



Health and Care
Jersey

Review Report: Temporary Suspension of Home Birth Service

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Introduction

This report provides an in-depth overview of the circumstances that led to the temporary suspension of the Jersey home birth service, highlighting the critical factors that contributed to this decision. These factors include challenges related to staffing, training deficiencies, and equipment availability, all of which are essential in ensuring the safe and effective delivery of home birth services.

At the heart of this review is our unwavering commitment to expectant mothers, ensuring they have access to a full range of safe birthing options that align with their preferences and clinical needs. This report also considers the planned home birth review and subsequent update of the home birth guideline, aimed at strengthening protocols, addressing gaps in service delivery, and reinforcing the safety of home births for mothers and their babies. By refining these guidelines and ensuring robust support structures, we remain dedicated to empowering women with informed choices for a safe and positive birth experience, regardless of the setting they choose.

The decision to suspend the home birth service, while difficult, has been made in the best interests of both the staff providing the service and the safety of expectant mothers and their babies. This suspension commenced in October 2024, and is a temporary measure as part of a broader strategy to address these challenges and prepare for the eventual reinstatement of the service. As part of this process, a thorough review of the existing home birth service framework will be conducted to ensure that any gaps or shortcomings are identified and rectified before the service resumes. We want to provide a safe, caring and effective homebirth service as soon as possible, as we know this is crucial offering in providing expectant mothers choice in their delivery.

Factors Leading to Suspension

Several key factors have contributed to the suspension of the home birth service. These factors are primarily related to the current capacity and resources required to maintain a safe and effective home birth service model. The following sections explore the primary issues in more detail:

1. Staffing Issues

The adequacy of staffing is a critical factor in ensuring the safety and success of home births. Unfortunately, several issues have arisen in this area:

- **Availability of Qualified Staff:** The current staffing model does not meet the demand for a 24/7 home birth service. The availability of midwives who have had training in Childbirth Emergencies in the Community emergency has been impacted by several factors. Additionally, there is a growing demand for midwives in other areas, which further strains the ability to maintain consistent coverage for home births.
- **Workforce Fatigue:** Many of the midwives currently working in the home birth service are facing increased workloads due to these staffing shortages. This has led to significant concerns regarding workforce fatigue. Staff well-being is

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essential, as exhaustion and burnout can lead to a decrease in the quality of care, which could compromise patient safety. The ability to provide reliable on-call services 24/7, 365 days a year, remains a significant challenge.

- **Retention and Recruitment:** The challenges of recruiting and retaining midwives with the necessary experience for home births have been a long-standing issue. The unique nature of home births requires midwives with specialised skills and experience in managing deliveries in a non-hospital environment, which has proven difficult to maintain. The reliance on agency staff to fill gaps in the workforce has only exacerbated the problem, as agency staff are often less familiar with the protocols and expectations specific to home birth services.

2. Training Deficiencies

The safety and effectiveness of home birth services are heavily dependent on well-trained staff who are prepared for the potential complexities of home births. Several training-related gaps have been identified:

- **Emergency Response Training:** One of the most critical areas requiring attention is emergency preparedness. The ability of midwives to manage unforeseen complications in the home setting is vital. However, it has been noted that current training protocols may not adequately address the specific challenges posed by home births, especially in the case of emergencies that require rapid decision-making and intervention.
- **Skills Maintenance:** Home birth services require midwives to maintain a high level of proficiency across a wide range of skills. Regular refresher courses and competency assessments are essential to ensure staff are adequately prepared. However, the current system has limitations in providing such training on a consistent and regular basis, which can lead to lapses in knowledge or skills over time.

3. Equipment and Infrastructure

The availability and maintenance of appropriate equipment and infrastructure is another critical factor in delivering safe and effective home birth services:

- **Availability of Essential Equipment:** Ensuring that the necessary medical equipment is available and functional for every home birth is of paramount importance. This includes everything from basic medical supplies to more specialised equipment for managing complications. In addition, regular checks and maintenance are required to ensure that equipment meets safety standards.
- **Transportation and Accessibility:** A robust transport plan must be in place to ensure that, in the event of complications, the patient can be swiftly transferred to a hospital setting. This requires collaboration with the Jersey Ambulance Service and the availability of transport at a moment's notice. Further robust escalation standards need to be explored to ensure cross-team working and transport is able to respond quickly when needed.
- **Communication Tools:** Effective communication between home birth teams and hospital-based teams is critical, particularly in emergencies. Communication tools must be reliable, secure, and capable of facilitating rapid

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information sharing and coordination, particularly when quick decision-making is required.

Guideline Review and Update

As part of the overall improvement process, the home birth guideline is currently undergoing a thorough review in line with governance processes. This review aims to align the service with the latest best practices in the UK, as well as to address identified gaps that could improve mother's safety and care outcomes. The key focus areas for the guideline review include:

- **Risk Assessment Criteria:** A comprehensive update to the risk assessment criteria will be undertaken to ensure that only mothers who meet strict safety guidelines are considered for home births. This will help to mitigate potential risks by ensuring that any underlying health conditions or complications that could arise during delivery are appropriately identified and managed.
- **Emergency Procedures:** The protocols for managing emergencies, including escalation procedures and the transfer process, will be strengthened. This ensures that midwives and other healthcare professionals are equipped with clear and comprehensive steps to follow in case of an emergency, reducing confusion and improving response times.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** A key part of the guideline update will be clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in home birth care, including midwives, support staff, and emergency services. Clear definitions of roles will help to ensure that every team member understands their responsibilities, particularly in high-pressure or emergency situations.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:** As part of the review process, there will be consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including midwives, obstetricians, mothers, and external experts. This inclusive approach will ensure that the updated guidelines are comprehensive, practical, and reflective of the needs and concerns of all parties involved.

Next Steps

In order to successfully reinstate the home birth service, the following strategic actions will be taken in 2025, with the aim to reassessing the safety of recommencing a home birth service which will then require the Chief Officer to review and agree to the recommencing of the home birth service:

1. **Resource Planning:** A thorough assessment of the current staffing model will be conducted to determine the most effective and sustainable approach to workforce allocation.
2. **Training Programs:** Targeted multi-professional training initiatives will be implemented to address skills gaps, particularly in emergency response and home birth-specific competencies. This is due to be undertaken in July 2025 and will become part of the ongoing maternity training programme, ensuring that skills are kept up to date.
3. **Equipment Audit:** A comprehensive audit of the current equipment and infrastructure will be undertaken to identify any gaps and ensure that necessary supplies are in place and meet current safety standards.

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4. **Guideline Finalisation:** The updated home birth guidelines will be finalised, and distributed to ensure that all staff members are thoroughly familiar with the new protocols.
5. **Transportation and Accessibility:** Multi-professional working groups to be established to develop robust and comprehensive transport plans and escalation standards, in the event of complications.
6. **Communication Tools:** Multi-professional working groups to be established to review communication tools available and the recommendations that can be implemented to strengthen these.
7. **Communication Strategy:** A clear and proactive communication strategy will be developed to keep stakeholders informed of progress and address any concerns as they arise.

Conclusion

The temporary suspension of the home birth service is a necessary and responsible step aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability and safety of the service. By addressing current challenges related to staffing, training, equipment, and infrastructure, and by updating the service guidelines, we are committed to creating a more robust and reliable home birth service for the future. Once these improvements are in place, we aim to review the service with the Chief Officer in Q3 2025, with enhanced safety measures, ensuring that expectant mothers can continue to choose to access high-quality care in the comfort of their own homes.