



SOMERSET

Maternity & Neonatal Voices

Working in partnership to improve maternity & neonatal services

15 Steps for maternity and neonatal in Somerset

Yeovil District Hospital and
Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton



November 2023

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You can download this publication from evolvingcommunities.co.uk/somerset-mvp

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Message from our Lead

I'm Laura and I got involved with Somerset Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) in 2022 and became the Lead in April 2023. I have three children, two of whom were born at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton where I had relaxed caesarean births. I'm a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, and I am neurodivergent.

I am so proud to be working with our community to develop and design our local maternity and neonatal services, and I am pleased to present this report on the 15 Steps for maternity and neonatal in Somerset at Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital.



It feels like things are tough for people in 2023. We are still working out a new 'normal' after the pandemic, we know that the NHS has many challenges, and that the staff are doing an amazing job despite difficulties with staffing and working conditions. However, we are all working together to improve care, and we recognise and appreciate all the great things happening in the space of co-production and co-design of services.

This report is about improving the environment, accessibility and spaces where maternity and neonatal care is provided. We know that the right care and support during pregnancy is vital and we must continue to work to get that right for families. We celebrate 'MNVP Stars' each month, to recognise staff who are remembered for providing personalised care, and we want our hospital spaces and facilities to match the care that is provided.

I am honoured to have stepped up into the MNVP Lead role, at a time when our work has extended beyond maternity and birth, so that it now spans antenatal care, health visiting, inductions, and bereavement care. I will continue to push forward to support maternity and neonatal care to involve service users, to provide personalised care, informed decision making at every step, and holistic compassionate, equitable care.

We have done amazing work as a team in the past year, including the 15 Steps project, and I am looking forward to seeing what comes next as our team grows and our work spreads into more corners of the NHS system. I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has contributed, you are all so valued and your voices are critical to keep driving change forward.

Laura Perry
Lead, Somerset Maternity & Neonatal Voices Partnership

Every project we work on is shared with our MNVP committee and every person who gives their time and energy is working to help services meet the needs of future families in Somerset.

About Somerset Maternity and Neonatal Partnership

Somerset Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) is an independent organisation where women, birthing people and families can give their feedback and share their experiences of maternity and neonatal services in Somerset.

We listen to and engage with those who have recently used our local maternity and neonatal services and feedback their views and experiences to Somerset's Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the maternity services at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust.

We have a committee of volunteers consisting of women, birthing people and their families, community groups, charities and supporting organisations. Our Committee and staff work together to review and contribute to the development of local maternity and neonatal care.

- We exist to support the implementation of the NHS England [Better Births](#) and [three year delivery plan](#) across Somerset.
- We host focus groups on specific maternity themes, to build an accurate picture of people's experiences and needs.
- We listen to and gather feedback from communities across Somerset, especially those who have not been asked for their views and those who are under-served by services.
- We 'Walk the Patch' and do the '15 Steps' challenge within the local maternity units and hospitals, to check that the facilities and care meets the needs of the people using them.
- We attend local, regional and national events to network and ensure people's voices are always heard.
- We provide critical friendship and accountability to professionals within the NHS Trusts, Council and ICB, who are involved in maternity and neonatal care.

Have your say

We welcome everyone who would like to get involved in our work. If you or your partner are pregnant or had a baby in the last two years, share your feedback to help us design and develop care and services in Somerset.

➦ Have your say via our website: evolvingcommunities.co.uk/somerset-mvp/have-your-say

To find out about other ways you can get involved, please get in touch:

✉ somersetsmvp@evolvingcommunities.co.uk

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📌 @SomersetMVP



What is 15 Steps?

