

Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Newham Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership Quarter 2 Report July to September 2024

Executive Summary

The Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) is a collaborative team of service users, midwives, nurses, doctors, and commissioners, working together to review and shape local maternity care across Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, and Newham. MNVP is committed to listening to the experiences and perspectives of service users from diverse communities, amplifying these voices, and co-producing with the Barts NHS Trust to improve maternity and neonatal services across all three boroughs, ultimately addressing health inequalities.

From the last quarter report (April to June 2024), positive feedback across the three boroughs highlighted supportive and skilled staff, as well as effective breastfeeding support. However, some common negative feedback across the three boroughs identified in the last quarter included long waiting times in triage and inadequate postnatal care support at the post-natal ward. In this quarter, positive experiences with the attitude and treatment of health staff remain consistent, along with adequate and informative breastfeeding support. However, the issues of waiting times in both triage and induction rooms, as well as inadequate postnatal care support, continue to recur.

This report covers the work undertaken by MNVP Chairs across all three boroughs during Quarter Two (July to September 2024). The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the feedback gathered, highlight significant trends, describe collaboration with Patient Experience Midwives, and outline key focus areas for the next quarter. It also showcases the support for local Chairs, emphasises the positive working relationship with Barts Health, and underlines the active role of service users in service development.

The summary of service user feedback captured in this report has been obtained through various methods, including visits to children centres and community centres, collaboration with health clinics and breastfeeding teams, hospital-based initiatives such as "Walk the Patch" and "15-Steps" assessments, and digital engagement via social media platforms.

Summary of Feedback - London Borough of Newham

Service users' feedback has been collected by the Newham MNVP Chairs through Walk the Patch at Newham University Hospital (24th July, 20th August, and 25th September), outreach (coffee morning/coffee evening) at the following locations: Sheringham Nursery and Children's Centre on 30th August, and Oliver Thomas's Children Centre on 27th September, "15 Steps for Maternity" surveys alongside the Patient Experience Midwife team on 16th August and 13th September 2024, and a case study. The total number of service users included in this report is 32, summarised below:

Positive Experiences:

1. **Compassionate and Caring Staff:** Twenty nine out of 32 service users praised the staff for being compassionate and caring. This was particularly noted across various stages of care, including antenatal appointments, labour, induction, and postnatal care.
2. **Breastfeeding Support:** thirty one out of 32 services users were satisfied with the breastfeeding support they received, both during their postnatal stay and in follow-up drop-in sessions. Many felt well-informed and supported in this area.
3. **Would Recommend Services:** Thirty one out of 32 of service users said they would recommend Newham University Hospital's maternity and neonatal services to their family and friends, showing a high level of satisfaction with the care provided.

Negative Experiences:

1. **Long Waiting Times:** Nineteen of services users reported long waiting times, especially in triage and outpatient clinics. One individual had to wait for eight hours for a bed despite being in a high-risk condition.
2. **Unskilled Staff and Dismissive Behaviour:** Three service users expressed concerns about staff attitude and communication. Issues included slow response times to service user's call or request, lack of empathy, and delays in recognising serious conditions, such as newborn jaundice.
3. **Ward Facilities:** Five service users raised issues with the ward facilities, particularly in the induction, labour, and postnatal ward. Complaints included unclean toilets, poor ventilation, and a lack of comfortable space for partners.
4. **Lack of Translator Services:** Two service users, who spoke Bengali and Urdu, reported difficulties in accessing translation services, which made communication with staff more challenging during their care.

5. **Antenatal Appointment Issues:** One service user mentioned receiving short notice about changes to their antenatal appointment schedule, pointing out the need for clearer communication regarding appointment management.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. **Support for Moms in Distress:** One service user mentioned that they hope the postnatal midwife team can be more understanding and compassionate towards moms whose babies are in the NICU and who are feeling anxious.
2. **Cut Down on Waiting Times:** It would be helpful to increase the bed capacity in triage ward and induction wards to reduce waiting times. Service users felt that they shouldn't be scheduled for induction if there isn't a room or bed available.

Summary of Feedback - London Borough of Waltham Forest

Service users' feedback has been collected by the Waltham Forest MNVP Chair through three "Walk the Patch" visits at Waltham Forest Hospital on 24th July, 20th August, and 18th September, as well as an outreach coffee morning held at the Waltham Forest Family Hub on 17th September 2024. The coffee morning was a joint session with the newborn health clinic and the breastfeeding team. Feedback from a total of 38 service users is summarised below:

Positive Experiences:

1. **Caring and Supportive Staff:** Many service users praised the staff for being caring, informative, and helpful, especially in the labour and recovery wards. Midwives were often described as attentive and patient, with special mention of a student midwife who provided exceptional support. Antenatal appointments were also noted for being well-organised and unrushed.
2. **Breastfeeding Support:** The majority of service users appreciated the breastfeeding support offered in the postnatal ward and through HENRY sessions, feeling well-assisted and encouraged during their breastfeeding journey.
3. **Pain Management Options:** Many service users felt that pain management was handled well, with options for different types of pain relief clearly presented and administered in a timely manner.

