



KERNOW

Maternity & Neonatal voices

Working in partnership to improve services for all



15 steps for maternity night visit

Royal Cornwall Hospital 2025

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About us

Kernow Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) is commissioned by the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board (ICB) to fulfil its responsibility to involve service users and communities in maternity and neonatal services.

Our vision

Inclusive, safe, personal and kind maternity care for everyone in Cornwall & Isles of Scilly; designed, implemented and evaluated in partnership with the communities that receive the care.

Our purpose

To ensure service user voice is at the centre of decisions and to provide insight and oversight to improvements, quality and safety of services. We also provide strategic critical friendship to the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS).

Our approach

People's views come first – especially those who are often marginalised or ignored by institutions and systems. We believe in transparency, openness and coproduction. We positively challenge, question and support the development and oversight of maternity and neonatal services by raising the voices of service users and supporting them to be involved.

How we find out what matters to you

We are always listening. We want to involve as many people as possible in our work and to hear from a wide range of voices and communities from across Cornwall & Isles of Scilly. Our team uses many ways to raise awareness of our work and to find out what matters most to you, including:

- Going out into the community – attending events and visiting groups
- Running surveys and focus groups
- Working with other organisations
- Visiting services to see how they work
- Using social media

Find out more and get involved



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Introduction

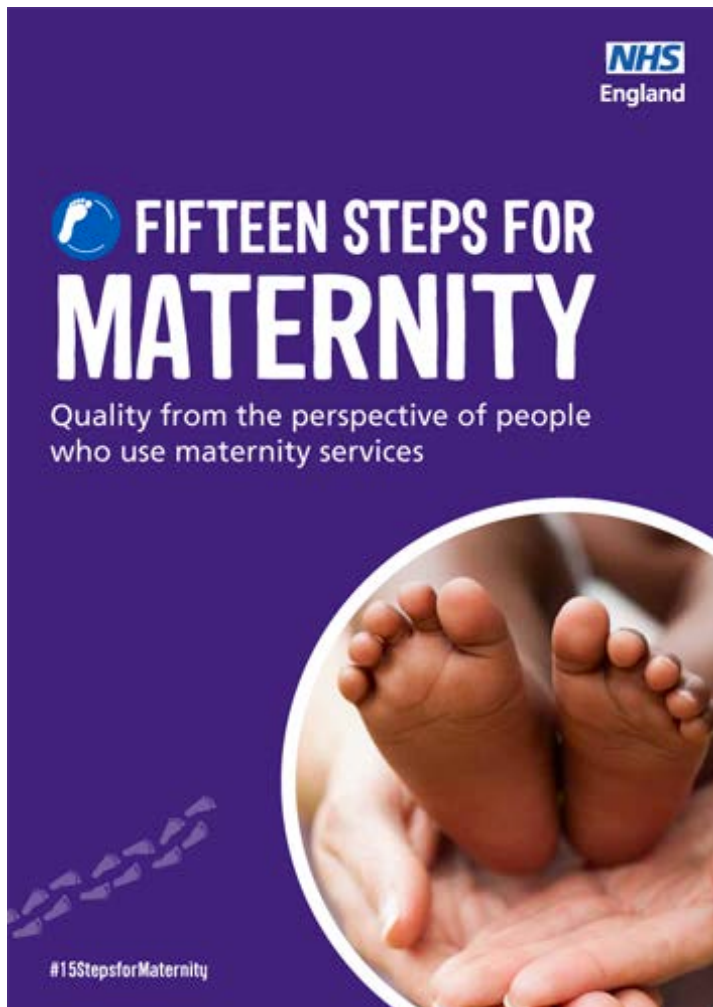
What is 15 Steps?

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.

First impressions can have a big effect on people’s confidence in the space where they are being cared for and the services being provided.

The toolkit was inspired by a comment from a mother who was often in hospital with her child.

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



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 event in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly every year, with progress reviewed at regular Safety Walkabouts and Walk the Patch visits.

What we did

In October 2025, we visited areas of the Princess Alexandra Maternity Wing in Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust (RCHT) with a group of current and recent service users, staff members and colleagues from partner organisations. 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.