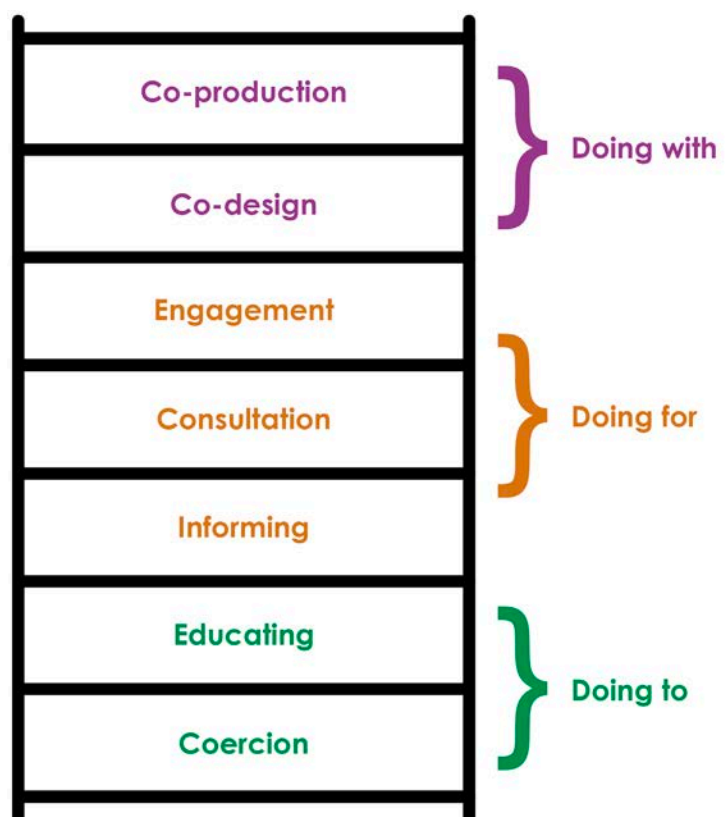
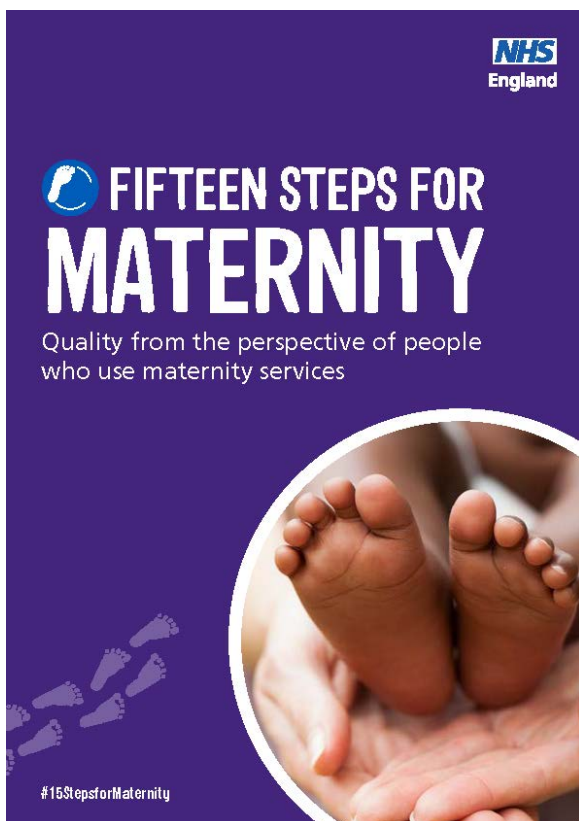
The **15 Steps** template is an NHS England toolkit that looks at improving the quality of services, usually in hospital settings, by bringing in ‘fresh eyes’ to visit, observe and spot things that staff might walk past.

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 visits in Somerset every year, with progress reviewed at regular Safety Walkabouts and Walk the Patch visits.



What we did

In early 2023, we visited Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital with groups of current and recent service users. We used the 15 Steps toolkit to explore the hospitals' maternity spaces and record their first impressions, to consider the general atmosphere of the hospitals, and to reflect on their interactions with staff.

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 'rate' each area out of five, and we discussed our recommendations for change and improvement.

At the end of our visits, we gave feedback to the leadership teams at each of the hospitals about our findings and our initial recommendations.

We created videos about our visits and posted these on our social media pages to encourage people who couldn't attend on the day to share their opinions.

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

The 15 Steps toolkit suggests four main themes for grouping feedback and recommendations, and we have added a fifth which reflects our values:

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



The 15 Steps group discussing findings

Our findings and recommendations



(Front centre, left to right) Donna Butland, Somerset MNVP Manager, and Laura Perry, Somerset MNVP Lead, with service users visiting Yeovil District Hospital

Yeovil District Hospital

Our visit

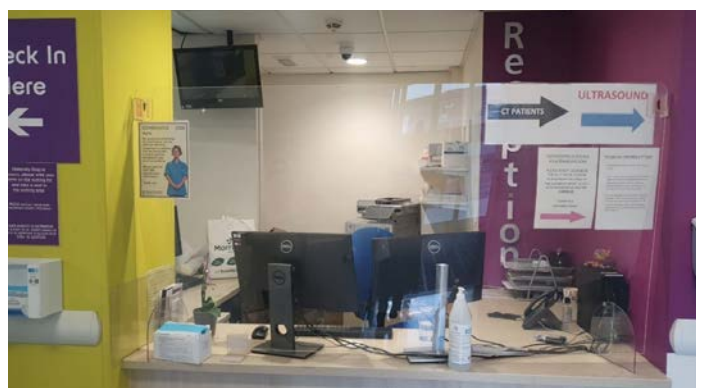
We visited Yeovil District Hospital on 10 February 2023. We split into small groups to explore the following areas:

- Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic (EPAC)
- Labour ward
- Antenatal clinic
- Reception areas
- Freya ward (postnatal)
- Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU)
- Day Care Assessment Unit (DCAU)
- Scanning clinic
- Sunflower room (bereavement space)



Yeovil Hospital

(credit: Wikimedia.org)



Main maternity reception

1. Welcoming and informative

We found the labour ward to be the most welcoming and informative space in the hospital. The 'Welcome' sign was in many languages; we weren't sure if the languages were relevant to the local area and nobody we asked knew either. Although there was no one sitting on reception, a staff member greeted us immediately. There were chairs for partners in the labour rooms.

The antenatal ward was welcoming but it wasn't clear where it was. It was called 'outpatients' on the sign, which we later discovered was because it was shared with gynaecology. If beds were in a seated position rather than lying flat it was felt that this would be more welcoming. We liked the floral skylight in the antenatal clinic, and all the spaces that let in natural light were very positive.

We liked the DCAU sign about the buzzer and the fact that it also had other languages on it.

There was a vending machine and a water cooler near the main reception desk, but this wasn't well signposted and the water cooler was out of order on the day of our visit.

We liked the QR codes so we could scan information, but we acknowledge that this might not be accessible for everyone.

There were lots of posters on the walls about how to feedback both for staff and service users including the MNVP and the Friends and Family Test. There was also information on community activities, research projects and infant feeding around the hospital. There was still lots of information around COVID-19 and social distancing regulations.

The notice boards are very informative, and it's clear that they are trying to listen to feedback from all sorts of stakeholders, like parents and hospital staff; it's clear they are trying to make improvements based on that.



Welcome sign on the labour ward

Having a reception immediately as you walk in the door is really welcoming.



Skylight in the antenatal clinic



Signs and buzzers outside DCAU

Recommendations

1. Make sure there is a clear and prominent sign outside the labour ward and all other areas so that people know they are in the right place.
2. Add pictures or images to areas, as well as signs, so that it is clear what things are.
3. Simplify the language used in hospitals – call things what they are.
4. Have information on active birthing positions in every room as standard.
5. Consider using a consistent and recognisable brand for maternity signage, preferably purple, to help people easily find their way to and from maternity areas within the hospital.
6. Consider adding a large welcoming multilingual sign to key areas.
7. Take down any COVID-19 information that is no longer relevant.

2. Safe and clean

All areas of the hospital were felt to be very clean, particularly the labour ward area. In the labour ward the doors were propped open, but the labour ward does get hot.

It's definitely clean in here.

In EPAC there was nobody on reception and nobody answered the buzzer. Bathrooms looked very clean. The beds were described as 'very clinical'. All areas were clean. Sometimes furniture or items were blocking other items. In one of the rooms on the labour ward, there was a stain on the bedsheets, and we noticed holes and other threadbare sheets in some of the other labour ward rooms.

It feels cluttered with lots of things in the corridor.

Handwashing was promoted throughout the hospital, particularly in SCBU. There were green posters around the hospital about confidentiality and there was a poster about chaperones but it was hidden by a Stop Smoking banner, so it would be good to have that more visible. There was information available about how the midwives could access Professional Midwifery Advocates.

There were people and stuff everywhere.

It feels like a disaster zone.

Proper sound proofing between the small rooms on labour ward. I was in Bluebell room (I think) and I could hear all of the confidential conversation happening next door about a lady in labour at 23 weeks and whether baby would survive.

Recommendation

1. Ensure that the necessary safety information is clearly displayed in easy to read terms and not hidden.



A day assessment space



One of our service users and a midwife

3. Friendly and personal

In the labour ward, some of the labour rooms felt very clinical and medicalised. It would be nice to display the names and pictures of the staff who are on shift in the labour ward, so that birthing people know who to ask for.

In the labour ward display cabinets, someone had taken the time to print out and frame positive feedback and baby photos from social media. There was some artwork in the labour ward which felt out of place, but people liked the water babies photos. The photos of other families in birthing pool room seemed dated and weren't liked by the group; a staff member told us the photos had been up for over 10 years.

