



Let's Talk... Maternity

Engagement Summary

March 2023

healthwatch
Rutland

1. Introduction

Healthwatch Rutland's 'Let's Talk' series of public engagement has been looking at people's experiences of healthcare since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report summarises what attendees of an Oakham-based baby and toddler group have told us about their recent experiences of maternity services.

2. Background

Nationally, there has recently been considerable attention given to failures in maternity services. The Ockendon Reports 1 (2020) and 2 (2022)¹ looking at mothers' and babies' deaths at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust between 2000 and 2019, have prompted a nationwide review of NHS maternity services. The NHS has also included maternity services within its Core20PLUS5 programme to address health inequalities².

During COVID-19 restrictions, women were unable to have someone supporting them during face-to face appointments, including scans, and during labour. Some aspects of maternity and post-natal care were delivered online or by phone in order to limit the spread of COVID-19. Pregnant and unvaccinated, or not fully vaccinated, women are more at risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19 (Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 2023)³.

In 2021 there were 274 births to Rutland women recorded, compared with 4,172 in Leicester City and 6,794 in Leicestershire⁴. This could mean there is a risk of the voices of Rutland mothers being lost when considered in the area covered by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Integrated

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-ockenden-review/ockenden-review-summary-of-findings-conclusions-and-essential-actions>

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/core20plus5/>

³ <https://www.rcog.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-women-s-health/coronavirus-covid-19-infection-in-pregnancy/coronavirus-covid-19-infection-and-pregnancy-faqs/>

⁴

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/birthsummarytables>

Care System. There has also been little historical representation from Rutland women within the LLR Maternity Voices Partnership, which is currently being restructured.

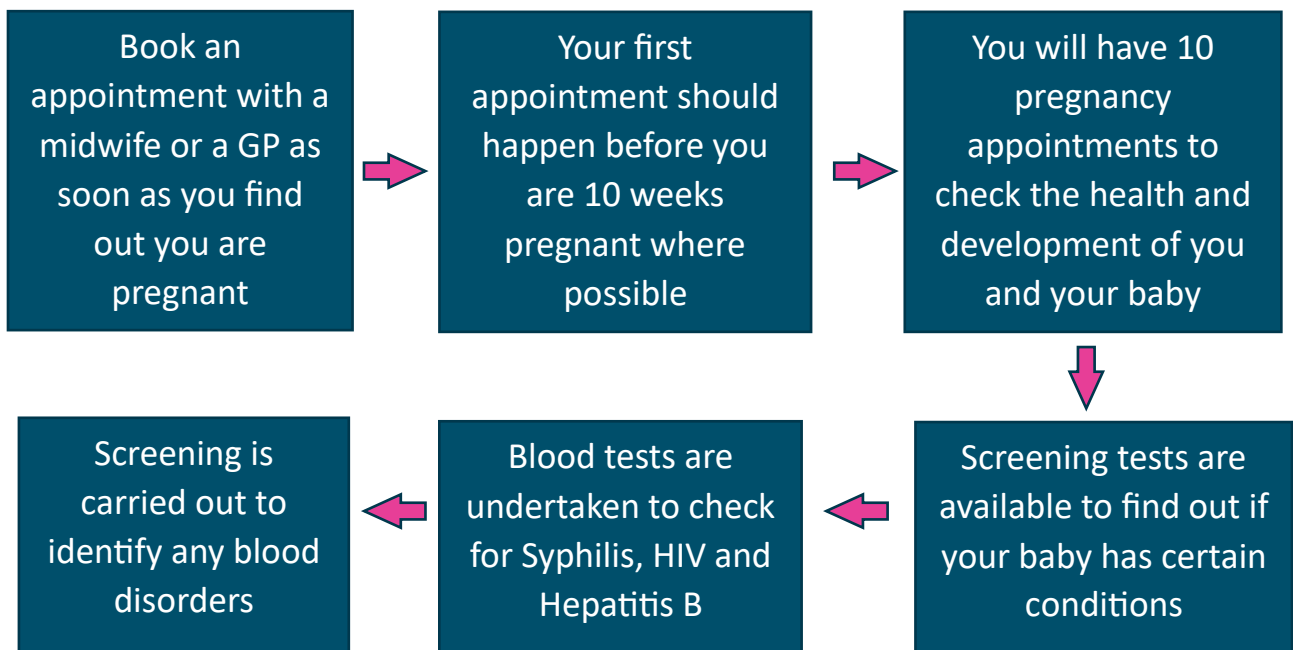
Rutland women can access their care and support at many places and the following sites were mentioned during this engagement:



Kendrew Barracks Medical Centre, Rutland Memorial Hospital, Peterborough City Hospital, Leicester Royal Infirmary, Leicester General Hospital, St Mary's Hospital, Melton, Oakham Medical Practice, Nottingham, and [Visions Children Centre in Oakham](#). There are no birthing facilities in Rutland.