Considerations

At KMNVP we have taken time to review and reflect on the previous 15 Steps events that have taken place, and the impact service user participation has had on Princess Alexandra Wing, Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust. Our first visit back in 2020 produced a wealth of feedback and recommendations, all of which stimulated a large body of work: from wall images, paintings and ceiling panels, to outdoor spaces, the impact could be felt throughout.

Following on from more recent 15 Steps events, we felt the need to be targeted in our approach and visit the wards at a time when service users might use them most – the evening. We knew the wards would look and feel different then.

Service users have often requested accessible times out of usual working hours, particularly for dads and partners, so this became an opportunity to explore a different 15 Steps.

We strive to continue to develop opportunities for different people to attend events such as these and add to the rich and nuanced feedback we can take to the maternity service, supporting meaningful change.

We met between 6pm and 8pm, when it was already dark, in October 2025. We didn't visit the neonatal unit or Daisy Suite formally, as those spaces will be covered by additional 15 Steps events.

Who took part?

We issued an open invitation to service users to take part in the visits. We had service users and representatives from WILD join the KMNVP team on the visit. We were also supported by members of the midwifery team.

We encouraged people on our social media pages to share their thoughts if they couldn't attend the visits.



What did we do?

At each setting we made notes and took pictures and 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 experience each area, focusing on 5 key areas. We used this to frame our experience and then discussed our recommendations for change and improvement.

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

We used these 5 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.



Room set up ready to welcome our volunteers. We ended the evening with pizza to help with the debrief!

Princess Alexandra Wing (foyer)

Welcoming and Informative

We had a strong representation from voluntary sector organisation **WILD Young Parents**. Currently the Young Parent Pathway is being reviewed, and their feedback on the physical environment centred hugely around the space being welcoming, accessible and informative. Many people, particularly younger people, will have never been to a hospital before and the information on arrival really does set the tone for the full maternity experience.

External Space

As an MNVP, we used What3Words to ensure service users would find the maternity wing entrance. As commented on in previous 15 Steps reports, finding Princess Alexandra Wing from the car parks, in the dark, is challenging! The external space is grey and uninviting, the dominating signage being anti-smoking. The evening was dark, cold and really highlighted how hard the hospital space can be to navigate. You need to know what you are looking for and what its called, otherwise there aren't really any clues to help along the way. The prominent "No Smoking" board at the door was interpreted as unwelcoming in a maternity context; service users would prefer a warm, maternity-branded welcome that reassures them they're in the right place and explains next steps.



The prominent 'no smoking' sign at the entrance to the maternity wing

Entrance

On entering the Princess Alexandra Wing, service users found the first steps confusing: reception was closed on our arrival and there was no obvious instruction on what to do for maternity queries (such as an 'out-of-hours' process).

The naming of the wards (eg Wheal Rose ward) lacked clarity, it didn't mean anything to service users and isn't immediately self-explanatory.

In our debrief session at the end, the emergency triage space was positively received with service users appreciating the privacy being given to this area.

The main concern for those attending was ensuring people knew where to go in the case of an emergency.

Some of the service users ended up in a Gynae waiting room and hadn't realised it wasn't part of the maternity service.



Lack of clarity around ward names. What happens on Wheal Fortune? Wheal Rose?

Service users repeatedly ask for clearer, bigger signposting and footprint floor stickers to guide them toward the right desk or department. This was noted as particularly important for those with barriers to reading or the visually impaired.

Lots of posters can be incredibly hard to decipher.

The QR feedback poster was noticed positively and service users felt this use of simplistic modern digital signposting could be continued throughout the foyer to create a visible, friendly orientation point that reduces uncertainty from the moment service users arrive.

Key points

First impressions feel confusing: the reception is closed at times when service users might be arriving distressed, in pain and in need of help. It was unclear what to do for maternity queries, where to go and who to ask. Maternity-specific signposting with words service users are familiar with felt lacking in this space.

- Naming/wayfinding was noted as unclear (Wheal names not obvious to public).
- Desire for clearer, bigger signage and footprint floor stickers; QR codes for simple signposting, less visual clutter.
- External messaging (e.g., “No Smoking” at the door) felt unwelcoming compared to maternity-branded welcome signage.

