



Dorset Maternity and Neonatal Voices



15 Steps for Maternity and Neonatal Care Report

University Hospitals Dorset
October 2025

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You can learn more about the 15 Steps for Maternity via the toolkit [here](#)

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Introduction

What is 15 Steps?

The 15 Steps template is an NHS England toolkit that looks at improving the quality of services, usually in hospital settings, by bringing in ‘fresh eyes’ to visit, observe and spot things that staff might walk past.

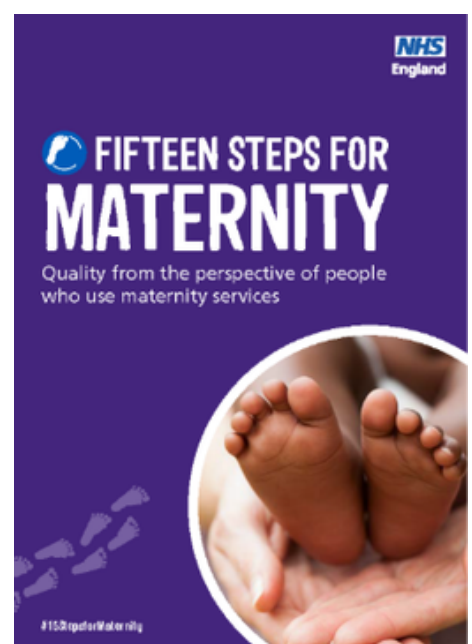
You can learn more about the 15 Steps for Maternity via the toolkit [here](#)

It was co-designed with a diverse group of representatives and service users, who advised on what should be assessed during 15 Steps visits.

The toolkit enables 15 Steps visitors to observe and reflect on whether the settings and the staff are friendly, welcoming, accessible, informative and organised; and whether the services feel safe, personal, kind and calm. Recommendations for change and improvement can then be made.

We aim to undertake a 15 Steps for maternity and neonatal visit in Dorset every 6 months, with progress reviewed at regular Safety Walkabouts and Walk the Patch visits.

“I can tell what kind of care my daughter is going to get within 15 steps of walking onto the ward.”



Overview

In October 2025, we visited University Hospitals Dorset, in Bournemouth with a group of current and recent service users, organisation representatives and NHS staff. We used the 15 Steps toolkit to explore the spaces and record first impressions, to consider the general atmosphere, and to reflect on interactions with staff.

Where did we go?

We split into two small groups and explored all floors of the Maternity building. Spring suite was the only area we were not able to visit on this day.



Who took part?

We issued an open invitation to service users to take part in the visits. We advertised in our Participation Volunteer WhatsApp group, on social media and via our mailing list. We also invited members from local community groups and organisations that work closely with maternity or neonatal service users.

7 volunteers joined us and 5 members of the midwifery team. including past service users, currently pregnant service users planning their birth at UHD and independent doulas.

We were also joined by representatives from:

Dorset Mind

Neonatal Network

Downright Perfect

Breastfeeding Network



What did we do?

At each setting we made notes and took pictures then discussed the areas we had visited as a group. We considered how things looked, felt and sounded to each member of the group, hearing about each person's unique experiences. We talked about how we would 'rate' each area, and we discussed our recommendations for change and improvement.

At the end of each visit, we gave feedback to the hospital leadership teams about our findings and initial recommendations.

We reviewed all the feedback we gathered on the visit to create this report which presents our findings and recommendations.

We used these five themes as a basis for reviewing the space and informing recommendations:

1. Welcoming and informative
2. Safe and clean
3. Friendly and personal
4. Organised and calm
5. Accessible and Inclusive.

About us

Dorset MNVP is the formal partner of Dorset NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), responsible for providing the voice of service users to inform development of maternity and neonatal care in the county.

We support the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) to ensure services are delivered in a kind, personal and safe way by making sure the service user voice is central to all decision-making and quality oversight. This enables the ICB to fulfil its responsibilities in line with the three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services in England.

We engage with people who have recently used local maternity and neonatal services, listening to their experiences and feedback. We share their insight with the Dorset Integrated Care System and the maternity and neonatal service providers it commissions, to make sure people's opinions are at the heart of shaping local services.

Welcoming & Informative

Antenatal

Positive

- Area feels welcoming with good on-screen information and graphics
- Bright, open space; calm atmosphere
- Drinks available; refreshments easily accessible
- Appointment cards and laminated wait times effective
- “Sally’s trolley” bladder care initiative brings education out of the classroom
- Quality boards, improvement boards, and mental health boards visible
- Staff generally welcoming and helpful
- Electronic screens show wait times and key messages clearly

Areas for Improvement

- Waiting area crowded with limited natural light
- Chairs uncomfortable for long waits (e.g. GTT tests)
- Too quiet, could benefit from soft music or TV for distraction
- Bare walls and clinical feel; artwork or murals suggested
- Signage not clear for scan areas and triage waiting rooms
- Payment process for scan photos confusing and awkward
- Infant feeding and kangaroo care information less visible than in NICU
- Need for more multilingual and inclusive materials
- Building hot in some areas

