

# **Swansea Bay UHB: Independent Review of Maternity and Neonatal Services**

## **Additional Briefing**

### **Background**

On 12 December 2023, the Minister for Health and Social Services confirmed her decision to escalate Swansea Bay University Health Board's maternity and neonatal services to enhanced monitoring. This followed twelve months of officials undertaking support, scrutiny and challenge within routine arrangements, as well as an unannounced inspection by Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) of the maternity services provided at Singleton Hospital. Officials were not assured the health board was making sufficient progress and therefore recommended service escalation to the Minister, who agreed to this escalation.

On the same day, the health board announced it would be commissioning an independent review of its maternity and neonatal services. The health board's Chief Executive confirmed on 29 January that the Chair has been appointed but did not confirm who the Chair was or the commencement date. The Chair is currently in the process of appointing panel members. In addition to the oversight panel, an experienced clinical review team is being appointed by the health board. The health board intends to publicly announce the Chair and panel members once the latter have been identified and confirmed.

The health board has proactively commissioned the Chair to undertake this review to provide assurance about its services; an approach officials remain supportive of. The health board is responsible for appointing the review Chair and officials have not been involved in their identification. However, it remains important the Welsh Government is assured that the appointed individual has the necessary expertise and capability to undertake the review and ensure the health board implements any emerging learning.

Whilst not yet in the public domain, officials understand the Chair is Margaret Bowron KC, a clinical negligence lawyer who has previously represented families in pursuing claims related to brain injury sustained at birth.

The focus of the clinical review team will be on quality and outcomes in the service between 2021 and 2022 using MBRRACE-UK (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK) data and cases, which includes maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths. Preliminary 2023 data will also be reviewed ahead of the formal notification from MBRRACE-UK which is expected late spring. This will be supported by service user feedback dating back to January 2019 and staff feedback dating back to 2021.

The health board's Executive Director of Nursing will be providing an update on progress at the Public Board meeting on 31 January.

The Minister has received correspondence from families and Members writing on their behalf to raise concerns about the proposed scope of the independent review, the lack of family input into the draft terms of reference and the review itself, as well as to request that their care be explored as part of the process. One of these families has been in regular contact with officials for the past 18 months, has been publicly named by Members during Plenary on multiple occasions and appears to be forming a group of affected and interested families. It is our intention to connect these families with the Chair to ensure they have an opportunity to have their voices heard.

The health board has issued open invitations to all local MSs and MPs to visit its maternity and neonatal service. Russell George MS visited on 19 January and further visits are planned for 02 and 09 February. The Minister has not yet visited the services, but officials have suggested the health board may wish to invite her.

On 29 January, BBC will be airing a Panorama episode focusing on maternity care in England. There is a focus on deaths of babies and mothers in Gloucestershire and a culture that fails to learn from its mistakes. Whistleblowing and fears around speaking up are clear themes running through the programme.

**Lines to take:**

Independent Review

- I believe an independent Chair has now been appointed to lead the review, who is currently appointing the other panel members including an independent patient representative. Collectively, they will be responsible for delivering the review and ensuring the health board takes forward identified learning and improvements in timely, open and transparent manner. I understand the health board's Executive Director of Nursing will be providing an update at its Public Board meeting on 31 January.
- I am aware correspondence has been received from several families regarding the proposed scope of the review. The Chair and independent panel will have the authority to review, modify and agree the terms of reference which are currently in draft form. They will also be responsible for determining the approach to family and service-user engagement within the review process. We intend to connect these families with the Chair once their appointment has been announced publicly.
- We maintain close oversight of the health board's maternity and neonatal services through the enhanced monitoring escalation arrangements. We will be seeking ongoing assurance that the health board is constructively supporting the review process and responding to any emerging concerns and learning in a robust manner.
- This review is independent of both the Welsh Government and the health board. The review will consider feedback provided by families and staff alongside clinical information and other evidence to develop an assessment of the health board's maternity and neonatal services.

### Speaking Up Safely

- We recently published the Speaking up Safely Framework for NHS Wales, which will strengthen procedures and provide assurances that concerns will be taken seriously, heard fairly and people will not experience personal repercussions.
- Raising a concern is a brave thing to do and both the Welsh Government and NHS Wales recognise that we must support staff to feel confident to speak up and assured that they will not suffer any detriment as a result of voicing their concerns.