“Reception was closed... nothing about what to do if wanting to visit anything maternity related – not even a telephone number to ring duty midwife?”

“Consideration to names – maternity not mentioned... Can it be called Wheal Rose antenatal... and Wheal Fortune postnatal ward?”

Recommendations

- Review the external space with a focus on **warm, maternity-branded welcome sign and clear instructions of what to do on arrival**.
- Replace/relocate generic “No Smoking” board with smoke-free iconography.
- Install **maternity welcome** at the entrance with clear “You’re in the Princess Alexandra Wing—Maternity”, arrowed directions and out of hours information.
- Adopt **consistent wayfinding**: color-coded routes + **footprint floor stickers** leading to Wheal Rose/Wheal Fortune. Examples of this can be seen in RCHT Paediatric ED – follow the fish.
- Standardise **ward naming on public signage** (Antenatal/Day Assessment; Postnatal/Transitional Care) alongside local Wheal names.

Wheal Rose: Antenatal/Day Assessment Unit (DAU)/Triage

Welcoming and Informative

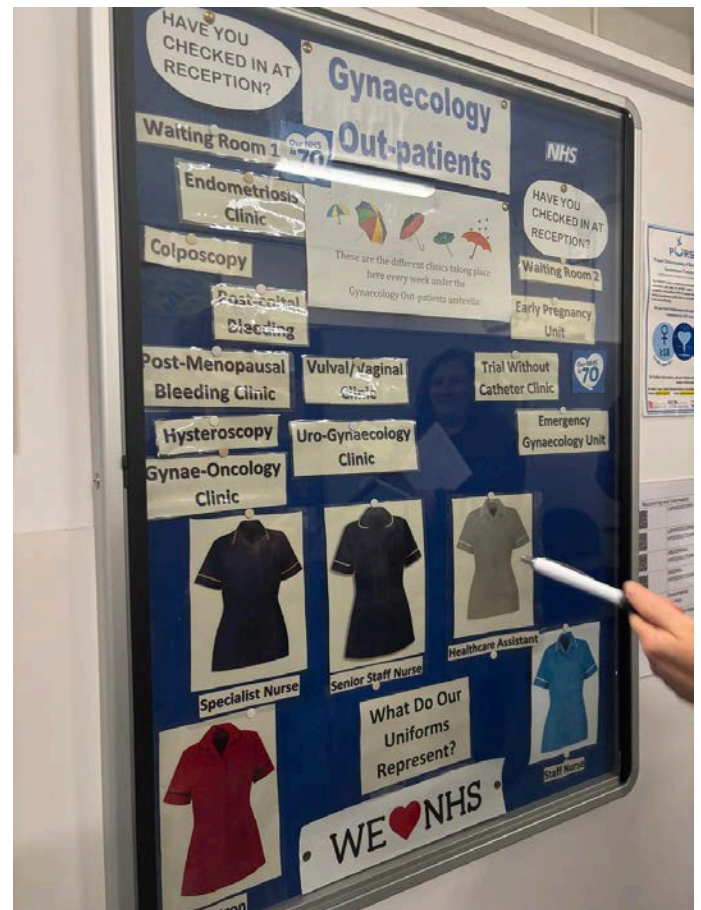
What's working well?

Clearer wayfinding ideas and visual cues were welcomed; the **"How are we doing?"** board was called **"really colourful and eye-catching."**

This space felt different to other visits the KMNVP have done during the day. Triage was in a separate space and although not in use whilst we were there, was a clearly defined space for emergency care. A second BSOTS banner in the waiting room would be appreciated.



The banner was informative but service users wondered what 'BSOTS' meant



Example of a board showing what the various uniforms represent

The ward was busy, with rooms in use and partners walking corridors. Staff were smiling and friendly and there was a sense of calm in this space. Service users commented that it would be useful to have a staff board identifying what the various uniforms represent and who you can ask for help.

Learning

- Entry is **confusing** after the buzzer; the reception not visible/covered; service users highlighted mixed messages (urine pot vs check-in).

"No one on reception... confused about what to do..."

"Reception empty – not welcoming."

