



## Department of Health & Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

POC\_1276589

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP,  
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee  
Professor Dame Jane Dacre  
Chair, Independent Expert Panel, Health and Social Care Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

14 December 2020

Dear Jeremy and Jane,

### **Government commitments on maternity services to support the work of the Independent Expert Panel**

Thank you for your letter dated 24 November in regard to the newly established Independent Expert Panel.

I was delighted to hear that core members of the panel have now been appointed and look forward to engaging with this new method of evaluation to provide a fair and transparent assessment of Government healthcare policy.

Given the critical importance of maternity services to pregnant women, new mothers and their partners and supporters, and the challenges in this area, I was pleased to hear that the panel's first investigation will focus on maternity.

As requested, please see below a list of the Government's commitments regarding maternity services over the last five years:

- **The National Maternity Safety Ambition<sup>1</sup>** – Launched in 2015 and revised in 2017, The National Maternity Safety Ambition aims to:
  - halve the rate of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth by 2025, and to achieve a 20% reduction in these rates by 2020.
  - reduce the pre-term birth rate from 8% to 6% by 2025.
- **Safer Maternity Care - Next steps towards the national maternity ambition<sup>2</sup>** – Published in October 2016, this document sets out the vision and action plan to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-ambition-to-halve-rate-of-stillbirths-and-infant-deaths>

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/560491/Safer\\_Maternity\\_Care\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/560491/Safer_Maternity_Care_action_plan.pdf)

help realise the National Maternity Safety Ambition, structured around five key drivers for delivering safer maternity care (See Annex A).

- **Safer Maternity Care, The National Maternity Safety Strategy - Progress and Next Steps**<sup>3</sup> – Published in November 2017, this document reports on progress with implementation of the Safer Maternity Care Action Plan and sets out a number of additional steps to make sure that we are doing all we can to prevent serious incidents in maternity services (See Annex B).
- **Workforce Announcement**<sup>4</sup> – In a written statement to Parliament on 27 March 2018, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced steps towards ensuring that the majority of women will receive care from the same small team of midwives throughout their pregnancy, labour and birth by 2021, starting with 20% of women benefitting from a ‘continuity of carer’ model by March 2019. To support this, the Department set out plans to train more than 3,000 extra midwives over four years, starting with 650 more midwives in training from September 2019, and planned increases of 1,000 in the subsequent years as capacity increases. Other parts of the announcement included professionalising the Maternity Support Worker role by developing a nationally defined role and national competency frameworks for Maternity Support Workers together with a voluntary accreditation register; and identifying better and clearer pathways for staff to progress and to develop new training routes to become a registered midwife.
- **The NHS Long Term Plan**<sup>5</sup> – Published in January 2019, the NHS Long Term Plan sets out new measures to improve safety, quality and continuity of care in maternity services (See Annex C).

Please do get in touch if any further information is needed to help the panel inform its future work. My officials will continue to liaise with the Health and Social Care Secretariat to understand more about the new evaluation process and provide the information necessary to allow an objective and beneficial evaluation.

Yours ever,



**MATT HANCOCK**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safer-maternity-care-progress-and-next-steps>

<sup>4</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2018-03-27/HCWS588>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-plan/>

## Annex A

### Safer Maternity Care Next steps towards the national maternity ambition (October 2016)

| Drivers for improvement                    | Commitments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Focus on leadership</b>                 | Board level Maternity Champion appointed. Target date: January 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                            | Maternity Safety Champion appointed in Maternity Clinical Networks. Target date: February 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                            | Trusts will have one obstetrician and one midwife jointly responsible for championing maternity safety in their organisation. Target date: February 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                            | Bespoke Maternity Safety Improvement Plan agreed and made public. Target date: January 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Focus on learning and best practice</b> | Informed by the independent evaluation, NHS England will publish the final version of the Saving Babies' Lives care bundle for use by maternity commissioners and providers by April 2018.                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                            | A package of publications and resources will be available for maternity and neonatal teams to support them to provide safer care and avoid unnecessary separation of mother and baby. Target date: January 2017.                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Focus on teams</b>                      | Learning and development plan in place for entire multi-disciplinary team. Target date: January 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                                            | The maternity team has attended maternity safety training, with funding from the Maternity Safety Training Fund. Target date: March 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Focus on data</b>                       | Trust is reporting to Maternity Services Dataset and other key data sets such as MBRRACE-UK, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' Each Baby Counts programme, the National Neonatal Dataset and the new National Maternity and Perinatal Audit. Target date: September 2018 although trusts should prioritise early implementation wherever possible. |
|                                            | Maternity and neonatal teams are using the Standardised Perinatal Mortality Review Tool to review and share learning from every stillbirth and neonatal death, when it is available.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                            | Maternity team is using national indicators dashboard to track their outcomes over time and benchmark against other organisations in their local maternity system and across the region. Target date: March 2018.                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Focus on innovation</b>                 | The maternity team will be taking part in the new national Maternal and Neonatal Health Quality Improvement Programme in their region. Target date: February 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                            | Individual or team may have applied for and used funding from the Maternity Safety Innovation Fund to develop an innovative idea. Target date: March 2017.                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## Annex B