The EPAC corridor was very busy. It was noted that EPAC feels very separate to maternity – it felt very clinical and 'medicalised' and that 'you are excluded from the maternity service', even though you are in early pregnancy and could be losing your baby. Staff throughout the maternity areas are clearly working hard and seemed happy working in their teams and speaking to families.

We really liked the signs in the labour ward that show the different staff who are working, so that people know who they may see and who they can ask for information or help.

(If) there were big signs with all the information on them, it would eliminate the need for lots of little homemade signs.

Having a separate area for scans when your pregnancy is high risk or outcome not likely to be positive. Nothing worse than being told your pregnancy is not viable as those sat next to you happily have their scan photos handed to them.

I really like the 'Here to help' sign, if I was lost that's where I would head to as I feel like I wouldn't be bothering someone by asking.

Recommendations

1. Ensure signage is up to date and clear.
2. Improve signage for the EPAC ward as it is currently very confusing.
3. Consider moving or making EPAC feel like a maternity space (for example, purple, consistent chairs, more information in the space).
4. Take down the photos of other families in the spaces and keep things more neutral.
5. Promote personalisation of birth/labour spaces.

4. Organised and calm

Some of the furniture and spaces were very full. The scanning area had equipment and furniture down one side of the space, which made the space feel messy and chaotic. It was felt that some of the items on display could have been put away.

In the antenatal clinic, it was felt that signs were put where they could fit rather than where they would work best or where was logical. As an example, there were posters about safe sleeping in the area where people go for a scan, which felt irrelevant as you wouldn't have had your baby at that time; these posters would have been more useful on the labour or postnatal ward.

Some of the spaces were very hot, including antenatal and the labour ward, even though we visited in February, and one woman told us she felt unwell because of the heat.

Freya ward felt calm, and people liked the thoughtful family-themed artwork there. We liked the pictures and artwork of trees and nature. There was also some other lovely artwork on the walls, which was appreciated. Though the artwork around the hospital felt a bit disorganised.

Lots of the information is outdated and posters are overlapping each other so you can't read them. It feels like it's been printed out and chucked up where there is space, even though being sat waiting for an appointment is a key place to capture people to read information.



Scanning clinic corridor

A few pictures on the (reception) wall would be nice.



Artwork in Freya ward corridor

Recommendations

1. Consider cupboards or cupboard doors on the labour ward, so that there isn't as much non-essential equipment or furniture on display.
2. Update posters and take down any posters that aren't relevant or make spaces look too busy or messy.
3. Consider consistency and relevancy of artwork and information in different spaces, make it less random and more relevant.
4. Replicate the positive signage/boards ('Who is working' sign).
5. Consider using a buzzer system in the antenatal or scanning spaces and consider a traffic light system for delays.
6. Remove items that are no longer relevant or not working, like the patient check-in desk.



A birthing room with pool



A labour room

If I was a new Dad and I was told to get from the hospital car park into the maternity unit I'd be struggling and looking very lost.

5. Accessible and inclusive

Overall it was felt that Yeovil Hospital struggled with accessibility and inclusion. We and the leadership team did recognise the limitations of the hospital space and work is ongoing to modernise the hospital buildings and spaces. So, we understand that much of the maternity building itself, such as size of rooms/space and layout, cannot be easily changed until the hospital development progresses.

In the labour ward there were grab rails in most rooms, some of the rooms were a very good size but some are much smaller. There were some tight corners and some rooms were nearly totally inaccessible due to being full of furniture.

In the scanning department there was not enough chairs or space and people had to stand. Chairs with arms may not suit people with larger bodies. The chairs for partners could pull out and recline and this was felt to be a really great addition.

There was no provision for if people had to bring their children with them. There was a quiet room labelled 'Nursery' which was a lovely space but didn't have a clear use so it was confusing as to what the room's purpose was. Staff told us it was used for whatever was needed, and is often used for breastfeeding support. The bathrooms were spacious and mostly accessible.

Recommendations

1. Add information in more languages/Easy Read/infographics.
2. Improve diversity of images used, for example, in posters and displays.
3. Make signage clearer.
4. Consider accessibility needs where possible in all rooms and spaces, for example, grab rails, ramps, accessible furniture, chairs without arms.
5. Consider that children may need to be brought into hospital and how they can be accommodated to help the parents have a better experience at hospital.
6. Have clear uses for rooms and spaces even if things have a dual purpose and make this clear to people attending the hospital.
7. Consider service users with sight or hearing loss and how they might access information and services.