Negative Experiences:

- 1. Long Waiting Times:** Several users reported long waits for various services, including delays in induction, transfer to the antenatal ward, discharge after labour, and postponed elective caesareans, which caused stress and discomfort.
- 2. Inadequate Postnatal Care:** Some service users experienced inconsistent care in the postnatal ward, mentioning a lack of attention due to staff shortages. One service user reported being left in an unclean bed, leading to a formal complaint about her care.
- 3. Staff Attitude and Communication Issues:** A few service users encountered poor attitudes from certain staff, particularly in triage ward. Some users described staff as dismissive or rude, especially during high-stress situations such as blood draws.
- 4. Lack of Continuity in Care:** Several users felt continuity of care was lacking, with midwives sometimes unaware of patients' histories or notes, leaving them feeling neglected or misunderstood.
- 5. Poor Facilities in the Postnatal Ward:** Concerns were raised over the postnatal ward's cleanliness, comfort, and noise levels at night. Some service users also reported the ward as being uncomfortably hot.

Summary of Feedback - London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Service users' feedback has been gathered by the Tower Hamlets MNVP Chair through three "Walk the Patch" visits at Royal London Hospital on 30th July and 20th September 2024. Additional feedback was collected through two coffee morning/evening sessions held at Ocean Children's Centre on 27th August and John Smith Children's Centre on 27th September, along with an online outreach session in September. Feedback from a total of 23 service users is summarised below.

Positive Experiences:

- 1. Supportive and Compassionate Staff:** Seventeen out of 23 service users commended the staff, particularly midwives, nurses, and doctors, for their

compassionate care and skill in managing emergencies with clear communication. This support was especially valued during labour and delivery.

2. **Prompt Pain Relief and Medication:** Eighteen out of 23 respondents reported receiving medication, such as pain relief, promptly when needed, both during labour and recovery. This was especially appreciated by mothers with high-risk pregnancies, who were given extra scans and immediate attention.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity and Interpreter Support:** Non-native English speakers, in particular, valued the availability of interpreters during labour and medical consultations. This helped ensure clear communication and provided comfort for patients with diverse needs.

Negative Experiences:

1. **Long Waiting Times:** Many service users expressed frustration over delays in planned procedures, such as C-sections and inductions, often due to bed availability. Long waits in triage (up to 8–9 hours) and delays in discharge from the postnatal ward added to stress and discomfort.
2. **Inconsistent Communication Among Staff:** Some users noticed communication gaps between midwives and doctors, which led to confusion over care plans. For example, inconsistencies in the administration of epidurals were highlighted as a point of frustration.
3. **Delayed Pain Management Post-C-Section:** Feedback included instances where post-operative pain relief was delayed. One mother, for instance, reported inadequate timely pain management following her C-section, which impacted her recovery.
4. **Dismissive Attitude from Some Staff:** Five out of 23 service users felt that certain staff members lacked empathy and responsiveness. Some mothers mentioned inadequate early intervention and felt their symptoms or concerns were dismissed.
5. **Visitor Restrictions:** A few mothers were dissatisfied with the hospital's visitor policy, which limited family support during their stay and did not allow them to change visitors frequently, making it more challenging for those needing additional assistance.

Quarterly Meeting with Services Users

On July 23, 2024, the MNVP held a quarterly meeting for service users from three boroughs at St. Mark's Community Centre in Beckton, which was attended by three service users. These events offer a platform for service users to share their experiences directly with the NHS team and receive updates on improvements to maternity services in the three boroughs.

Representatives from Barts NHS Trust, including Patient Experience Midwives, the Health Visiting team, and a Consultant Midwife, also attended the meeting. Sister Circle joined as our partner. Overall, the session was productive, providing service users with the opportunity to engage directly with the NHS team.

Collaboration with Patient Experiences Midwives

We've built a collaborative relationship with patient experience midwives (PEMs) to enhance the Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) program. Here's how we've been working together:

- The chairs have been reviewing maternity documents, guidelines, and action plans with the PEMs, including initiatives like the Violence and Abuse campaigns (Newham), the Standard Operating Procedure for interpretation services in maternity (Newham), and the Visiting Charter with the People Participation lead in Newham (Newham), and feedback on BAME Support group for pregnant women in Whipp Cross Hospital (Waltham Forest).
- Cross-site meetings were held twice in July and August to ensure consistent communication and information sharing about key MNVP requirements across all maternity services.
- MNVP – Healthwatch Newham Safeguarding protocol has been designed specifically to enhance the well-being and ensure the chairs feel safe and protected throughout their service.

Collaboration with VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) and Local Council

- MNVP has become an official partner of the Tower Hamlets Family Hub, with the MOU signed. This partnership presents an opportunity to enhance community

engagement, as well as to conduct joint sessions with the local community, ultimately leading to standalone sessions at community venues.

- MNVP has engaged the Communication Team of Barts Health NHS Trust and the Newham Health and Care Communications Network (part of NHS ICB) to improve promotion of the MNVP profile and upcoming events.
- MNVP has initiated introductions and collaborative sessions with VCS organisations sharing similar project goals for parents with young children. These organisations include Sister Circle, Roma Support Group, Serene Beginning, and St Luke's Little Lion Club.

Moving Forward

Raising Awareness:

- Display MNVP informational posters and chair profile posters in maternity wards, antenatal clinics, and GP offices to increase visibility.
- Become an official partner with the Newham Family Hub and Waltham Forest Family Hub to increase engagement with service users.

Co-Production Actions:

- Partner with the Patient Experience Midwives Team to develop an action plan addressing issues identified from service user feedback and key themes from the MNVP report, such as providing translated patient information sheets for use in maternity wards and antenatal clinics.

Membership and Volunteers:

- Establish a membership database and explore creating a mailing list to share beneficial information with members. Actively recruit volunteers at voluntary recruitment fairs to expand capacity for reaching service users.

Strengthening Work Plan:

- Enhance the work plan and establish benchmarks based on the MNVP baseline assessment through co-production meetings with MNVP regional teams and Barts NHS Trust.