

## **St Mary's Birth Centre – Update and Next Steps**

This update explains what is happening with St Mary's Birth Centre, why services were paused, and what needs to happen next. We will also want to hear from people affected by the pause since July 2025 to help shape the best way forward.

### **Background**

In 2021, following the Building Better Hospitals for the Future public consultation, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) decided, based on feedback from people across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, that births at St Mary's Birth Centre would relocate to a new standalone midwifery-led unit at Leicester General Hospital as part of the national New Hospitals Programme. That decision remains in place, and Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Integrated Care Board (ICB), together with University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL), are committed to delivering it as far as possible within current national programme priorities and funding, ensuring services are safe, sustainable, and equitable.

CCGs were replaced by Integrated Care Boards in 2022, meaning it is now the LLR ICB which is leading work with University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust on the next steps following the pause of services in July 2025. While the outcome of the previous consultation remains the agreed direction of travel, the current pause was introduced due to safety concerns, and we are now assessing the impact of the pause and considering how best to deliver safe, equitable, and sustainable maternity services before any final decisions are made.

### **Current position**

The reasons for relocating St Mary's Birth Centre (SMBC) which formed part of the public consultation remain and challenges at the centre have increased since 2021:

- Safety concerns have increased as staffing pressures have worsened alongside very low birth numbers. These factors significantly compromise the ability to provide consistently safe care for mothers and babies if birth services and inpatient care continue at SMBC.
- Birth activity has fallen further, with only one or two births a week in 2024/25, making it increasingly difficult to maintain safe clinical standards.
- SMBC location in Melton Mowbray means the service is not easily accessible for many families across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This raises concerns about fairness and equity, as resources should benefit all communities.
- Financial pressures have grown, with high fixed costs and reliance on temporary staff making the service even less sustainable. Before the pause, the centre cost around £1 million annually while averaging fewer than two births per week. We have a duty to ensure resources are used effectively.

Only 92 births, less than 1% of all births in LLR, took place at St Mary's Birth Centre in the year prior to the pause in July 2025, which is far below the level needed for a standalone unit to remain clinically viable. National reviews, including NHS England's maternity safety reports and [BirthRate Plus workforce planning guidance](#), highlight that very low activity

makes it difficult to maintain staff competencies, provide 24/7 cover, and deliver safe, efficient care. Low volumes also increase reliance on temporary staff and raise sustainability concerns, meaning the service cannot operate to the standards expected for mothers and babies.

These challenges are not new and were highlighted during the 2021 consultation and have worsened since then.

Equity was a key concern in 2021 and remains so today. The long-term ambition of all health and care organisations in LLR is to make services more accessible to a greater number of women across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, particularly those with higher health needs who face barriers such as transport, language and cultural differences.

Maintaining the birth service and inpatient care at St Mary's Birth Centre poses an unacceptable risk to the safety of mothers and babies. More women are presenting with complex needs that require closer obstetric or neonatal support, meaning fewer are eligible to use standalone midwifery units like St Mary's.

Since 2021, national changes to the New Hospitals Programme have delayed construction of the new maternity hospital planned for Leicester Royal Infirmary (LRI). As a result, maternity services have not moved from Leicester General Hospital (LGH) to LRI as originally intended.

These changes also mean the previously proposed standalone maternity unit can no longer be implemented. With no capital funding for a new freestanding unit, the presence of a well-established Midwifery Led Unit at LGH, and national policy emphasising evidence-based, resource-efficient models, progressing with the original plan is essential. This will ensure safe, high-quality, and equitable care while making the best use of NHS resources.

Families will continue to have options, including home birth, midwife-led care at Leicester General Hospital and Leicester Royal Infirmary, with consultant-led care available whenever it is clinically required.

### **What happens next**

As described since the consultation, the situation at St Mary's Birth Centre has worsened with fewer births and ongoing staffing challenges. While the decision following public consultation still stands, a new standalone unit cannot be delivered under current national funding constraints. Services remain paused, so we now need to confirm how to implement the 2021 decision as far as possible and in a safe, sustainable and fair way.

Legal advice sought supports the recommendation to move services to the existing midwifery-led unit at Leicester General Hospital. This approach would follow the outcome of the Building Better Hospitals for the Future public consultation in 2021 as closely as possible and make sure maternity services are fair and safe for everyone. This would help maintain clinical expertise, improve access for families across LLR and make best use of NHS resources.

## **Our approach**

We plan to relocate births to the existing midwifery-led unit at Leicester General Hospital. As births would no longer take place at St Mary's Birth Centre this would also mean provision of inpatient postnatal care would cease.

Other community-based services in Melton will remain unchanged, including antenatal and postnatal clinics, home visits and infant feeding support, ensuring continuity of care for families in the area.

Women and birthing people will continue to have a choice of safe, high-quality maternity services across LLR, including:

- Midwife-led units at Leicester Royal Infirmary and Leicester General Hospital
- Consultant-led delivery suites at Leicester Royal Infirmary and Leicester General Hospital
- Home Birth Team, made up of experienced midwives passionate about supporting safe and positive home births.

Relocating births to Leicester General Hospital offers:

- Improved safety by consolidating services
- Improving workforce resilience
- Better use of NHS resources to deliver safe, high-quality care

Detailed staffing plans will be developed collaboratively to ensure any changes are implemented safely and effectively, with a focus on maintaining high standards of care. Any workforce adjustments will be carefully considered, proportionate, and aligned to service demand and clinical safety requirements

## **Why this matters**

This approach makes services fairer and more accessible for those facing the greatest barriers, while maintaining choice for all families. It strengthens the midwife-led unit at Leicester General Hospital, to offer more women greater choice in maternity care, retains consultant-led care at both hospitals, and ensures resources are used effectively to deliver safe, high-quality care.

The plan aligns with national priorities for maternity care by:

- Delivering safer care through stronger clinical support
- Reducing inequalities by making services more accessible across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
- Supporting workforce sustainability by improving staffing resilience and maintaining essential skills

Equity remains central to this plan, ensuring that maternity care is fair and inclusive for every community. Our priority is safe, sustainable maternity care for all families, while honouring the consultation outcome as far as possible.

## Have your say

We are sorry this work is extending beyond the originally indicated six months pause but we hope you appreciate the importance of ensuring all perspectives are considered before arriving at a final long-term decision.

Before we move forward, we want to understand what the pause at St Mary's Birth Centre has meant for women and birthing people, their families, and staff who were directly affected. These experiences will help us make sure the next steps are clear, fair, and informed by those most impacted.

We want to hear from:

- Those who were planning or considering giving birth at St Mary's Birth Centre between July 2025 and September 2026 but were (or are) unable to do so because of the pause
- Family members or carers of these individuals
- Staff who worked at St Mary's Birth Centre before the pause in service
- Staff and students working in the maternity services at LLR

Working with partners and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP), the ICB will be contacting people directly to attend focus groups over the coming weeks.

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch about taking part in the focus groups, please email: [llricb-llr.beinvolved@nhs.net](mailto:llricb-llr.beinvolved@nhs.net)

The link to an online questionnaire can be found on our website: [www.bit.ly/smbc-impact](http://www.bit.ly/smbc-impact)