Notes on the Sunflower room (bereavement space)

During our visit, we visited the Sunflower room. This room needs modernising and updating and we are working with the local charity Towards Tomorrow Together and the lead Bereavement Midwife to improve this space.

Maybe there is a way to make it be more neutral furniture in here, I can imagine that the kids' chairs might be a very difficult thing to see if someone is receiving sad news.

Recommendations

1. Frosted glass covering on the window for privacy
2. Some sunflower wall art
3. Refresh paint
4. Possibly hiding wires/call bells
5. Matching furniture
6. Better lighting
7. Moving and/or changing the children's items
8. Making it a more personal and homely environment.

Musgrove Park Hospital

Our visit

On 10 March 2023 we visited Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton. We split into groups and between us we explored the following areas:

- Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic (EPAC)
- Labour ward
- Antenatal clinic
- Reception areas
- Fern ward (Postnatal)
- Special/Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (SNICU)
- Willow ward (Antenatal)
- Scanning clinic
- Bereavement spaces
- Transitional care
- Bracken Birth Centre



(credit: Wikimedia.org)

Musgrove Park Hospital

We also visited the Mary Stanley Birth Centre at Bridgwater Community Hospital on 20 July 2023.



Donna Butland, Somerset MNVP Manager (back centre) and Laura Perry, Somerset MNVP Lead, (front centre) with service users visiting Musgrove Park Hospital

1. Welcoming and informative

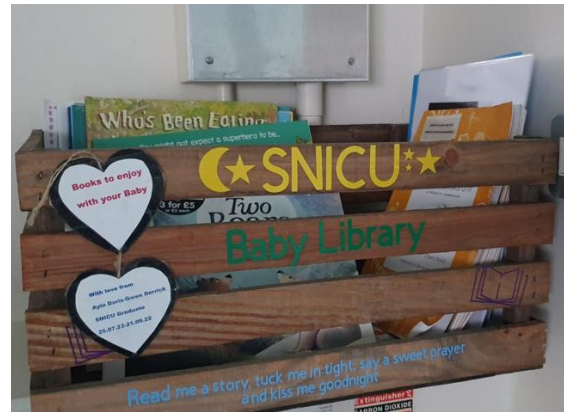
The SNICU was really welcoming and informative, and the staff were very warm towards us. We couldn't find any signage from the outside car park (Q-Park) to the SNICU and the layout of the hospital made this confusing. A member of our team had stayed in the parents' room overnight and told us that the quality of mattresses could be improved and the space felt quite clinical. This parent room could be made to feel more homely and colours may help to achieve this. The SNICU space is quite small compared to the amount of equipment that is needed in there. There were lots of resources available and a 'help yourself' station for parents.

Maternity reception staff were friendly and helpful, but the main maternity reception space is uninviting and uninspiring. Changing the bench seating and adding some nature-themed artwork or a larger multi-lingual welcome sign would really improve the feel of the space and change visitors' first impressions. Useful leaflets had been tucked behind chairs and a wheelchair had been parked awkwardly near the doorway.

Outside spaces would feel more welcoming if they were cleaned, tidied, and improved. The entrance to the maternity unit from the outside is grubby and needs some fresh paint and art. We liked the purple signage as it was felt that this was strongly associated with maternity spaces. Our group were told that the check-in machine was no longer in use and needed to be removed.

We weren't able to look inside the rooms on the labour ward on the day of our visit as they were in use. There were two rooms that didn't have shower or bath facilities. The spaces that we did see on labour ward felt very clinical and medicalised. There was a lot of medical equipment in corridors, corners and on the floor of some rooms.

It's good that there is a quiet room in antenatal clinic, this space feels light bright and airy.



A baby library for parents in SNICU

It would be lovely to have some colourful artwork, something that looks quite natural and inviting in antenatal clinic as well as in reception.



A scanning room



A labour room with birth pool

The EPAC was very daunting and unwelcoming. We appreciated this was a difficult area to improve but it is very far from the maternity unit and this contributed to feelings about early pregnancy being separated from the whole maternity journey. There was a small window for the EPAC reception but it was covered up, presumably for privacy. It is a very small space and the scanning rooms are also small.

There was still information about COVID-19 around many of the spaces, like social distancing markers on the floor. Some of the COVID-19 posters had some stark statistics on them. Our group wondered if this information was still relevant and thought that for some people it might be a difficult reminder of the pandemic. In some areas there were several posters about domestic violence that some of our group found to be too much because although the information was useful, the images and language were distressing. We also found several posters that contained out of date information.

