on Loveridge Ward are maintained at all times. The Committee must carefully balance the desire of women to choose their preferred place of birth against the rights of all women to receive a safe level of maternity care.

The Royal College of Midwives recommends that midwifery establishment is calculated using a national tool developed by Birthrate Plus, which considers the time required to provide care across the childbirth spectrum, as well as allowances for time spent away from the clinical area due to annual leave, sickness, training and supervision. Using this tool, it has been determined that to meet the safety and care requirements for women and babies admitted to Loveridge Ward, the following dedicated midwifery resource is required:

Clinical shift	Midwifery establishment
Loveridge Ward – day shift	1 Clinical Lead Midwife (Band 7) 4 Midwives (Band 6)
Loveridge Ward – night shift	1 Clinical Lead Midwife (Band 7) 3 Midwives (Band 6) 1 Midwife on-call (Band 6)

NHS Trusts in England and Wales may be able to share staff or call upon neighbouring hospitals to assist in resourcing home births but unfortunately this option is not available locally due to Guernsey's health care infrastructure and as such, the Midwives working on Loveridge Ward cannot be sent to attend a woman labouring at home without compromising the safety of the women and babies on the ward.

Subsequently, home birth provision relies upon a demanding on-call commitment from Community Midwives on top of their contracted hours. To facilitate a single birth at home, two of five Community Midwives are required to be on-call for 24 hours a day, for up to 5 weeks at a time. This is difficult for a small team to accommodate because although some of this time will be met during usual working hours, the large part of it will not and can inevitably result in staff not having adequate time off for long periods and, if called to attend a birth at home, potentially working for very long hours without a break. It is therefore regretful that Health & Social Care is not able to facilitate homebirths safely, or without causing disruption to the antenatal and postnatal care of other women.

The Maternity Team continues to work hard to develop and improve services that are personal and based on the needs and wishes of women and their families in the Bailiwick. Given that the Maternity Team is passionate about being able to offer choice in birthing environments, expectant mothers should be reassured that midwifery-led care is available on Loveridge Ward and that every effort will be made to meet their wishes in the hospital environment. Considerable effort has been made in recent years to improve the delivery suite area on Loveridge Ward so that it feels more homely; Delivery rooms have been refurbished and birthing pools are available. Expectant parents are encouraged to bring in items from home to help make their labour and birth feel more familiar and arrangements are in place for these items to be delivered to the ward in advance. New parents and babies are also offered swift discharge from Loveridge Ward, as far as possible, to add to the home from home environment that has been created.

02 March 2022