- **Policy signage out of date** (re partners staying) and the **clinical feel** was noted as a negative:

"Still an old sign on the door – partners not allowed... not very cosy."

- **Basic wayfinding:**

"Floor markings would be helpful – reception desk is far away."

"After the door entry buzzer... would be super helpful if the reception desk area could be moved (or turned) so you can see the entryway."

Recommendations

- Re-site/angle the **reception desk** to face the entry route; add **"Keep coming → Reception"** footprints.
- Use a **single policy panel** (visiting, partners, what to bring).

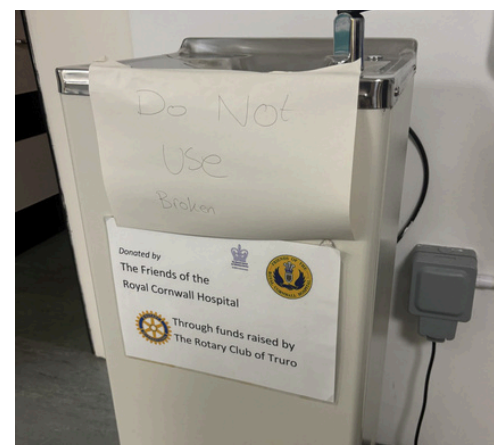
Safe & Clean

Overall this area felt safe, with a buzzer entry so staff know who is onsite. The corridors felt relatively clear with minimal clutter.

- **Data security & privacy:** *"Computer was left unlocked... staff not at the desk."*
- **Clinical clutter in view:** *"Pots of urine" visible through office window.*

Recommendations:

- Remind staff of importance of data security
- Privacy film on office windows
- Routine checks of water machines and utilities



Friendly & Personal

We discussed the importance of the welcome as part of a friendly and personalised experience. It was agreed this space was generally used by service users who might be worried or have concerns, or be in the early stages of labour.

All staff were friendly and made us feel welcome on our initial arrival. Once we were walking around, staff didn't really understand who we were so potentially had we been using services they may have approached us differently?

We noted fresh fruit and food available in the waiting rooms as well as magazines and books. It would be good to highlight the cameras in the waiting room, and their purpose for keeping service users safe.

The needs of young parents were at the front of our minds, and we discussed the possibility of the KMNVP doing a project alongside parents and developing leaflets and reading materials in the waiting rooms (particularly the positioning of safety messaging).

- **Tone at entry:** Large triage poster feels intimidating; request for **warm welcome** signage and some form of information for what to do when you arrive in Day Assessment. The triage information poster could be better placed in the waiting room.
- Staff images and corridor pictures appreciated; overall **atmosphere felt 'clinical'** without colour.

Recommendations:

- Add a **welcome message, staff photo board** near entry, and softening colours/art.
- What to expect signage: what will happen, who you might see, where you can access water or food, how to alert staff if your symptoms change. Seeing this message in a variety of places will be useful.

"Need something saying come in, welcome, it's ok, ring the bell – we will help you."

"No staff spoke to us or smiled or offered any support."

Organised & Calm

Service users were unclear as to why there was a '**partners wait in foyer**' sign on display. It was noted that this could be anxiety-inducing for a variety of reasons; especially so for families with access needs.

Recommendations

- Improve **signage for cupboards vs toilets**
- Refresh **privacy curtains**
- Declutter **side rooms**

"Must remove sign... partners having to wait in the foyer!! My husband is autistic and would literally do this and that would cause me so much anxiety."

Accessible & Inclusive

Restrictions imposed by the current estate means that certain types of accessibility needs will be more difficult to facilitate at the present time. However, our service users were very aware of opportunities to use language in particular to aid inclusion.

It was highlighted that, for many, access needs aren't discussed or highlighted prior to service users attending at the unit, so an inclusive NHS response is so important for making the physical environment as accessible as possible.

Service users liked the **QR codes for feedback**.

They did, however, also comment on the lack of **diversity of images used, trans-inclusive toilets/signage** and **disability-friendly shower room**.