Recommendations

1. Improve facilities and spaces for parents to stay overnight when their baby is in SNICU/ Transitional care (for example, mattresses).
2. Update posters to ensure information is relevant and current, including taking down Covid information.
3. Improve signage from the car parks to maternity spaces (keeping a consistent purple colour scheme).
4. Clean, tidy and improve the entrances to the maternity spaces to make them more welcoming for families.
5. Add some nature-themed artwork or a multi-lingual welcome to the main maternity entrance.
6. Rooms should promote active birth wherever possible despite space limitations, for example, with birth support ropes and adding pictures of active birth positions in all labour rooms, (including Bracken).
7. Add more colour and more artwork to white, clinical spaces to make them feel more inviting (like Bracken).

2. Safe and clean

The vast majority of the spaces that we saw in the hospital felt very clean.

There are some spaces for parents to stay if their baby is in SNICU or Transitional Care; in the bathrooms, there was some mould in the showers. In some other bathrooms there were cleaning schedules on the door that were partially completed, so we were unsure whether the bathrooms had been cleaned or if the paperwork hadn't been completed.



A bathroom

In the antenatal clinic the samples box was unlocked, so there could be a risk to confidentiality or a results mix-up. There were building and decorating supplies on the top of the lockers in the clinic on the day of our visit.

Recommendations

1. Keep cleaning inspection paperwork up-to-date.
2. Consider modernising some of the bathrooms that are very out-of-date.

3. Friendly and personal

In one of the parents' kitchens we found that the table had been removed; we felt it would be useful to reinstate it. In the scanning clinic it would be good to have a vending machine close by in case women/birthing people are asked to have a sugary drink to get their baby moving or if they wanted a snack. Various tea trolleys around the maternity area were a lovely touch.

There was plenty of information around the hospital about how to give feedback and what they had done with that feedback, in the form of 'You said, we did' posters. It is clear that the hospital teams are receptive to feedback from families in order to make improvements, which is excellent.

Many of the areas also had pictures displayed of key people, like the Maternity Safety Champions and teams in different areas. In places where they didn't have photos, they had names of the team, for example the sonographers on the doors in maternity ultrasound.

One group were shown information by a staff member that explained that parents with a baby in the neonatal unit were entitled to free parking, which was thought to be a brilliant and useful initiative to take some stress away from parents.

In EPAC, there were some posters that our group found upsetting as some of the posters presumed a miscarriage or had some stark statistics on them.

We much preferred the newer wooden-style cots compared to the previous plastic cots for babies. There were some lovely displays around babywearing and stopping smoking in the antenatal clinic but they couldn't be seen clearly by most of the seats.

Some areas felt dark and depressing, It would be good to try and get more natural light into the hospital spaces.



Scanning clinic corridor

It's nice that they have a big screen in front of you to see your baby when having your scan and the rooms are big and laid-out well.

Recommendations

1. Think about the suitability of posters and privacy in the EPAC space.
2. Air conditioning would improve the environment for both staff and service users.
3. Improve lighting in dark areas - pictured skylights would help and reduce stress for people being transferred around the unit.
4. Locate a vending machine near to the scanning clinic.



A parent room in Transitional Care

Going down that (maternity) corridor to get to labour ward is quite frightening. It looks very surgical and like a sci-fi film and I speak from experience that it didn't help my panicking when I was wheeled down there in labour.

4. Organised and calm

There were some great facilities and information in SNICU and the area was made to feel calm by the staff.

Sometimes information was too busy to be taken in, with lots of different messages and information boards put in awkward places, like behind doors for example. Some information boards around the different spaces were empty and others had lots of information on them, but with fonts that were too small to read properly.

There was a corridor in maternity that was used for storage of equipment and spare beds; we felt it could be overwhelming if you were taken down that corridor during a labour emergency. Also, if staff need to get to Bracken Birth Centre, they will run through the scan corridor which could feel worrying for the people waiting in the corridor for their ultrasounds.

The quiet room in antenatal would benefit from some calming colours or artwork.

Recommendations

1. Consider adding cupboards and shelves for storage of equipment.
2. Remove any equipment or items that are no longer needed to help declutter spaces.
3. Simplify and declutter information displays to help create a feeling of calm.
4. Consider some calming artwork in the maternity entrance spaces and through the antenatal clinic.
5. Try and ensure that information boards are populated with clear, easy-to-read information and accessible for people to read them (for instance, not behind doors).

5. Accessible and inclusive

There was some signage confusion around the terms 'labour ward' and 'delivery suite', including on buzzers and the direction signs.

The first thing my eyes are drawn to (on the labour ward) are the broken lights and hazard tape.