Labour & Delivery

Positive

- Bright, airy rooms with calm colour schemes
- Natural light and spacious layout
- Posters showing birth positions helpful
- Drinks and refreshments available in triage corridor
- Quality and huddle boards promoting communication and transparency

Areas for Improvement

- Quiet rooms (e.g., fetal medicine) too dark and clinical, need artwork and warmer tones
- Resuscitaire visible and intimidating; curtain or screen option suggested
- Lack of personalisation opportunities in labour rooms (no space for affirmations/photos)
- Mirror placement at end of bed not ideal
- Pantry signage unclear: needs clarity on family vs. staff use
- Some corridors obstructed by equipment

Postnatal

Positive

- Large, airy rooms with natural light
- Celebration boards provide a personal touch
- Senior management photos displayed for concerns or recognition
- Information boards visible and well used
- Calm, soothing colour schemes

Areas for Improvement

- Bare corridors and clinical feel; artwork and murals needed
- Privacy windows blocked effectively but should be maintained
- Kitchen signage poor, only labelled on doors
- No communal or lounge area for social interaction
- Missing baby changing mat (Level 2)
- Information leaflets often not displayed (given directly to patients)

NICU

Positive

- Warm, welcoming environment; colourful equipment and décor
- Welcome leaflet, discharge pack, and Baby Steps brochure helpful
- Neonatal journey cards and FAB information well used
- Kangaroo care board encouraging and clear
- Multicultural posters and evidence-based info displayed
- Video of waves/beach adds relaxation

Areas for Improvement

- Expressing rooms feel too clinical, could be more comfortable and homely
- Only one MNVP poster spotted, needs more visibility
- Kangaroo care display could show more diversity

General

Positive

- Bright, wide corridors, calm colour schemes
- Improvement and huddle boards visible throughout
- Mental health and celebration boards appreciated
- QR codes for patient feedback increase engagement
- Drinks and refreshment access easy in most areas

Areas for Improvement

- Signage across hospital inconsistent or too high
- Colour-coding system suggested for easier navigation
- Volunteers on each floor could help with wayfinding
- Posters (mental health, consultant boards) often too busy or incomplete
- Information should be available in multiple languages
- Temperature variation across building

Safe & Clean

Positive

Antenatal

Positive

- Clean, tidy, and fresh environment
- Active cleaning observed; no unpleasant smells
- Infection control visible (hand sanitiser, gloves, aprons)

Areas for Improvement

- Corridors occasionally obstructed by trolleys — ensure access clear for wheelchairs

Labour & Delivery

Positive

- 1:1 care during labour
- Cleanliness excellent in all rooms
- Ensuite bathrooms ensure privacy
- Equipment labelled and organised
- Resuscitaire and emergency equipment in place
- Hygiene posters visible and handwashing encouraged

Areas for Improvement

- Resuscitaire can look intimidating; concealment or curtain suggested
- Some clutter in corridors (rare, but noted)

Postnatal

Positive

- “Very clean” and “fresh” environment consistently noted
- Ensuite facilities praised for comfort and hygiene
- Security strong with baby tagging and lockdown systems
- Intercom and call bell systems effective

Areas for Improvement

- Missing changing mat (Level 2) poses safety risk
- Maintain privacy window film consistency

NICU

Positive

- Very clean, uncluttered, peaceful space
- Fingerprint access provides safety and autonomy
- Sound monitoring and soundproofing reduce stress
- Feeding equipment and pumps clearly labelled and accessible
- Specialist support (feeding champions, S&L therapists) available

Areas for Improvement

- None significant, environment described as model of safety and cleanliness

General

Positive

- High cleanliness standards throughout
- Cleanliness ratings displayed visibly
- Staff training and huddles promote safety awareness
- Good hygiene practices seen consistently
- Resuscitaires available and well maintained

Areas for Improvement

- Some staff visibility inconsistent, reassurance through presence could help



Friendly & Personal

Antenatal

Positive

- Staff generally friendly and approachable
- Celebration and improvement boards add personal touch
- Clear appointment communication and patient engagement

Areas for Improvement

- Staff at triage office appeared stressed and less welcoming
- Feeding support less visible than in NICU

Labour & Delivery

Positive

- Staff welcoming and friendly in labour and Haven areas
- Calm, personal environment for birthing
- Staff photos visible help patients recognise team

Areas for Improvement

- Labour rooms lack space for personal items (lights, affirmations, etc.)
- Mirrors in room layout cause discomfort for some patients

Postnatal

Positive

- Personalised name signs on doors (“Love this feature”)
- Celebration boards with staff and patient notes
- Partners can stay overnight; siblings welcome to visit
- Flexible discharge approach when possible
- Calm, private environment

Areas for Improvement

- Staff engagement inconsistent (some did not look up or smile)
- Limited visible staff photos in some areas
- Discharge felt rushed after caesarean section for some
- No communal lounge for social interaction

NICU

Positive

- Described as outstanding in friendliness and support
- Staff very calm, kind, and attentive
- Compassion care officer, support groups, and vouchers for parents
- Family-centred approach — parents can stay with baby overnight
- Feeding champions and specialists provide personalised help