Recommendations:

- Review of all posters/photos to ensure a more diverse **age/ethnicity/disability representation**
- Introduce **gender-inclusive toilet signage**
- Address **access needs** in shower rooms



Wheal Rose - Waiting Area

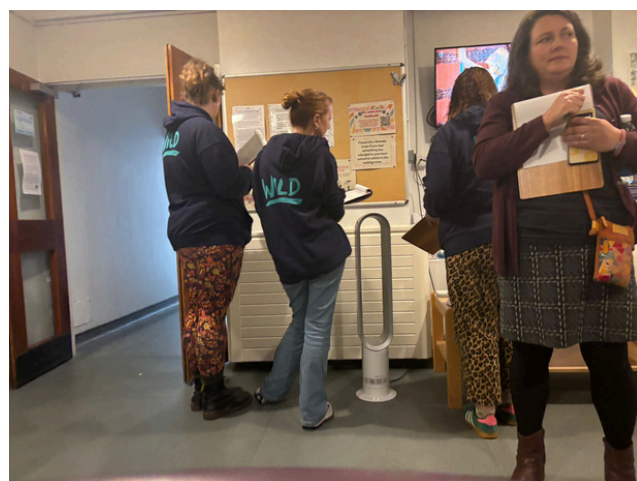
Welcoming & Informative

A lot of conversation centred around the information leaflets available in this space. Service users were asking questions as to why certain leaflets had been included, and also why private antenatal classes were being advertised here. They commented on a missed opportunity for the Maternity Natters Bitesize videos which could be promoted in this space (highlighting key videos that feel important for those who might be attending). There were also no 'Personalised Care and Support Plans' or any of the BRAIN acronym pop up banners that are placed on other wards.

Service users commented that highlighting information in a variety of ways would enable people to interact and absorb information in a different way. The ICON information for example was set up on a table at the back of the room, with all chairs facing away from it.

What's working well

- Signage in multiple languages
- Fresh fruit, snacks and refreshments
- Clear signage on what to expect, where to get food and when to seek more help



Learning:

- **'Bell'** unclear which to press

"There is a sign... press bell, but not obvious which bell."

- **Overload of posters** that look temporary
- Expectations for young families; eg additional children at emergency appointments
- Need **permit info** on day-one inductions

"Too much information... posters could be better grouped."

Recommendations

- Replace **bell signage** with a large button, label and arrow
- **Information-zone boards** (Induction, Feeding, Facilities, Travel/Parking)
- **TV content:** time appropriate **Natters Videos** (eg; reduced foetal movement, pain management, early labour, inductions, c-sections)

Safe & Clean

There was a sense, through our conversations, that this space felt far away from staff and, as a service user, you could be waiting in this area for a long time. There is a camera so staff can see service users; clear signage making sure people know they are being filmed would be welcomed.

Overall a thoughtful space that was clean. The KMNVP would love to link in and support leaflets and poster placements in the waiting areas.

- Thermal comfort/windows broken.
- Safer sleep content seen but needs **clearer display**

Friendly & Personal

Our WILD workers noted that for young parents, lots of signage and leaflets may not be seen as welcoming and friendly. There was a TV, and it was noted by all this could be a useful opportunity to play some of the Natters Bitesize videos (those linked to the antenatal pathway/core topics). The snacks and drinks gave the space a more personal feeling as well as some of the more informal look books.

What's working well

- "Body of Mothers" book
- The WILD workers visited the **Daisy Suite** and were impressed by the access arrangements, private kitchen and homely aesthetics
- Small touches in the waiting room (oat milk, homely cues)

Organised & Calm

On the night we visited, it felt like a very quiet and peaceful space. It was clear that there were service users there in the first stages of labour and partners were walking around, but it felt peaceful. Staff were talking softly and there was no sense of rush.

Service users commented that during the day the waiting room could get very busy and that might alter how calm this space felt.

There was a discussion around whether/how Kernow MNVP, in collaboration with WILD Youth Workers and the student midwives, could support the development of information and leaflet management in the communal waiting areas.

Accessible & Inclusive

Accessibility is a real focus for us at KMNVP, and this was also reflected in our service user feedback.

We discussed how we could clearly see the impact from our previous 15 Steps events and recommendations. This was amazing and all staff felt strongly a need to communicate this via our social media channels.

Positives:

Bilingual signage; different languages on posters.

