



healthwatch

Blackburn with Darwen



DISCLAIMER

This report relates only to the service viewed at the time of the visit and is only representative of the views of the staff and patients who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.



INTRODUCTION

On Friday 22nd March 2024 commencing 1pm Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen undertook an Enter and View visit to the Blackburn Birth Centre.

This was an announced visit undertaken by authorised representatives from Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen who have the authority to enter health and social care premises, announced or unannounced, to observe and assess the nature and quality of services and obtain the view of those people using the services.

This visit was arranged as part of Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen's Enter and View programme. The aim is to observe services, consider how services may be improved and disseminate good practice. The team of trained Enter and View authorised representatives record their observations along with feedback from patients and staff. This together with an environmental assessment, staff and patient questionnaires and online research forms the basis of the report.

This Enter and View was part of a wider programme of work carried out by Healthwatch Together (HW Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Lancashire and Westmoreland and Furness) engagement project which will investigate the experiences of women and families who access maternity and neonatal services within Lancashire and South Cumbria, and whether people feel they have choice and personalisation in their care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen would like to thank the staff and patients at the Birth Centre on 22nd March 2024, for making us feel welcome and taking part in the visit.

In particular we would like to thank Louise Bardon for hosting us on the day.

METHODOLOGY

An Enter and View visit was arranged to speak to patients and staff attending at Blackburn Birth Centre in the afternoon of Friday 22nd March 2024.

This was an announced visit with contact being made in advance by letter and email.

We had 4 fully trained representatives present on the day. These were clearly identifiable by a Healthwatch ID badges.

Representatives were sensitive to the issues that may arise from the visit, and signposting to NHS mental health services was available if required. All responses were anonymous.

We spoke to 4 patients and 5 staff where possible within the constraints of the clinic's routine, people's willingness, and ability to engage and access to people in public areas. Discussion was structured around information available in pregnancy, decision making and general experience of the visit to the birth centre.

The team also recorded their own observations of the environment and facilities. The visit was intended as a snapshot of the patient experience on that day.

Team Members

Sarah Johns HW staff (Lead)

Katie Merry HW staff

Jenny Hayes HW staff

Liam Kershaw-Calvert HW staff



SUMMARY

Blackburn Birth Centre is very accessible unit on Park Lee Road. The centre is bright, clean, and welcoming, with friendly staff, creating a calm and relaxing environment in the centre.

The signage at the entrance to the Centre could be clearer as it is silver against brick, which may not be easy to read for those with visual impairments.

The waiting room and birthing rooms are comfortable, bright and inviting, with the birthing rooms having access to a garden to sit in. The rooms were decorated with butterflies and other little touches to make them feel less clinical and enhance the comfort for all patients. The waiting room has seats organised in a circle to encourage conversation, with enough seating.

Blackburn Birth Centre has a dedicated Facebook page with a good following, patients are encouraged to share their experiences of the centre onto social media. Which could be a good example for other centres to look into as a means of promoting to local residents.

Representatives were informed that last year there were 141 births at the centre. From speaking with patients and staff, the feedback was very positive. Staff felt that they all worked well as a team and supported one another and patients felt that the staff were friendly and caring.

Patients had some negative feedback around the Badger app and GP communication around postnatal care. Some staff members also spoke of a disconnect between GP and maternity care with one staff member stating “I feel there is a real barrier between maternity care and GPs”.

When asked if there was enough staff in the centre, some staff members spoke of the need for more midwives in the centre, “I don’t feel like we have enough midwives”. While others stated they do believe there was enough staff but “it’s always good to have more”. Similarly, there was feedback from staff about the length of appointments needing to be slightly longer to be able to fit in all necessary conversations with patients and we understand that this is being looked into by the Trust.



WHAT WE SAW

Pre visit

Representatives first undertook an overview of the hospital website. This gives a good overview of what is available at the centre, operating hours and how to get there.

<https://elht.nhs.uk/services/maternity-and-newborn-services/blackburn-birth-centre>

<https://elht.nhs.uk/services/maternity-and-newborn-services/place-birth-choices>

There are also virtual tours on the website of the centre, however these are both dated 2015, therefore we would recommend updated versions of these be produced by the Trust.