Areas for Improvement

- Kangaroo care display could better reflect diversity
- Consider extending similar family support model to other wards

General

Positive

- Consistent respect for privacy, staff never heard discussing patients
- Open nurses' stations create approachable atmosphere
- Communication boards help families feel informed

Areas for Improvement

- Inconsistent friendliness between areas , especially at nurses' stations and triage



Organised & Calm

Antenatal

Positive

- Calm, quiet, and controlled environment
- Good spacing in waiting areas and corridors
- Appointment cards and screens for wait time updates

Areas for Improvement

- Waiting area feels crowded and warm
- Chairs uncomfortable for long waits
- Could benefit from entertainment or distraction options

Labour & Delivery

Positive

- Very calm, quiet, and private atmosphere
- 1:1 care ensures smooth flow
- Soundproofing excellent; privacy maintained
- Rooms spacious, well organised, and uncluttered
- Huddles, quality boards, and teamwork visible
- Equipment well labelled and ready for use

Areas for Improvement

- Limited birthing pools, more needed to meet demand
- Some equipment in corridors noted
- Signage in pantry and kitchen areas unclear
- Recliners missing in "Lagoon" room

Postnatal

Positive

- Quiet and calm atmosphere
- Private rooms with ensembles maintain comfort and dignity
- Soundproofing supports rest and recovery
- Discharge system efficient and structured
- Improvement boards visible

Areas for Improvement

- No communal lounge for parents to mix
- Some rooms overly warm
- Need more pillows and comfort supports
- Mirror placement not ideal

NICU

Positive

- Exceptionally calm and peaceful atmosphere
- Spacious, organised rooms with clear systems
- Rooming-in areas allow family time
- Very quiet, clean, and well managed environment

Areas for Improvement

- Expressing rooms could be made more comfortable
- While privacy is valued, may reduce opportunity for parent interaction

General

Positive

- Overall sense of calm, control, and organisation
- Large, open spaces with good layout
- Huddle boards and improvement boards reinforce safety
- Consistent efficiency and teamwork across departments

Areas for Improvement

- Temperature management inconsistent (some hot areas)
- Some signage (especially kitchens) unclear
- Soundproofing, while beneficial, reduces social connection opportunities



Action Plan

From the feedback we received on the day, we have developed an action plan. Maternity staff are tasked with making changes based on feedback, and we have asked them to report back on progress towards these goals

Area	Issue	Action Needed	Name	Date
Antenatal	Introduce artwork or murals to reduce clinical feel and create a warmer, more welcoming environment.	Artwork ready for installation	Kerry Taylor / Anna Eaton / Carol Burgess / Katie Elliot	01/04/26
Antenatal	Improve signage and wayfinding for scan areas and triage waiting rooms.	Organisation of signs	Anna Eaton/Akeisha Robinson	01/04/26
Antenatal	Simplify payment process for scan photos with clear instructions or digital option.	Robust payment process	Anna Eaton/Akeisha Robinson	01/04/26
Antenatal	Increase visibility of infant feeding and kangaroo care information (mirroring NICU standards).	Screen in waiting area being arranged	Rachel Dehe	01/04/26
Labour	Introduce opportunities for room personalisation (affirmations, photos, lighting options)	Lighting, photos and affirmations being worked on	LWC/ Haven Lead	01/04/26
Labour	Clarify signage in pantries and kitchens for family vs. staff use.	Clear signage agreed	LWC/ Haven lead	01/04/26
Labour	Ensure corridors remain free of equipment for better flow and accessibility.	Monitoring and reviewing storage	LWC/ Haven lead	01/04/26

Area	Issue	Action Needed	Name	Date
Labour	Add artwork or murals in corridors to create a more homely, less clinical feel.	Artwork ready for installation	Kerry Taylor/ Haven & LWC Lead	01/04/26
Postnatal	Provide a communal lounge or family activities to encourage social interaction and peer support.	Room changes in progress	Christine Smith/ Jane Folland/ Caroline Boyd	01/04/26
Postnatal	Replace or provide missing baby changing mat (Level 2).	On order	Jane Folland/ Caroline Boyd	01/04/26
Postnatal	Review discharge process to ensure patients feel supported, particularly after C-section.	MNVP to support by asking women on walk rounds	Jane Folland/ Caroline Boyd	01/04/26
NICU	Make expressing rooms more comfortable and less clinical (add soft furnishings or décor).	Equipment on order	Tace Young	01/04/26
All	Increase visibility of MNVP and family support posters across the unit.	Plans for MNVP information board and info	MNVP	01/04/26
NICU	Update kangaroo care displays to reflect greater cultural diversity.	Pictures being updated	Tace Young	01/04/26
All	Recruit or assign volunteers on each floor to assist with navigation and reassurance.	Volunteers in place	Akeisha Robinson	01/04/26
Triage Area	Encourage consistent friendliness and visible staff engagement at all desks and triage areas.	Consistent monitoring	Carol Burgess	01/04/26

For more information or to get involved with Dorset MNVP, visit our website or follow our Facebook page using the QR code below



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If you'd like to know about future events, join our mailing list