
Update on St Mary's Birth Centre

Joint Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
Scrutiny Commission

23/02/2026

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Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and
Northamptonshire Integrated Care Boards

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL) took the difficult decision to pause births and postnatal inpatient services at St Mary's Birth Centre (SMBC) in July 2025 due to concerns over safe staffing and declining birth numbers. To understand the impact of the pause, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB) commenced a period of engagement on 5 January 2026, running to 15 February 2026. The engagement seeks experiences from affected patients, families and staff to inform next steps.

The intended direction, consistent as far as is possible with the findings of the 2021 public consultation and supported by legal advice, is to relocate births to the existing midwifery led unit at Leicester General Hospital while maintaining community maternity services in Melton. A full report will be considered by the LLR ICB Board on 19 March 2026.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Joint Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- **Note** the progress of the engagement and emerging themes.
- **Note** the changes made to strengthen the engagement approach in response to feedback received
- **Receive** the outcome of the engagement and the ICB's final decision following the LLR ICB Board meeting on 19 March 2026.

3. Detailed report

3. Background

3.1 Temporary Pause of Services

In July 2025, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL) took the difficult decision, following discussion with ICB, to pause births and postnatal inpatient services at St Mary's Birth Centre. There are several longstanding challenges at St Mary's, where less than 1% of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland's births take place, that worsened in the months prior to the pause. This included safe staffing - around 30% of the community team were unavailable due to maternity leave, sickness, or planned absences. Birth numbers at the centre were also in decline, with just 92 births taking place in the year prior to the pause. 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. The low number of births makes it harder for staff to maintain clinical experience and for the centre to operate safely.

The following maternity services continue as normal:

- Community antenatal and postnatal clinics
- Access to midwifery-led care through the Trust's home birth team and at the Leicester Royal Infirmary and the Leicester General Hospital midwifery led units
- Births in obstetric-led maternity units at the Leicester Royal Infirmary and Leicester General Hospital

3.2 2021 Public Consultation and Current Context

The 2021 *Building Better Hospitals for the Future* public consultation set out a plan for births at St Mary's to move to a new standalone midwifery led unit (MLU) at LGH. Key contextual changes now affecting delivery include:

- National changes have delayed construction of the new maternity hospital at LRI.
- There is no available capital funding for a new standalone MLU at this time.
- Birth numbers at St Mary's have continued to fall, and staffing pressures have worsened.

Given this position, the ICB's approach, informed by legal advice, is to enact the 2021 consultation outcome as far as possible by:

- Relocating births to the existing midwifery led unit at LGH.
- Maintaining community maternity services in Melton Mowbray.

4. Engagement Approach

This section explains how the engagement approach has been designed and the principles guiding it.

4.1 Principles and Legal Framework

The approach is grounded in:

- Cabinet Office public engagement principles
- Equality Act 2010
- Brown Principles
- Gunning Consultation Principles
- Health and Social Care Act 2012

The accountable organisation is LLR ICB, with affected services delivered by UHL. Legal advice confirms that continuing engagement is appropriate and remains in line with our public involvement duties, without the need to move to formal consultation.

4.2 Target Audiences

The engagement is seeking views from:

- Those who were planning or considering giving birth at St Mary's between July 2025–September 2026
- Those who used St Mary's (births and postnatal care) between January 2021– July 2025 (extended eligibility following current engagement feedback)
- Staff who worked at St Mary's Birth Centre before the pause in service
- Staff and students working in the maternity services at LLR

- Partners, carers, and family members of these people

5. Engagement Methods

This section describes the tools and routes used to engage with stakeholders.

5.1 Materials

- Online and paper impact questionnaire (with equality monitoring) written in clear and accessible language: www.bit.ly/smbc-impact
- Translated and accessible versions available on request
- Dedicated webpage on ICB website www.bit.ly/smbc-impact
- Support is available via the ICBs Engagement and Insights Team to help people complete the questionnaire via:
 - Emailing llricb-llr.beinvolved@nhs.net
 - Calling 0116 295 7532
 - Writing to: Freepost Plus RUEE–ZAUY–BXEG, SMBC Engagement, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board, Room G30, Pen Lloyd Building, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester Road, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8TB