The NHS Pregnancy Journey

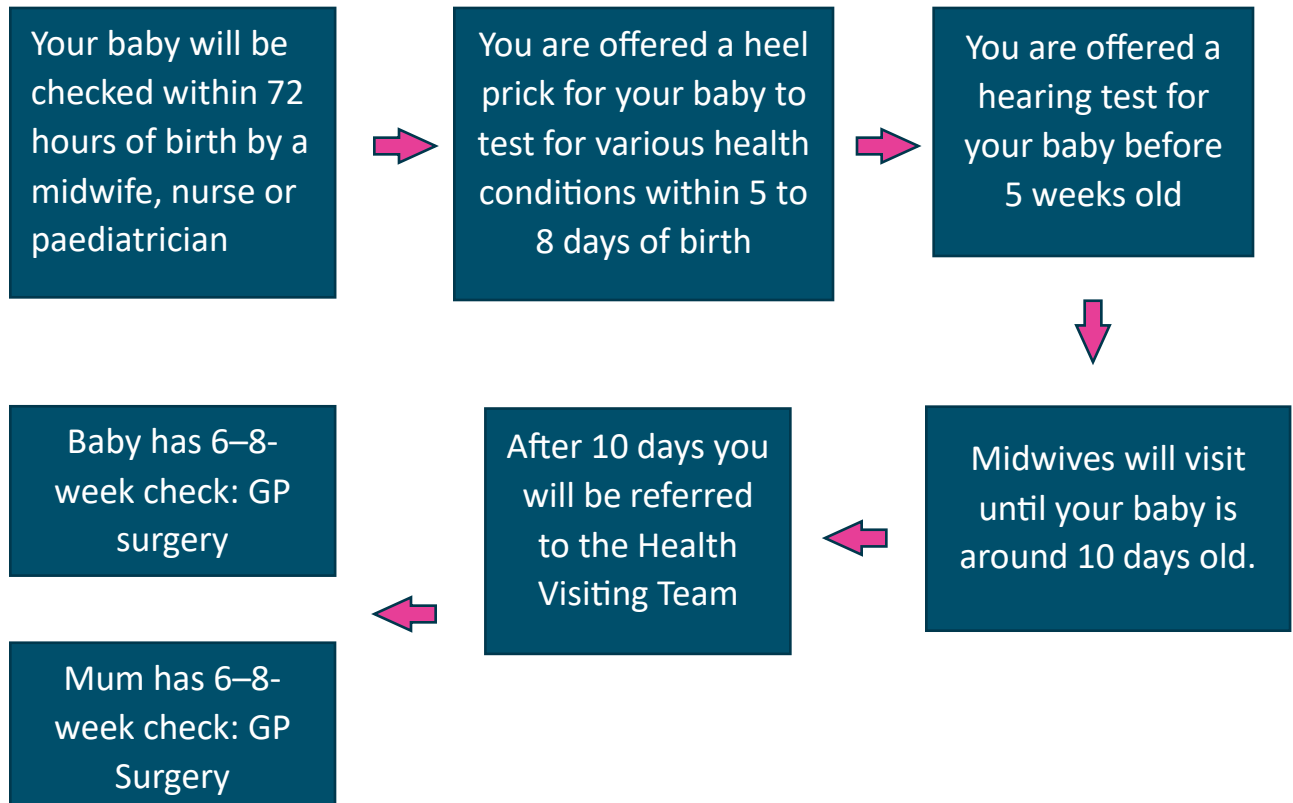
Women, especially first-time mothers, might be unsure about what to expect from their journey through pregnancy, birth and parenthood. Below is a diagram of the pregnancy journey indicated by the NHS for the care of first-time mothers who do not have additional complications⁵:



⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/finding-out/your-nhs-pregnancy-journey/>

Post-natal care NHS journey

The diagram below shows post-natal care offered by the NHS, again for a mother and baby who have no additional complications⁶.