Many of the posters dotted around the hospital had lots of writing on and were only in English and text. This makes information less accessible for service users. There were some small signs in multiple languages that welcomed people to the maternity unit and we really liked these - it would be great to have them bigger and with larger fonts so they are more visible and welcoming. We couldn't see find many examples of information or leaflets in multiple languages.

Navigating around the hospital was often challenging. There is a need for more purple signage outside so it is clearer where maternity ultrasound and Bracken Birth Centre are. It was felt that the hospital spaces would be very difficult to cope with if you were hard of hearing, short-sighted or blind, or needed any mobility aids such as wheelchairs. The bright, clinical lights and some jarring noises (such as buzzers) may also be difficult for service users with sensory difficulties.

We saw some examples of inclusive language and some different skin tones, but this could be improved and be made standard. Some good examples of inclusion were pictures of dads with babies and some surrogacy information. The information we could see around the hospital usually referred to 'mum.'

The call cords in some of the bathrooms are confusing, which could be a safety concern.

Recommendations

1. Try to improve the limited EPAC space there is currently.
2. Use clear and consistent signs and language for the labour ward/delivery suite (purple signage preferred).
3. Make it clear that ultrasound scanning is in a new location and have directional signs from the car park.
4. Use easy-to-read posters and information displays in the hospital, with simple language and pictures and images.
5. Add information in other languages to posters and signs.
6. Improve diversity of images displayed; use different skin tones and family types.
7. Improve access for people with disabilities, including those with sight and hearing impairments as well as physical disabilities.

Notes on the bereavement room

We really liked the resources and facilities available in the bereavement room. We talked with the hospital leadership team about how this room needs modernising and updating and we will be working with the local charity Towards Tomorrow Together and the Lead Bereavement Midwife to improve this space.

Recommendations

1. Let natural light in where possible but also ensure privacy
2. Change the wall art
3. Consider the best use of the space
4. Refresh paint
5. Moving and/or changing the furniture, including matching furniture
6. Better lighting/dimmer switches
7. Making it a more personal and homely environment
8. Consider soundproofing.

Notes on the Bracken Birth Centre

Improvements could be made to create a nicer approach to the Bracken Birthing Centre, including more signage from the car park, fresh paint, and removing moss and weeds from outside areas.

It was felt that all the displays in Bracken were lovely and people really liked the use of the colour green as well as imagery of nature in the space. The information boards were colourful and interesting and it felt like a much more personal and homely space than in the other parts of maternity. The waiting room would be a lovely space for some more birth/nature themed artwork or a mural. A staff member has suggested some promotion of the MNVP and birth stories at Bracken where there is space on displays. More diversity of imagery would be good, as well as skin tones of the dolls in Bracken.

The rooms we visited were clean and struck a good balance between being relaxing but also having photos or information to look at. It would be good to have pictures of active birth positions and maybe some affirmations in each room to encourage positive birth hormones.

The bathrooms were clean but had showers over bathtubs which could be difficult for the postnatal period. The toilets and bathrooms should be wheelchair accessible but they are not.

The staff room is very small which must be difficult for those on shift to get restful breaks.



Display of 2023 births at Bracken

It's clear that the team in Bracken takes pride in the way they treat people so are much more likely to be helpful and approachable.

Recommendations

1. Put up some affirmations and/or active birth positions in the labour rooms.
2. Put equipment that isn't needed or used frequently in other rooms to make spaces feel tidier.
3. Consider accessibility for birthing people with audio or visual impairments as well as physical disabilities.
4. Make sure that information that's displayed on boards is clear and easy-to-read in a large font.
5. Consider putting some of the information in a booklet or brochure for people to read if they want more information rather than having too much on display boards.
6. Improve diversity of images on display boards and skin tones of dolls where possible.
7. Consider painting and clearing outdoor spaces that are looking tired and overgrown.

Notes on the Mary Stanley Birth Centre in Bridgwater

We felt that the space was quite clinical and impersonal for a birth centre. Staff were warm and friendly. The spaces were very clean. One of the rooms was being used for clinics rather than as a birthing space and this meant that the space felt jumbled with chairs and equipment. We appreciated the little details, like the lights and diffuser for aromatherapy. We waited a while to be let in, and we looked at the information outside as we waited. There were a lot of out-of-date posters, brochures, and boards both inside and outside the unit, which could be updated and improved. There was information available about PALS and the MNVP. It was thought that perhaps there could be a better set-up as a clinic room but space is an issue here.