<https://youtu.be/0D7VeKUtxFA?si=YMoPEOeDzi2A7ZXn>

<https://youtu.be/1NLSzDJwets?si=T9b-R8CSjhaEQyNo>

The birth centre has a very engaging Facebook page with around 2,000 followers. This is a great way of promoting both the offer and letting expectant parents get to know the staff by name and face before accessing the Centre.

<https://www.facebook.com/blackburnbirthcentre/>

There is no AccessAble.co.uk guide to the Birth Centre. The Trust might want to consider commissioning this guide to allow disabled parents and those with either hearing or visual impairment to access the Centre with confidence.

The CQC's latest report issued 6 January 2023 rates the Birth Centre as 'Good'.

“The freestanding midwifery-led birth centre in Blackburn, run by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, was the first of many positive changes in maternity services for expectant parents in the region. Prior to the opening of the Birth Centre, babies in East Lancashire could either be born at home, or at Lancashire Women and Newborn Centre at Burnley General Teaching Hospital, so the Birth Centre provided a new, safe alternative location for receiving maternity care.” ELHT website – news on the 10th anniversary of the Birth Centre



Location

Parking and the Birth Centre grounds

Blackburn Birth Centre is located on Park Lee Road and is accessible by buses 12a and 1 from Blackburn Bus Station with a short walk to the Centre.

The Birthing Centre is in the same estate as the East Lancashire Hospice, tucked away at the back of the car park. Car parking is free and there are blue badge spaces available.

The grounds of the Birth Centre are well maintained and there are nice decoration touches at the reception.

There is signage for the Centre but it is silver against brick, which may not be easily visible. A larger sign on a solid background, like the existing staff entrance sign could be more suitable. However, no patients made any comments regarding the signage.

The entrance is easily visible and accessible. To get to the entrance, you need to cross a small road, which is marked and accessible for both visually impaired and wheelchair users.

There is a buzzer to access reception, with the reception staff opening it from the inside, which adds a level of security to the centre.





Inside the Birth Centre and Welcome

On arrival the staff were friendly and hospitable to our representatives. The reception desk was well populated with staff. The reception has two sofas in the lobby, it is clean, brightly lit and overall, a comfortable environment. In front of the desk was a table selling knitted baby wear and garments.

The corridors in the centre were again bright and clean throughout, the atmosphere was very calm and quiet. To get into the main corridor of the centre and into the waiting room, a staff member on the desk must buzz you through the door.

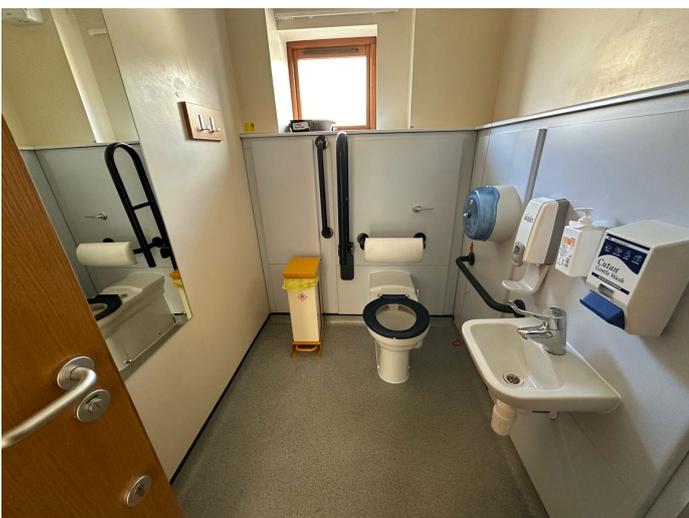
The waiting room was large and bright, with an outside garden connected, and filled with relevant information for expectant parents. The chairs were seated in a semi-circle to encourage conversations, which representatives found warm and welcoming. Across from the waiting room were two bathrooms, one accessible, and had signs on them to interchange to male/female. The bathrooms were observed to be clean, with the soap dispenser full and working.

Staff were efficient and prompt, with one patient being called as soon as she sat down in the waiting room. Other patients stated that it was “comfortable” in the room.

