

# IN THIS TOGETHER

26 February 2018

Dear Sue

## **Maternity Matters: Discovering experiences of maternity services in Southampton, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth**

In response to the recent Wessex Voices report which looked at the experiences of women and their birthing partners accessing maternity services within the Southampton, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth local maternity system (SHIP LMS), the LMS Team would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the families who took part in this survey. Their views are very important to us and give us a clear insight of how women and their families feel about their maternity care. We would like to thank Wessex Voices for recognising positive responses as well as areas of concern as this will help us celebrate and build on our successes and to work harder to make improvements elsewhere. This engagement work provides us with an exciting opportunity to work together to develop our future maternity services across the region to ensure they are truly responsive to the needs of women and their families and that they are able to continue to meet these needs.

There is already a considerable amount of work underway to improve the experiences of women and their families accessing care within the SHIP LMS and this positive reports reassures us that we are concentrating on the areas that matter to women and highlights a couple of areas that would benefit from further exploration with women to understand how we can improve services, these are outlined below alongside our responses to the recommendations made in the report:

### **Make time - provide clear and easy access to information and support at all times**

We recognise that women value the support given by midwives and other staff during their pregnancy, birth and postnatal care. We were pleased that most women felt they were given an opportunity to discuss what was important to them during their appointments. However, some women felt rushed or that staff were too busy to answer all their questions. We can feed the Maternity Matters feedback into the initiatives to improve women's experiences in this particular area.

Through the LMS, work is underway on improving information and this has been recognised as a key area as we develop personalisation and choice for women. We have just published a booklet giving more details on local choices and links to useful information, which will be available as part of an App. All professionals working with women will be encouraged to offer information in a number of ways so that women can access resources when they need them. This action is being undertaken through the maternity pioneer project which looks at how to improve women's experiences through personalisation and choice.

### **Consistency of midwives – ensure that women have access to a consistent service at times that suit them**

Research shows that continuity of care is vital in maternity services and is associated with positive outcomes such as reduced preterm birth and stillbirth as well as increased maternal satisfaction.

The SHIP LMS is committed to delivering continuity of care and a pilot is currently underway working with a group of women on how to develop the continuity of care model further. Once this pilot has been evaluated there will be a review on how we develop further. This work will be commence in the summer of 2018 and we intend to work with women to explore how we can provide continuity of carer. We will be in touch with those who provide their contacts via Maternity Matters about whether they would like to get involved in this piece of work.

### **Clear communication at referral – particularly for referrals related to raised BMI**

Having a constructive and comprehensive discussion with women at their booking appointment about their medical history is crucial to planning a safe and healthy pregnancy. Our expectation is that the rationale for any referrals and care plans should be discussed with women providing them with an opportunity to participate equally in decisions about their care. This clearly was not every woman's experience so we will continue to share the Maternity Matters feedback to improve future training and communications with pregnant women.

With regards to raised BMI, in particular, we are engaged with a number of strategies to improve future health outcomes in line with the *NHS Five Year Forward View*. These include positive 'healthy conversations' and motivational interviewing techniques, as well as links with local weight management services.

### **More information at discharge – provide appropriate information after birth**

Within the SHIP LMS we have recognised that women have different information needs and that giving out a postnatal discharge pack is not always helpful. We know many women access information on the internet first prior to seeking help from the maternity services. With this in mind we now direct families towards the *Wessex Healthier Together* website to provide information about newborn and child health, as well as locally relevant contact information and when to seek advice. There is a feedback option on this website so please do take a look and let us know what you think.

Across the SHIP LMS we are also encouraging women to download the *Baby Buddy App* which provides daily personalised information as well as access to videos and clips to help guide them through their pregnancy and birth. Of course, apps and websites cannot replace face-to-face contact with a health professional and we are working on ensuring women have equal access to consistent postnatal care pathways across the SHIP LMS. However we are particularly careful to only recommend Apps that have involved pregnant women and parents in their development and have been grateful to women across Hampshire who have helped us develop our local 'Birthplace' app which is now being taken up by other areas in the UK.

### **Manage expectations – ensure all communication is open and transparent, particularly when discussing birth plans and options**

Through the work of the SHIP LMS we have rolled out the *MyBirthplace App* which gives women information about their birth place options within the region. This is designed to enhance the conversations women have with their midwife about where to give birth. Women are then able to consider which setting may be most appropriate for their needs facilitating more of an informed decision.

However, we recognise that unit closures and staffing issues impacted the experience of some of the respondents to the survey. We are committed to working collaboratively within the LMS to build a confident and resilient workforce and to ensure sustainability within the system. We will continue to raise awareness of the Maternity Matters report findings with key groups of maternity staff, such as the new Professional Midwifery Advocate (PMA) and Consultant midwives, as this feedback will continue to enhance their practice.

### **Improve diagnosis and treatment of tongue-tie – provide further training for staff in diagnosis and treatment**

All of our local hospitals have a treatment pathway for tongue tie, where this is thought to be relevant to a baby's difficulty with feeding. The feedback from parents in this report highlights we need to explore local variation in the way the service is provided within the LMS and consider ways of working collaboratively to ensure consistent training for staff and reduce delays in access to treatment we aim to have this work completed by July this year.

### **Free antenatal classes for all – ensure everyone who would like to access antenatal classes has the opportunity to do so**

Within the SHIP LMS we will consider ways to make booking easier to ensure those who wish to attend face-to-face classes do so as free antenatal classes should be available across the SHIP LMS. We need to ensure midwives are signposting women appropriately at their first midwifery appointment.

Where women do not wish to attend a class or may just want a quick refresher midwives are also encouraging women to download the *Baby Buddy App* which has personalised information to suit each stage of a woman's pregnancy journey.

### **Improve breastfeeding support – provide specialist support at easy to access locations across the region**

We recognise that breastfeeding is associated with positive health outcomes for mothers and babies and that it is vital that new parents receive the best support and advice available. In the initial postnatal period, breastfeeding support is provided to women across the SHIP LMS by midwives and specially trained maternity support workers in the hospital and during subsequent postnatal contacts at home or in community hubs.

We will have further dialogue with our health visiting colleagues and voluntary organisations to increase access and improve awareness of breastfeeding support services.

### **Improve communication – use consistent and easy to understand terminology**

We appreciate women may have different communication needs. Our staff are currently having some extra training to ensure individual needs and circumstances are taken into consideration and information is explained clearly in a way that is easily understood. As well as videos and pictures, the *Baby Buddy App* contains written and spoken information that can be easily understood by all. In addition, the *Wessex Healthier Together* website provides the option to select information in over 100 different languages.

We recognise that improving communication is a key theme that has arisen from this report. We will ensure that we continue to ask woman to give feedback on what works well and what could be improved and to use this information to improve verbal communication and information that is shared on paper or using websites and apps.

Once again, we would like to thank Wessex Voices for taking the time to highlight areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement. We are delighted that so many women have offered to have further involvement with the SHIP LMS. We plan to keep the voice of women central to this work and will inform you of future opportunities to provide input through surveys, focus groups and other ways. We hope this response demonstrates our commitment to hearing women's feedback about how we can work together to improve experiences in our maternity services throughout the SHIP LMS.

Kind regards



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