Birth pool at Mary Stanley

The seating was comfortable, but most seats were fabric so they are difficult to clean for infection control. Accessibility is poor as it's a small unit, and there was a lack of inclusive information, for example, Braille. It was felt that the space could be much more welcoming with some artwork or murals. Some of the posters and equipment in the room felt quite alarming, with large red fonts about emergencies and Newborn Life Support posters by the birthing pools. It was felt that this could be panic inducing for prospective parents. We talked to staff about the possibility of making the area feel more personal with pictures and birth affirmations, as well as producing different display boards.

It would be good if there was a separate room for postpartum women and birthing people that isn't a birth space/room due to trauma.

Recommendations

1. Try to make the environment feel more calming and natural by adding pictures, artwork, murals (for example, flowers, vines, tree imagery) and skylights/lighting.
2. Make sure seating is compliant with infection control and is comfortable for partners (reclining chairs).
3. Make sure information displayed on boards is clear and easy-to-read in a large font.
4. Consider putting some of the information in a booklet or brochure for people to read if they want more information rather than having too much on display boards.
5. Move the National Cleaning Standards and Complaints information from the entrance and make the outside display board more personal (for example, pictures of staff, a welcome to the space, babies born here display).
6. Move/change any alarming information next to the spaces that birthing people will see (for example, the cord prolapse box and the Newborn Life Support posters).
7. Update the information in the unit such as posters and brochures and consider using QR codes.
8. Put up some affirmations and/or active birth positions in the labour rooms.
9. Put equipment that isn't needed or used frequently in other rooms to make spaces feel tidier.
10. Consider accessibility for birthing people with audio or visual impairments as well as physical disabilities.

Next steps

We will publish this report and share our findings and recommendations with hospital leaders and decision makers, with our partners and stakeholders working in maternity and neonatal care, and with the public, via our website, social media and community networks.

We will carry out the 15 Steps for maternity and neonatal visits again in early 2024 and we will regularly check progress of NHS Somerset Foundation Trust against our recommendations, including through Safety Walkabouts.

Stakeholder response

Alison Dennett
Head of Midwifery
Somerset NHS Foundation Trust



We have welcomed the team visiting our maternity units in Somerset and value the '15 Steps' feedback. Continuing to work together with the Somerset MNVP team, enables us to reach out to our women, birthing people and families in a way that we would not accomplish alone. We will be working to achieve the recommendations from the feedback highlighted in this report, and look forward to sharing our progress with the team.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who made the 15 Steps for maternity and neonatal visits 2023 possible. We appreciate all your support, time and effort in working with us on this project. Thank you to the staff, the service users, the MNVP representatives and the Maternity and Neonatal Leadership teams.

Appendix

Additional service user comments about Musgrove Hospital

“It’s very hot and there’s little natural light...”

“I feel sorry for the staff that work in these spaces.”

“The SNICU is spectacular and a wonderful space to be in at a difficult time.”

“There is a lack of toilets and shower facilities especially on Fern ward and it’s very hot. Willow ward felt run down and there is no privacy. All very outdated with little storage for equipment. It’s a shame it’s not like the Mary Stanley in Bridgwater.”

“There are corridors full of equipment as there is no proper place to store it and no facilities for partners to use either when they stay overnight.”

“The room I was in on labour ward was lovely. There was air con, it was modern, clean and good facilities. Fern ward however is tired, boiling hot and not fit for purpose, especially for twins even though they gave me the biggest bay they had. The staff were lovely though and I felt well looked after.”

“There is nowhere to take yourself or your baby for some quiet.”

“The environments of both Mary Stanley and Bracken are lovely and relaxing and I believe they make a huge difference to your birth.”







“The wards are so hot and stuffy I’ve insisted on going home before I should have after both of my births because I was getting migraines. Genuinely unbearable heat and can’t get a breath. I’ve also missed out on a water birth both times because there just aren’t enough and they’ve not been able to get one ready for me quick enough. Staff are fantastic, so it’s a shame not to have better facilities, for them as well as patients.”

“I had twins and it was such a struggle to fit in the bay. There are lots of women who have twins and no provisions in place for it at all! And the heat was horrific!”

“Yeovil’s layout is much better.”

“No matter how run down the facilities it’s the people working in them that matter the most. I hope if you can improve the environment you can retain the lovely staff ethos and attract more nice people to work there too.”

Contact us

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If you need this report in an alternative format, please contact us.

Share your views with us

Tell us about your experience with a maternity service, good or bad, and share your feedback. Somerset MNVP is here for you.

Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch.