Representatives found the room to be well maintained, and pleasant, with relevant information, there were signs for movement and relaxation for new mums and mums to be.

Inclusive posters were on display in different languages and displays for minority ethnic groups, although no LGBT+ information was present.

There was even a photography area for patients to pose in front of a board, encouraging them to “share your snaps”. These are showcased on the Centre’s Facebook page.





The Birthing Rooms

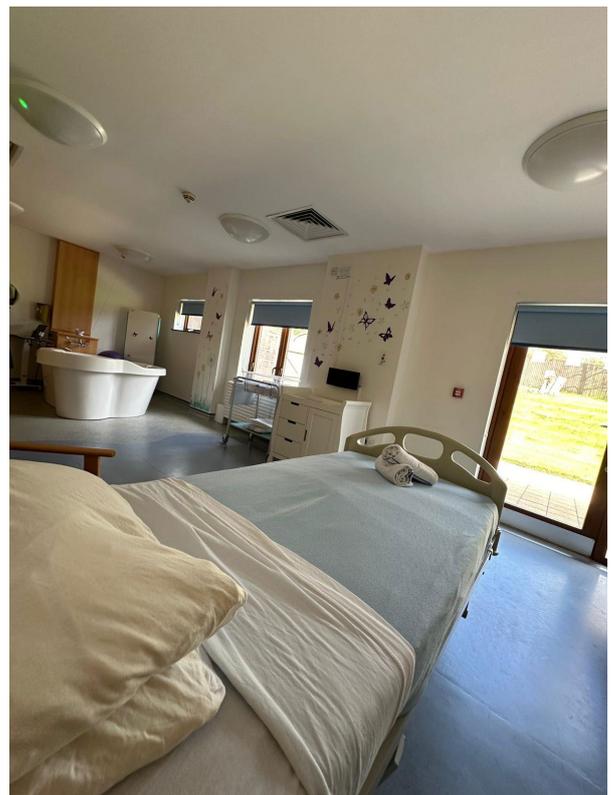
There are four birthing rooms, with three of the rooms having big birthing pools, which patients are encouraged to use.

Representatives were shown one of the four rooms. Each of the rooms was identifiable by a different flower on the door which we felt was a nice touch.

The birth room was very spacious, clean and well laid out with a bed, birthing pool and three seats in the room. A pregnancy exercise ball was also in the corner of the room. The walls of the room were plainly painted but had decorations on some walls, such as butterflies and flowers.

There was an ensuite bathroom which was well suited and was also clean and bright.

Each birthing room is connected to the outdoor space, with garden furniture to sit outside. The grounds are well maintained and relaxing. Representatives found this to be very comfortable and well thought out.





WHAT STAFF TOLD US

We spoke with five staff members during our visit, with their responses to our survey questions below.

Do you feel supported to carry out person centred care?

“Yes, I get really good support. We are very close as a team, you have to have good communication for it to work well.”

“Yes, I have a brilliant manager. We are a good team, we work well together. No matter what band you are.”

“Yes, it’s good. It’s a really supportive team. I would like more time to spend with my patients, I often find myself working into my lunch to spend more time with them.”

“I do yes, it’s a fab team”

“Yes, absolutely”

Do you feel that there are enough staff available to meet the needs of your patients?

“Yes I do, but it’s always good to have more”

“Yes, we have to be. When Burnley Birth Centre is busy we sometimes have to send staff over to support.”

“Sometimes, it’s different from day to day, we have rota changes. Our main priority is to cover the clinics”

“I don’t feel like we have enough midwives, I feel like if we had more time with our patients we could have better person centred approach”

“Not all the time, we run clinic sometimes and need midwives and there’s not always one available. But there is always someone to help.”

What is currently working well?

“Everything really, I can’t think”

“I love my role; we all work so good as a team”

“Working within a good team, everyone helps each other out. If anyone ever needs a rota change people always help and swap”

“Everything works well when we have the right amount of staff”

“Everything - a really good team, everyone works well and supports each other”



Are there any changes that could be made to improve the experience for families at your service?

“We only do a couple of home visits now, I feel our families would benefit from more”

“Everything being over at Burnley and patients having to travel over there, I would like it if we did more here to support these patients.”

