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Health Board

Your ref/eich
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Our ref/ein
cyf: AW/KB
Date/Dyddiad: 14 March 2013
Tel/ffôn: 01443 744803
Fax/ffacs: 01443 744800
Email/ebost: Allison.Williams4@wales.nhs.uk
Dept/adran: Chair & Chief Executive

Mr William Powell AC
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Powell,

Re: Tair Afon Birth Centre

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd January 2013 in relation to the Tair Afon Birth Centre. I am now in a position to update you on the outcome of the review referred to in my letter to you dated 23rd November 2012, explaining the decision that has been reached by the Board and supported by the Community Health Council at its meeting on 22nd February.

As you are aware, the Tair Afon Birth Centre was planned to move from Aberdare Hospital to the new build within Ysbyty Cwm Cynon when it opened in April 2012. However due to the low number of women accessing this service over a number of years, a decision was taken to relocate the Birth Centre on a temporary basis to Prince Charles Hospital. This has provided us with the opportunity to review the service and how it may best be provided to ensure as many women as possible have an opportunity to access a low risk birthing experience.

Birth Centre births have been shown to be a safe option for maternity care for women, however the research acknowledges that a number of women will develop complications during pregnancy or labour which necessitates transfer to an obstetric facility (National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit November 2011).

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Chief Executive/Prif Weithredydd: Mrs Allison Williams

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2012. Overall, women were suitable to give birth in a birth centre. There are strict rules governing which women are suitable to give birth in a birth centre. In the Cynon Valley only 50% of pregnant women meet these criteria. Despite efforts to increase the number of women who are able to use the birth centre, there were on average only 160 births a year in Tair Afon birth centre when located in Aberdare. This represented only half the women who initially planned to give birth in Tair Afon, as the remaining women developed a complication during pregnancy or labour that required their transfer to the obstetric led service.

In addition, a longer analysis of the women who, whilst they were suitable to have care in the birth centre in Aberdare, preferred instead to give birth in the maternity unit in Prince Charles Hospital as they felt more confident with having obstetric medical staff and services on site, should a complication arise.

On the closure of Aberdare Hospital in April 2012, the birth centre, (maintaining the name Tair Afon) was relocated to a designated area, adjacent but separate to the existing maternity unit in Prince Charles Hospital. Care in labour has continued to be provided by the birth centre midwives from Cynon Valley and the service has remained an option for the women from this area, in the same way that it was formerly provided.

An evaluation was undertaken of the transfer of service which involved

- An analysis of the activity in Tair Afon
- The views of women who have used the service
- The views of midwives providing birth centre care
- Other observations regarding provision of care

The evaluation of women's views regarding the temporary relocation of the birth centre was undertaken over a six month period, May to October

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2012. Overall, women were satisfied with the care they received in the birth centre and all said that they would choose birth centre care again. Further information gathered from the qualitative aspect of the evaluation showed that most women who had previously given birth in the birth centre in Aberdare felt the service in Prince Charles was equal to or slightly better to that they had previously experienced, even where they felt that the travelling was further than they would have liked. What was important to all women was the option of having a birth centre with its associated philosophy of care rather than the actual location.

In addition, a longer analysis of the usage of the birth centre was able to be completed which includes information from May 2012 to the end of December. This confirms that more women from the Cynon Valley wanted to give birth in the birth centre in Prince Charles Hospital than during the same time period the previous year with the actual number of births for women who commenced labour in the Birth Centre showing an increase from 71% to 86%. Transfer rates from midwifery-led to obstetric-led care in the antenatal period and during labour showed a slight increase, but this is a finding recognised with 'Alongside' Birth Centre's, which attract more women due to the ease of transfer should the need arise.

There was a slight increase in women choosing to have a home birth during the above time frame, (this is always an option for women within our Health Board), which may be attributable to women wishing to give birth in their own locality. This supports the choice agenda and the additional aim to increase the home birth rate.

Key messages from the evaluation are

- The relocation of the birth centre to PCH has meant a higher usage of facilities as the number of Cynon Valley women choosing this option has increased.

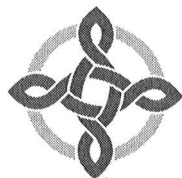
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- All women who responded in the questionnaire confirmed that the option of having a birth centre was important to them.
- The location of the birth centre was of lesser importance than a birth centre *per-se* to most women, although views for both location at PCH and YCC were expressed. Midwives also felt that what was important was to be able to provide birth centre care to women, irrespective of where it was located.
- Some women reported travel to PCH as a negative comment, but this was balanced by the acknowledged speed of transfer achieved to obstetric care, should complications arise.
- The birth pool was an important issue for women, and most women wanted to use the pool during labour, if not for birth.

It is also important to recognise that historically, women from other localities have not generally chosen to use Tair Afon Birth Centre with the location in the Cynon Valley. However, it is anticipated that should the birth centre remain in Prince Charles Hospital, it will be a popular choice for women from the Merthyr area, and this view has already been expressed.

The information from the evaluation was considered by the Local Health Board and a decision made to support the continuation of the alongside birth centre at Prince Charles Hospital. This will assist the aim of increasing the number of women using a birth centre as we have found that more women are confident to choose an alongside midwifery unit when the risk is removed of delay of transfer should this become necessary. Increasing the number of women using the birth centre is in line with the All Wales Service Redesign Plan and will also enable women from Merthyr Tydfil to make use of the facility, offering equity of choices for place of birth.

With the relocation of Tair Afon Birth Centre to Prince Charles Hospital, we remain committed to ensuring women continue to have access to

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local midwifery services and plan to develop a model of midwifery care which will be provided in Ysybty Cwm Cynon by the local community midwifery team. Antenatal and community services will continue to be provided from Ysbyty Cwm Cynon where a dedicated midwifery area will be retained.

This proposal was considered by Cwm Taf Community Health Council at its Service Planning Committee in January and by the Full Council at its meeting in February and was fully supported.

A presentation will be given to the LHB's Public fora being held in the Cynon Valley on March 13th and Merthyr Tydfil on March 21st.

I hope that my reply will assist the Committee.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Mrs Allison Williams
Chief Executive/Prif Weithredydd
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