

## Maternity consultation frequently asked questions (FAQs)

### Have you decided not to re-open the freestanding midwife-led birthing units (FMBUs) at County Hospital and Samuel Johnson Community Hospital?

No – no decisions have been made yet.

The public consultation on the birthing services will run for 12 weeks, so there is plenty of time to get involved and tell us what you think about the proposal.

All the feedback from the survey and meetings will be analysed and included in a report. The Integrated Care Board will consider the findings in the report alongside the medical and cost factors.

### Are the freestanding midwife-led units (FMBUs) at County Hospital and Samuel Johnson Community Hospital going to close?

No, the proposal does not mean that the FMBUs would close. They would still offer antenatal and postnatal appointments, like they do now.

### Why are you not re-opening the birthing service at the freestanding midwife-led units (FMBUs)?

Few babies were born at the FMBUs, compared with births at Royal Stoke University Hospital and Queen's Hospital, Burton. You can see the numbers in the table below. The birthing services at the FMBUs have been temporarily closed since 2020, so this is why we have used numbers from 2019/20 – there haven't been any births at the FMBUs since then.

Hospital / FMBU	Number of births (2019/20)
County Hospital FMBU	94
Samuel Johnson Community Hospital FMBU	220
Royal Stoke University Hospital – consultant-led care	5,264
Royal Stoke University Hospital – midwife-led care	970
Queen's Hospital, Burton – consultant-led care	2,329
Queen's Hospital, Burton – midwife-led care	584

If the FMBUs were re-opened for births, we would not expect the number of babies born there to go up in future. This is because assessments have shown that the number of moderate-risk and high-risk pregnancies has increased across our area. With a higher-risk pregnancy, there are advantages to having your baby in a hospital maternity department, where specialist help is close at hand, rather than an FMBU.

If the FMBUs were re-opened for births, and the number of births there was still low, or even lower than before, we would not be making the best use of our staff's time.

### Would I still be able to give birth with midwife-led care?

Yes, you would still be able to choose midwife-led care at the Royal Stoke University Hospital, Queen's Hospital, Burton, or a home birth.

### What's happening with the home birth service?

The home birth service is now fully available again across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the local trusts had to temporarily pause the home birth service. In the following years, staff shortages meant that it wasn't possible to get the service up and running again on a consistent basis, but the service has now been restored.

### **If you can offer home births again, why can you not offer births at the freestanding midwife-led units (FMBUs)?**

In the years after the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shortage of midwives across the NHS.

In our area, the two NHS trusts that run the FMBUs have recruited more midwives. They have also put support programmes in place for new midwives, so that they feel supported to stay in this demanding role.

But even though we have overcome some of our staffing challenges, we still need to plan our services in a way that makes the best use of our staff's time.

With the proposal, midwife-led care would still be available in the bigger maternity departments and through home births. We would not need to recruit more midwives to keep this in place.

But we would need more midwives – or to reorganise the workforce – to re-open the birthing services at the FMBUs and staff them with two midwives per shift, 24 hours a day.

There would be other impacts too:

- Because the FMBUs are not part of a bigger maternity department, with bigger, more multi-skilled teams, it would be harder to provide support programmes for new midwives based at the FMBUs
- Both NHS trusts have been developing plans to establish **continuity of carer** – having support from the same team of midwives through pregnancy and birth – for the most vulnerable women. This is already in place at Queen's Hospital, Burton. The trusts would be less able to provide this kind of care if they had to recruit extra midwives to staff the FMBUs.

### **An on-demand staffing model was discussed a few years ago – what happened to that idea?**

With an on-demand model, midwives would not be based in the FMBUs 24/7. Instead, they would be based in the community. They would support births at the FMBUs when needed.

If the trusts were to re-open the FMBUs for births with on-demand staffing, they would not need to recruit as many extra midwives compared with 24/7 staffing.

But the community midwifery teams would have a bigger workload. So it's likely that more midwives would be needed in those teams.

Other impacts would be:

- More midwives would need to be on call at any given time. This would give them less time to provide antenatal and postnatal care
- A potential impact on providing home birth services if the community midwives were supporting births in the FMBU.

### Does the proposal mean some women would have to travel further to give birth?

Some women would have to travel further to give birth if they live near the FMBUs and would have chosen to give birth there. But:

- The proposal affects quite a small number of births (around 344 per year) when compared to the overall number of births in the areas served by our two NHS trusts (around 15,000 per year)
- The home birth service would be available for women who want to consider this option.

It's also important to note:

- The proposal only affects the birthing services at the FMBUs. Antenatal and postnatal care would still be provided at both sites, so there would be no additional travel needed for those appointments.

We have carried out a detailed analysis of how the proposal could impact travel time to birthing services. You can read more about this in our consultation document and Pre-Consultation Business Case. You can download both from our consultation involvement page: <https://staffsstoke.icb.nhs.uk/midwife-led-birthing-units/>