

HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 September 2023

Title: Barking Community Birth Centre – changes to services Aug 2023	
Report of the Newham Hospital, Barts Health NHS Trust	
Open Report / Open Report with Exempt Appendix / Fully Exempt Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Directors: Simon Ashton, Chief Executive	
Summary	
<p>This is an update on the changes to service provision at Barking Community Birth Centre (BCBC) from the period of 1 June 2023.</p> <p>Due to staffing related issues and operational pressures, the executive team at Newham Hospital made the decision to suspend intrapartum care (giving birth in the centre) from 1 June 2023, with antenatal and post-natal appointments continuing as usual at BCBC. Patients who had planned to have their birth at BCBC after this date have been contacted and alternative arrangements have been made.</p> <p>During this period of closure, we have been developing an action plan for next steps for the service, which we are happy to share with the Committee once complete.</p> <p>Women and birthing people in Barking still have multiple options for where they can give birth, including our Alongside service and in their own home.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
<p>The Health Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:</p> <p>(i) Note this briefing</p>	

1. Background and national context

- 1.1 The Barking Community Birth Centre (BCBC) is a stand-alone centre where women and birthing people are supported during antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care. It is staffed entirely by midwives and provides a relaxed home-like environment for pregnant women and birthing peoples, assessed as low risk to birth there. It is operated by Newham Hospital, as part of Barts Health NHS Trust. In December 2022 the [centre celebrated 10 years](#) since first opening its doors.
- 1.2 The centre welcomes and cares for people from across the London boroughs of Newham, Barking, Havering, Redbridge and other surrounding boroughs, including Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Waltham Forest. We also welcome women and birthing people from other parts of London and Essex to come and give birth at the BCBC.

- 1.3 The BCBC delivers 120 babies annually (amounting to 2 per week) compared with approximately 5,400 per year at Newham hospital. The complexity of pregnancies of women and birthing people in East London means that the BCBC is not an appropriate setting for the vast majority of pregnancies that we manage, hence the low number of people birthing there.
- 1.4 There are only three community / stand-alone birthing centres / units in London, including the BCBC and Barkantine Birth Centre, also run by Barts Health NHS Trust. There is currently a national review of these community / stand-alone birthing centres, and the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) within North East London is also currently undertaking a review of births location, demand and capacity.

2. Temporary changes to services

- 2.1 In June 2023, the executive team made the decision to temporarily close the BCBC for intrapartum care (giving birth in the centre). The centre remains open to antenatal and postnatal appointments.
- 2.2 The decision was made due to operational pressures and staffing-related issues. It's important to note that there is a national midwifery shortage, meaning the availability of staff is challenging and we, like others across London and the UK, rely on agency staff to run all of our midwifery services, including those at the BCBC.
- 2.3 The decision was also made as a routine review of our risk assessment processes and development of personalised birthing plans highlighted that work needs to be done to ensure they are in line with best practice.
- 2.4 Anyone who had planned to give birth at the centre has been contacted and recommended to attend our midwifery run unit, The Birth Centre, at Newham Hospital where services continue to run as normal. Women and birthing people in Barking still have multiple options of where they can give birth, including our Alongside service and in their own home.
- 2.5 As of 4 September 2023, intrapartum care at the BCBC remains suspended while we continue to resolve the issues that require resolution to safely resume the service.
- 2.6 During this period of closure, we have been developing an action plan for next steps for the service, which we are happy to share with the Committee once complete.