### Safer Maternity Care, The National Maternity Safety Strategy - Progress and Next Steps (November 2017)

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Drivers for improvement</b>             | <b>New Commitments building on Safer Maternity Care Next steps towards the national maternity ambition (October 2016)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Focus on leadership</b>                 | To support the named national, regional and local Maternity Safety Champions, <b>a central platform to be developed within the NHS Improvement Hub to foster a cohesive community of Maternity Safety Champions, other system leaders and experts to help spread learning and best practice across the system – from early 2018.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Focus on learning and best practice</b> | <p>Towards a Smoke-free Generation - <b>A Tobacco Control Plan for England (July 2017)</b> set out an aim to reduce the prevalence of smoking in pregnancy from 10.7% to 6% or less by 2022.</p> <p><b>To support local providers and commissioners to meet this aim and to assist with implementation of Saving Babies Lives, the Government is providing funding to train midwives to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to give very brief advice to women during antenatal appointments and upskilling practitioners (e.g. maternity support workers) to deliver evidence based smoking cessation interventions.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Focus on teams</b>                      | With a view to improving maternal outcomes, NHS England has been working with the Women's Health Clinical Reference Group and others to develop a plan to introduce a network of maternal medicine specialists across the country to care for pregnant women with significant health conditions. <b>The Department of Health will provide funding over three years to train 12 consultant physicians as 'Obstetric Physicians' to be able to establish networked maternal medicine across England.</b> The Obstetric Physician together with an Obstetrician trained as a Sub-Specialist in Maternal Medicine will provide expert care for pregnant women with complex medical problems. They will also provide region-wide leadership and expertise across the whole network to help ensure there is early recognition of problems and access to best practice care. |
| <b>Focus on data</b>                       | The Department of Health is committed to improving the standards and quality of investigations and learning from serious incidents leading to stillbirth, early neonatal death or serious brain injury in term babies and all maternal deaths from direct or indirect causes related to pregnancy. <b>The new Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB) will be funded to develop investigation standards and conduct independent investigations into all cases that meet the criteria for notification from the RCOG's Each Baby Counts Programme and all maternal deaths from direct or indirect causes related to pregnancy. NHSE, working with NHS Improvement, the Department of Health and HSIB will publish, by Quarter 2 2018, information and guidance on the</b>                                                                                        |

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|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | <b>standards for maternity investigations to deliver the Morecambe Bay and Better Births recommendations.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Focus on Innovation</b>             | <b>The Department of Health will provide additional funding over the next three years to provide support for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal Colleges of Midwives to launch 'Each Baby Counts Learn and Support' - a programme of work to enable greater collaboration between the Royal Colleges and the NHS via the Maternal and Neonatal Health Safety Collaborative - this aims to align quality and safety improvement, multi-professional learning and clinical leadership into a consistent and sustainable safety strategy across the system.</b>                                                                               |
| <b>Accelerating the pace of change</b> | <b>To encourage local teams to take further steps to improve safety, NHS Resolution will launch a new incentive scheme in 2018.</b> The scheme will provide a discount on Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts (CNST) maternity premia to incentivise local services for taking steps to improve the delivery of best practices linked to safety in maternity and neonatal services. NHS Resolution has built provision for an incentive fund into its pricing for 2018/19. By meeting the 10 criteria, Trusts are likely to deliver safer maternity services and may be expected to have fewer cases of brain injuries or other harm which can lead to negligence claims. |

## **Annex C**

### **The NHS Long Term Plan (January 2019)**

New maternity commitments set out in The NHS Long Term plan:

#### **Reducing outcome inequalities**

- In maternity services, we will implement an enhanced and targeted continuity of carer model to help improve outcomes for the most vulnerable mothers and babies. By 2024, 75% of women from BAME communities and a similar percentage of women from the most deprived groups will receive continuity of care from their midwife throughout pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period.
- Women from the most deprived communities are 12 times more likely to smoke during pregnancy than women from more affluent areas. In addition to the enhanced midwife model, we will offer all women who smoke during their pregnancy, specialist smoking cessation support to help them quit.

#### **The Maternity Safety Ambition**

- Roll out the Saving Babies Lives Care Bundle across every maternity unit in England by 2019. Publish an expansion of the SBLCB in 2019 which includes a focus on preventing pre-term birth.
- Encourage development of specialist pre-term birth clinics across England.

#### **Data**

- Maternity digital care records are being offered to 20,000 eligible women in 20 accelerator sites across England, rising to 100,000 by the end of 2019/20. We will continue to expand the roll-out of maternity digital care records. By 2023/24, all women will be able to access their maternity notes and information through their smart phones or other devices.

#### **Postnatal**

- We will improve access to postnatal physiotherapy to support women who need it to recover from birth. We will ensure that women have access to multidisciplinary pelvic health clinics and pathways across England via referral.

#### **Infant feeding**

- All maternity services that do not deliver an accredited, evidence-based infant feeding programme, such as the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, will begin the accreditation process in 2019/20.

#### **Neonatal Critical Care**

- We will redesign and expand neonatal critical care services to improve the safety and effectiveness of services and experience of families. In particular, we will address the shortage of neonatal capacity through the introduction of more Neonatal Intensive Care Cots where the Neonatal Critical Care Review has identified under capacity.
- We will improve triage within expert maternity and neonatal centres so that the right level of care is available to babies as close to the family home as possible.

- We will develop our expert neonatal nursing workforce. This will mean extra neonatal nurses and expanded roles for some allied health professionals to support neonatal nurses.
- We will enhance the experience of families during the worrying period of neonatal critical care. From 2021/22, care coordinators will work with families within each of the clinical neonatal networks across England to support families to become more involved in the care of their baby and invest in improved parental accommodation.