Gaps:

Young parent focussed information was lacking (WILD) and the reading age of much of the material too high for the county average.

The placement of information did not not correlate with the status of pregnancy in each area

Recommendations:

- Rewrite key posters to **reading age ~7**,
- Add **WILD recommended** content eg. youth imagery.



Wheal Fortune: Postnatal & Transitional Care

Welcoming & Informative

What's working well

Where staff approached us, said hello or chatted, service users responded very positively and felt so welcomed.

"Lovely TC staff member came to say hello... Lots of smiles"; "Open reception area with accessible staff is positive."

On entry onto Wheal Fortune, service users still lack confidence in what to do and how best 'get into' the ward. On observation, it felt like lots of signs to filter through with a lack of focus.

"As we stood waiting... couldn't find the bell... possibly too many signs."

"Is there a welcome booklet for the postnatal ward... food, visiting, parking, bathrooms?"

Learning

- **Too many/duplicative signs**
- Unclear **Nest/Infant Feeding** info (eg when and how you can access staff, help or support)
- Information on ward rounds, mealtimes, quiet hour were highlighted as important.
- **Equipment instructions** (bottle warmers/pumps) easily accessible, in multiple places.
- Moving around the space can feel cluttered, intruding on the staff work area, public when in night wear.

Recommendations

- A **welcome pack** (paper + QR): ward map, visiting, feeding support, equipment guides, parking.
- Streamline signs; add **info-zones** on **going home** topics along walking routes.
- Link with Kernow Parenting Journey core values and principles for information zones: continuity through the PCSP and Maternity Matters.

Safe & Clean

The Kernow MNVP have reviewed the estates annually for Princess Alexandra Wing since 2019. It is wonderful to see the impact our 15 Steps events have had on continuity through physical spaces and where possible, softening some of the clinical edges. It is incredible to keep re walking these spaces with service users as they continue to feed back similar themes, proving how important they are in the birthing and postnatal experience.

Plumbing issues and out of order toilets caught their attention, and all were reflecting on post partum bleeding and difficulty in moving around post delivery. Basic human functions such as being clean and needing the loo are so important, and definitely caused concern.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise **toilet/shower fixes**
- Add **curtains/blinds** for the private spaces,
- Review **corridor clutter** and storage.



Friendly & Personal

Appreciated:

Staff approachable, staff board/photos;

Gaps: sling-carry option, pillows/breastfeeding cushions,

Quotes:

"Why can't you carry your own baby... sling library?"

"More pillows needed – especially on Wheal Fortune."



Organised & Calm

Service users commented upon the noticeable lack of call bells and highlighted the quiet atmosphere as a huge positive. Squeaky floors, yellow lights and bathrooms out of order highlighted the impact estates has on care experience. Areas such as the kitchen and the garden then seemed to be so important to the overall sense of feeling calm in this space.

Actions:

- From our debrief, WILD and KMNVP are keen to support a project to bring young people in to the garden and support a seasonal refresh of flowers and plants.

Accessible & Inclusive

Positives:

Service users loved the pictures in the kitchen; **affirming quotes such as “Holding you... You are enough” were really important.** They liked the cartoon style and felt the young parents in particular would respond well to these images. Overall there was a sense of a lack of diversity in images in corridors and in the kitchen. Opportunities to highlight pronouns in spaces to support staff was recommended; as well as specific information on making up a safe bottle feed.

Gaps:

- **Limited diversity** in imagery, no WILD/young parent content
- Siblings welcome not obvious. **No toys/resources**
- Hidden bottle-feeding guide
- Consider **pronouns** on bed boards

Actions:

- Inclusive imagery set
- Youth-friendly resources
- Add **pronouns** whiteboards by beds
- Signpost **siblings policy**



Wheal Fortune Day Room

Welcoming & Informative

- **Garden** valued but under-used due to lack of prompts; needs **inviting signs** and **evening lights**; add **permit info** and **partner food options** guidance.

"Garden is lovely" / "Garden sign needed... please come outside."

Friendly & Personal

Ambiguity over **tea/coffee** and **fruit** for whom; service users found the tone of some signage didn't feel welcoming.

Recommendations:

- Clear labelling **"for patients/partners/visitors"**; re-balance charity sales to postnatal/day room.