5.2 Mechanisms and Channels

- UHL patient lists
- Maternity, Neonatal and Voices Partnership (MNVP) (via emails, WhatsApp and Facebook)
- Healthwatch Leicester & Leicestershire
- Leicester Mammas
- SMBC campaign group
- Local councillors, MPs, and Health & Wellbeing Boards
- Social media – ICB website, ICB Facebook page and Facebook ‘Spotted’ pages across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
- Local media – Two press releases sent to media contacts and channels across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.
- GP newsletters and networks
- Voluntary sector engagement – reached via the LLR VCSE Alliance through email and the forum covering all protected characteristics, areas and varying levels of interest.
- A wide range of stakeholders from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland covering all audiences identified through the ICBs comprehensive stakeholder database.

5.3 Focus Groups

Four cohorts:

1. SMBC staff
2. People due to give birth at SMBC before the pause
3. People considering giving birth at SMBC between July 2025–September 2026

4. People who have used SMBC between January 2021 and July 2025 (extended eligibility following current engagement feedback)

Two additional online sessions were added due to low uptake at initial sessions. One-to-ones are offered to those who would prefer to give feedback outside of a focus group. So far, one session of this kind has taken place.

6. Engagement Update (as at 5/02/26)

6.1 Participation so far

- Staff online focus group (19.01.26)
- Staff face to face focus group (Melton, 20.01.26)
- Patient face to face focus group (Melton, 20.01.26)
- Patient face to face focus group (Leicester, 27.01.26)
- Patient online focus group (05.02.26)
- All correspondence received via email is responded to in a timely manner.
- Meetings held with councillors/MPs on request and as identified by interest.

6.2 Early emerging themes

Early engagement feedback has highlighted a range of initial reflections from patients and staff, with emerging themes centred on access and practicalities, people's experience of care and support, the importance of clear communication about the pause, and varied workforce perspectives during a period of change. Feedback also indicated that women value having easy access to supportive postnatal care at St Mary's, including breastfeeding support, continuity, and care that feels personal to their individual needs. These early themes are provisional and will continue to develop as more feedback is gathered.

7. Changes Made to Engagement Approach

Given the volume of feedback relating to the quality and importance of postnatal care at SMBC, it is both appropriate and necessary for the ICB to amend its engagement approach to ensure that these concerns are fully examined, proportionately reflected in the evidence base, and used to strengthen the robustness and credibility of subsequent decision making. The specific changes we are making are:

- Eligibility widened to include users of SMBC (births and postnatal care services) from 2021–2025
- Deadline extended to 15 February 2026
- Additional online focus groups added (05.02.2026 and two planned for 11.02.2026)
- Communications broadened to improve reach

8. Next Steps

The engagement process will continue until 15 February 2026, during which time the ICB will actively gather experiences, feedback and views from patients, staff, partners and stakeholders to fully understand the impact of the proposed changes to services at St Mary's Birth Centre.

Following the close of the engagement window, all responses will undergo an independent evaluation and thematic analysis to ensure that the findings are robust, impartial and accurately reflect the views of those affected.

The outcome of this analysis will be incorporated into a comprehensive final report, which will be presented to the LLR ICB Board on 19 March 2026 to support informed decision-making regarding these services. Should the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee request further assurance or clarification, the ICB will return to JHOSC for additional scrutiny.

Subject to the Board's approval of the recommended way forward, the programme will then move into an implementation phase, ensuring that any agreed changes are enacted in a safe, timely and carefully managed manner.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The implications are currently being assessed and will be provided in the next iteration of this report for the Committee's consideration.

Signed: Ket Chudasama

Dated:12.02.2026

4.2 Legal Implications

The implications are currently being assessed and will be provided in the next iteration of this report for the Committee's consideration.

Signed: Ket Chudasama

Dated:12.02.2026

4.3 Equalities Implications

The implications are currently being assessed and will be provided in the next iteration of this report for the Committee's consideration.

Signed: Ket Chudasama

Dated:12.02.2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

The implications are currently being assessed and will be provided in the next iteration of this report for the Committee's consideration.

Signed: Ket Chudasama

Dated:12.02.2026

4.5 Other Implications

The implications are currently being assessed and will be provided in the next iteration of this report for the Committee's consideration.

Signed: Ket Chudasama

Dated: 12.02.2026

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A: St Mary's questionnaire



St Marys
Questionnaire 29.01.2