3. How we engaged with Rutland mothers

Healthwatch Rutland attended the toddler group at Oakham Baptist Church, run by the Visions Children’s Centre, on three occasions. Seven women spoke individually about their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care. Six of the women had given birth within the previous 12 months and 1 woman had given birth 2 1/2 years previously. The main themes mentioned by the women about their experiences during and after pregnancy and childbirth were as follows.

⁶ <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/labour-and-birth/after-the-birth/early-days/>

4. Themes

a. Antenatal care

Three of the women spoke about their antenatal care:

I am based at Kendrew Barracks and the support is very good. I would go over to Rutland Memorial Hospital for my maternity checks, but nobody came to Kendrew.

I saw the local midwife team at Rutland Memorial hospital and the early pregnancy team at Leicester Royal Infirmary because of previously losing a baby. I had a great service from Oakham and Leicester.

During pregnancy, the midwives were really friendly and positive I didn't have any complications. I needed to contact the midwives as I had a COVID scare, and I needed to cancel an appointment, but I wasn't able to get through to them. I could leave a message but there wasn't anyone to speak to (the message said it wouldn't be accessed until after my appointment time). I rang the Rutland Memorial Hospital, and they gave me an emergency number to ring. I generally saw two midwives and they kept me well informed.

We had our care in Peterborough and they were very good. It was very difficult to get to the hospital, especially with all our complications. Without a car it would be impossible as there is nothing locally.

Rutland women talk about accessing routine antenatal appointments with 'really friendly and positive' midwives at Rutland Memorial Hospital. There are indications that women can experience anxieties arising from both previous difficulties in pregnancy and childbirth and from illnesses that occur during pregnancy. They need and welcome professional reassurance - even if this means travelling to the city hospitals. However, some have had problems getting in touch with the professionals who can give them advice and reassurance. Additionally, accessing appointments at Rutland Memorial Hospital and the city hospitals is difficult for those

without access to a private car and who are reliant on an infrequent public transport service.

b. Giving birth

Five women shared the circumstances of the birth of their babies:

I had my first child in Nottingham in 2020 and my second baby in an ambulance in 2022 and then afterwards I went to St Mary's in Melton for aftercare. I was still able to have my partner with me for my labour during COVID-19, and despite having my second baby in an ambulance, which was a bit traumatic, I had good care both times. I had both my babies at Leicester General hospital, my first child was born in 2020

I had the baby by emergency caesarean in Peterborough.

St Mary's was the most amazing place ever; I started my labour there, but I had problems so was then moved to Leicester General.

I have had good experiences with childbirth at Peterborough City Hospital

I had a really good experience. I had my baby at the General in Leicester. My baby was out within the hour! The midwifery support I have had has been outstanding.

Rutland babies are being born across a large geographical area and in a variety of circumstances. Although giving birth in the back of an ambulance is described as 'a bit traumatic', there is satisfaction with the care received in all named places.

c. After giving birth

When I came home the Midwives checked on me.

After my second child, the hospital checked to see if St Mary's had space for my aftercare, which was amazing. It was so quiet and when I came home the Midwives checked on me.

I didn't have any issues [when I came home] but I knew I could ring the Health Visitor if I needed to, and they would come to the house.

I then went back to St Mary's for post-natal care, I stayed for 4

Afterwards, I had visits from midwives and health visitors although sometimes this is a bit annoying as you can wait in all day for them to come. This is hard when you have other children to entertain, it would be good to have a specific time. I did say I was struggling a bit with my breast feeding but I didn't push the situation as it usually settles down.

I had two other babies in Peterborough in 2019 and 2021 but this experience has been the best care. The care in Leicester and Rutland has been the best so far.

The midwives did help at first, but they signed off after a few days, and then the health visitors take over. They have been really accommodating and I haven't needed any additional care

The post-natal care at St Mary's birthing Centre in Melton Mowbray is highly valued by local mothers. The ongoing support offered by health visitors and midwives in the first days at home is also well received. However, it is suggested that the local community midwives could better organise their visits so that busy new mums know approximately what times to expect them. The women mention seeing several health professionals in different places.

d. When things don't go to plan

The biggest problem with my maternity journey is that it has been very difficult to see a doctor. I had mastitis and it got worse; I felt too ill and thought it would be a struggle to see the

GP, so I didn't ring them. It got even worse and after ringing NHS 111 I had to go back to the hospital for treatment.... A recent experience left me waiting on the phone for 1 hour and 40 minutes, the phone message is also quite confusing as you have a choice for 'appointments' or for a 'Primary Care Emergency' I don't know what that is and when I should press for that!