Organised & Calm

- This space, due to the tables and chairs, would have felt cramped if there were multiple cots in the room.
- Review **kitchen unit** and redundant equipment; this could an opportunity to re-plan layout for flow

Accessible & Inclusive

Bringing in service users always supports widening the lens in terms of inclusivity. Clarity of language and instruction came through our service users feedback strongly. Phrases such as **"help yourself"** were cited as being problematic for neurodivergent visitors.

Recommendations:

- Add **eligibility icons** on refreshment points.

Cross-cutting quick wins

Lowest cost & highest impact

- **Cohesive wayfinding & policy signage** across all areas (one brand style; remove duplicates; add arrows/footprints; fix outdated partner policies). Our service users were particularly keen on floor stickers, or wall stickers similar to ED.
- **Welcome & orientation:** foyer “Start here” panel; DAU greeter at peak times; postnatal welcome pack + QR.
- **Inclusive environment:** increase **diverse imagery**, visible **formula-making guide**, **WILD/young parent** content, **pronouns** option on bed boards.
- **Facilities fixes:** showers (temperature/pressure/curtains), blinds, mirrors, water dispensers, decluttered corridors/day room.
- **Comfort & calm:** soften lighting in Wheal Rose, KMNVP and WILD projects to support garden refresh and leaflets and posters in waiting spaces and corridors and appropriate TV content.

A few specific design ideas (from the comments)

- **“We are going home”** photo walkway mural at the postnatal exit (replace white walls with gentle wording/imagery).
- **Garden activation pack:** “Please come outside” sign, fairy-lights, and a simple **benefits of fresh air** poster; enlist **WILD** volunteers for maintenance.
- **Equipment ‘how-to’ micro-posters** beside **bottle warmers/pumps**, plus the welcome pack.



Recommendation Round Up

Review the external space with a focus on warm, maternity-branded welcome sign and clear instructions of what to do on arrival.	Adopt consistent wayfinding: color-coded routes + footprint floor stickers leading to Wheal Rose/Wheal Fortune. Examples of this can be seen in RCHT Paediatric ED- follow the fish.	Standardise ward naming on public signage (Antenatal/Day Assessment; Postnatal/Transitional Care) alongside local Wheal names.
Ensure data security with lock screens on computers, privacy film on office windows; routine checks of water machines and utilities.	Audit posters/photos for diversity and representation.	Welcome orientation board, staff board, what to expect signage for all wards.
Day Assessment waiting room: Replace bell signage with a large button label and arrow. Information-zone boards (Induction, Feeding, Facilities, Travel/Parking).	Introduce gender-inclusive toilet signage, pronoun whiteboards by beds	Rewrite key posters to reading age ~7, add WILD content, youth imagery.
A welcome pack/FAQ's (paper + QR): ward map, visiting, feeding support, equipment guides, parking.	Streamline signs; add info-zones on going home topics along walking routes.	Equipment 'how-to' micro-posters beside bottle warmers/pumps, plus the welcome pack.
Wheal Fortune Day Room: Review kitchen unit and redundant equipment this could an opportunity to re-plan layout for flow	Add eligibility icons on refreshment points.	Link in with KMNVP to develop project opportunities (garden refresh with WILD, waiting room leaflet refresh)

Recommendation Round Up

- **Review welcome on arrival at the unit**
- **Adopt consistent wayfinding**
- **Standardise ward naming**
- **Welcome, orientation, staff boards for all wards**
- **Ensure pictures and posters support inclusivity**
- **Welcome packs on wards**
- **Gender-inclusive toilet signage**
- **Pronoun whiteboards by beds**
- **Eligibility icons at refreshment points**
- **'How to' micro-posters near bottle warmers, pumps etc**
- **Review redundant equipment in day room**
- **Privacy film on office windows**
- **Relevant information-zone boards throughout**
- **Rewrite key posters to reflect average reading age**
- **Enforce staff screen lock security**
- **Update bell signage - DAU**
- **Routine water cooler and utility checks**
- **Develop project opportunities with WILD and KMNVP**

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<https://evolvingcommunities.co.uk/kernow-mnvp/reports/>