

## Temporary changes to coastal maternity units

From today (17 March) at 5pm, on a temporary basis, women booked to give birth at the maternity units at the community hospitals in Clacton and Harwich will be offered a choice of a home birth or delivery at Colchester General Hospital.

The decision was taken on clinical advice by the Board of Directors of Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust, the organisation which runs all maternity services in north east Essex.

The Board will receive further clinical advice and will review the decision at its meeting on 12 June.

Mothers will continue to have access to care both during and after pregnancy (antenatal and postnatal care) at both hospitals from 9am to 5pm, seven days a week.

Pregnant women who have opted to give birth at the Clacton or Harwich units, which are both for low-risk women, will be given a choice of a home birth or the Juno Suite, the midwifery-led unit at Colchester General Hospital.

The Board took the decision prior to a joint review of all maternity services in north east Essex involving the Trust and North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Amanda Hallums, Divisional Director of Women's and Children's Services at Colchester Hospital Trust, apologised to those women and families who will be affected.

"The Board took this decision because of concerns about the low number of midwives at Colchester General Hospital in relation to the high number of births there," she said.

"The Department of Health accepts that the ideal ratio should be one midwife for every 29 births in a year.

"At Colchester, where there's an average of 70 births a week, this ratio is 1:39 whereas at Clacton it's 1:18 and at Harwich it's 1:14, where there's a total of five births a week on average. We need to place our resources where the need is greater.

"We have to regularly take midwives from the Clacton and Harwich units to help provide cover at Colchester, and the Board took the view that this position was no longer sustainable.

**More follows**

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“The temporary change beginning today will move the ratio at Colchester General Hospital to 1:30 and this will come down further still after we’ve recruited the 5.6 extra midwives that the Trust has recent agreed to fund.”

The Trust will contact all pregnant women booked to deliver at Clacton and Harwich to make them aware of the options available to them. Other key groups are being briefed, such as midwives and MPs.

Some of the midwives at Clacton and Harwich will transfer temporarily to the Juno Suite at Colchester General Hospital. Others will remain at the coastal units to support women during and after pregnancy.

In addition, women will no longer be able to deliver babies at the birthing centre at Halstead Hospital, which is also run by Colchester Hospital Trust and where in recent years there has been an average one birth a year.

Any woman who has opted to give birth there will be given a choice of a home birth or the Juno Suite at Colchester General Hospital.

Unlike the maternity units at Clacton and Harwich, which are normally staffed 24/7 by midwives, any woman who wants to deliver at Halstead contacts an on-call midwife who she arranges to meet at the birthing centre.

The joint review of maternity services is expected to begin before the end of the month and will include external consultant obstetrician and head of midwifery professional advice.

## **Ends**

### **For further information:**

Contact Mark Prentice at Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust.  
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