I did have to ring as I had reduced movement (of the baby) so I rang the maternity unit at Peterborough City Hospital (PCH) but all the nurses were busy so I couldn't chat with anyone. It does make me wonder what would happen if you did need extra help

I have a 2 and a half-year-old. She has intolerances and it was very difficult during the pandemic. It took us a year to see a consultant when we should've been seen after 6 weeks. The midwives were great at the time. I was ringing the GP practice every day about my daughter, as she was sick and had diarrhoea all of the time. There wasn't much help or explanation because everyone was very stretched. Midwives did ask about my mental health but there wasn't much time to worry about my well-being and further down the line no health professionals really asked. We had our care in Peterborough and they were very good. It was very difficult to get to the hospital, especially with all our complications, without a car it would be impossible as there is nothing locally."

These accounts demonstrate unacceptable difficulties before and after birth in accessing medical assistance when it is needed. Transport to health care facilities is difficult and expensive. There is a confusion over the terminology used by a GP practice automated telephone handling system. The term 'Primary Care Emergency' risks misinterpretation by patients.

e. The 6–8-week postnatal check

At the 6–8 weeks check, I was seen by a GP at Oakham Medical Practice.

My 6-8 weeks check was over the phone. I had a bad tear and lost a lot of blood so I think this should be done in person to check your physical and mental health.

I am a patient at Oakham Medical practice and my 6 weeks check was carried out over the phone. I didn't feel that was appropriate. I wanted checking face-to-face.

The 6-8 weeks check for me was on the phone at Oakham Medical Practice, which is not good, trying to get face-to-face appointments has been ridiculous.

I think if you did have problems with physical or mental health you would need to push to get help. We can see a GP on the base, we don't seem to have as many problems with that as those outside of the base."

I feel that the GP has checked my baby, but I haven't been checked - they are a bit hands-off for mum, and I haven't seen a GP since the birth of my baby.

The comments show that that women prefer face-to-face consultations for their 6-8-week postnatal check. One woman suggested her experience of postnatal care at Kendrew Medical Centre was better than that of peers who attended NHS services.

f. Importance of Children's Centre activities

It is nice to access support at Visions Children's Centre also...

Visions do some good classes - baby massage etc but I don't think the advertising is too good, it's hard to know what is going on.

Visions have now started texting about the groups etc that they are offering which is working really well.

All of the women we spoke to were attending a toddler group and some had accessed Children's Centre activities, demonstrating a need for support, friendship, advice and community - all of which are tools to help reduce mental ill health and loneliness. These were lost during the pandemic but are being built up again post-COVID-19.

g. Contraception

Getting the coil fitted for contraception is difficult I have been on the waiting list since December. I have been on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland sexual health website and there are never any appointments. The coil can't be fitted at the Rutland sexual health clinic. I am also on a waiting list at Peterborough, but it is 3 months long. I don't have a choice; I have to take the pill.

I want to have a coil fitted for my future family planning, but I have needed to chase this and have been waiting 6 months. I don't understand why this can't be fitted in the hospital after childbirth."

At my 6-8 week check I talked to the nurse about contraception, she said it was ok to go ahead with it I just needed to ring back when I wanted to start having it again. I rang when I wanted to start it again but then I needed an appointment with family planning to get the injection and it has taken me a month to get an appointment so far and it is still not sorted..

This feedback suggests that some Rutland women are waiting a long time for contraception that has to be administered by healthcare professionals, meaning that their choices are limited.

5. Conclusion

This was a small-scale engagement exercise carried out in Oakham, with most women likely to be registered with Oakham Medical Practice. It should therefore be understood that this may not be representative of women's experiences in other areas of Rutland.

The women we spoke to were generally very happy with the local Midwife Team. However, several issues were identified by the women around *communication* including knowing where to go for help and difficulties in rearranging or cancelling appointments. Other issues included *availability of post-natal contraception* and *dissatisfaction with virtual post-natal checks in General Practice*.

We would like to thank the women for sharing their experiences.