

Brent PCT PPI Forum response to the public consultation on the future of the Brent Birth Centre – February 2008

1. Do you have any options which you feel we should consider?

Ideally, Brent PCT Forum members would prefer the option of keeping Brent Birth Centre open with the addition of extended obstetric services to make the Centre responsive to need and viable for the future. The Forum seeks assurance that full consideration has been given as to how Brent Birth Centre can be run cost effectively and provide a valuable resource to a greater number of local women. Feedback from previous users of the Birth Centre suggests that improvements can be made to staff-patient communication and better support patients – see point 4 below.

2. If you had to choose a preferred option from this list, what would it be, and why?

It has been made clear to the Forum that the current services at Brent Birthing Centre are not viable. Considering the practicality of the current position Brent PCT PPI Forum members would support Option 4, with in-patient maternity care transferred from Brent Birthing Centre to Northwick Park Hospital's maternity unit, where a dedicated midwifery-led unit would be created.

We feel that it is important for Brent residents that ante-natal services are provided at Central Middlesex Hospital, but not so important that services are provided within Brent Birthing Centre. We understand that the financial impact of letting out the Birth Centre building will be significantly different if the building available to let empty. The Forum recommends that future options for the building take full account of rising birth rates and consequent future demand for maternity services in Brent.

3. If we were to go ahead with option four what do you think would be the important issues for us to take into account?

(i) High risk pregnancies - We understand that up to 50% pregnancies in Brent are assessed as 'high risk'. With a higher than average number of high-risk births in Brent, the Forum supports initiatives to promote better take up of ante-natal care to identify risks at an early stage, particularly in Brent's black and minority ethnic communities. Outreach and engagement with particular communities at risk would be beneficial. Ante-natal services at CMH must be adequately staffed and trained to respond to the needs of high risk pregnancies.

(ii) Information and publicity - Brent PCT and NWLH Trust should clarify what ante-natal services will be provided at Central Middlesex Hospital and where these will be located, as well as setting out the alternatives. Information and sign-posting should be clearly displayed. Better information on interpreting services should be made available to staff and patients.

(iii) *Patients' choice* - The Forum was informed that a survey is being carried out as to why women and their partners did not choose Brent Birth Centre as an option. At a recent forum meeting, the Forum queried the degree to which the high-profile 'special measures' at Northwick Park Hospital had influenced people's decision making. We were reassured by NWLHT that services at NPH have been turned round and that maternity services are now well used. The Forum accepts that patients in general are becoming more 'risk averse' and that, consequently, many women prefer to have emergency obstetrics available on same site when they choose to give birth in a birth centre.

(iv) *Equalities Impact* – the Forum notes the information on the number of births at Brent Birth centre by registered postcode in 2006/07 and the ethnicity figures for Brent from the 2001 Census. It would be helpful to have the number of births at Brent Birth Centre by ethnic group, so that the potential impact of proposals on different groups in the community can be assessed. The Forum has concerns about the impact on underprivileged and low paid women in South Brent. A survey of public transport routes to different maternity services for Brent residents would be helpful.

(v) *Standards of care* - Brent PCT PPI Forum support patient choice and would like to hear more about patient feedback on the range of maternity options available to women in Brent, including the Birth Centre. We are pleased to hear that maternity services at Northwick Park Hospital have improved and that public confidence in the service has returned. We would like to hear more about women's experiences at Brent Birth Centre and ways in which the service can be improved and take-up increased.

4. If you are a current or previous user of the Brent Birth Centre what do you think works well and what do you think we could improve on?

Feedback from patients - Forum members heard from some women about their experiences at Brent Birth Centre, including complaints about poor attention from staff, especially during the night. Good communication between staff and patients is essential. The Forum seeks reassurance that Brent PCT and NWLH Trust have learned from patient experiences at Brent Birth centre so as to improve patient satisfaction and increase take up of the service. Women's positive or negative experiences of Brent Birth Centre obviously affects whether they would go there again or recommend it to other expectant women.

5. Other comments

London-wide strategy - the PPI Forum understands that Barnet's Birth Centre at Edgware Community Hospital has also seen a decline in demand whilst St Mary's Paddington is planning to open a birth centre (which may be a future option for Brent women). The Forum seeks assurance that this is not a 'piecemeal' approach to the re-organisation of local health services and that future options for Brent Birth Centre are in keeping with local and London-wide strategy and demand for services.

Mansukh Raichura, Forum Chair, on behalf of Brent PCT PPI Forum

February 2008