“More time, our appointments are 20 minutes long at the moment we want to extend them to 30 mins, I think there is meetings going on at the moment to discuss. Having a triage unit over here at Blackburn would be good, somewhere closer for our Blackburn patients to go.”

“More time with our patients, a triage unit at Blackburn Ante Natal Clinic”

“Honestly no, everyone provides good care. Never had any complaints, it runs a lot smoother here.”

What is your experience of working here?

“Fantastic! Everyone makes you feel a part of the team. Everyone knows their role, I have worked here for 14 years”

“All good, good team, good manager and matron. I love working with our patients and families”

“Good, when it’s all going well it’s a great place to work, it’s the staff that make it”

“Yes it is good I have been here since being a student to a midwife. I do really enjoy my job, it’s close to home it fits in well.”

“Love working here”.

“Couldn’t fault anything here.”

Are there any changes that can be made to improve the patient experience?

“Just the home visits like I mentioned earlier”

“As I said, more clinics over here at Blackburn”

“Longer appointment times and better working relationships with GPs. We have a lot of women ringing us with troubles getting their prescriptions. I feel there is a real barrier between maternity care and GPs”

“Closer triage unit for Blackburn patients”

“I feel it’s a good service. Every patient is different and we alter to that.”

How satisfied are you with your role?

3 out of 5 staff scored “Very satisfied” and the other two scored their role as “Satisfied”.





WHAT PATIENTS TOLD US

We spoke with four patients during our visit to the Birth Centre, with their responses to our survey questions below.

Please describe your experience here so far

“This is my favourite, they are friendly and relaxed. It’s an amazing place.”

“Good experience of both pregnancy and birth.”

“It’s been great.”

“Really good, I’ve been here for a few appointments now, and so far so good.”

Have you received information in a way that is easy for you to understand?

“Yes”

“Yes, very good and the Badger app is useful.”

“Yes, the Badger app is easy.”

“Verbally and leaflets are better. I found the Badger app hard work as I couldn’t log on and the information hadn’t been uploaded so I had to re-explain everything to the midwife.”

Have you felt informed about any decisions about your care?

“Yes”

“Yes”

“I felt listened to about my fear of needles.”

“Yes I’ve not felt pushed in any way, and everything has been explained to me.”

Do you have a birthing plan in place?

“Yes”

“Yes”

“No”

“I’ve spoken to the midwife about it and there are antenatal conversations on the Badger app. I’d have liked a consistent midwife throughout.”

Have you felt that your physical and mental wellbeing have been supported? If not, why?

All four patients felt that their physical and mental wellbeing had been adequately supported.



Do you know who you can contact if you need any additional support or information?

All four patients knew who to contact for support or information.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us today about care you have received throughout your pregnancy journey?

“I wouldn’t change one thing.”

“GP communication around postnatal care has not been great, they kept telling me I needed to come back here but it’s something the GP needs to refer me for.”

“No.”

“Could do with a paper list of useful contact numbers that I could pin to my fridge.”

WHAT RELATIVES TOLD US

We spoke with one relative during our visit to the Birth Centre.

Please describe your experience so far

“Ok better than I expected, we have been well looked after and the staff are very welcoming”

Have you been involved/ informed in any decisions that have been made about your partner/ relatives care?

“Kind of. They informed me about when they had to cut my wife to help get the baby out. They explained it well to me whilst it was all going on.”

What is your view of the facilities?

“Very nice and clean”

How would you describe the support that your family has been provided by this service?

“Really good.”

Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?

“Not really, it’s all been really good.”



Further Reference

CQC report dated 6 January 2023 - <https://www.cqc.org.uk/location/RXR78?referrer=widget3>

Response from provider

Dear Sarah Re: Enter and View report in respect of Maternity Services at ELHT

We are extremely grateful to the Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen team for their visit to Blackburn Birth Centre, Antenatal Ward, Antenatal Clinic, Rossendale Birth Centre and the engagement roadshow across community groups, family hubs and online across our areas in March 2024. Such meaningful feedback offers us as a maternity and neonatal service great opportunities to ensure we hear the voices of women, families and multi-disciplinary team members, further highlighting areas of good practice to inform any improvements as we strive to continuously provide a high-quality service for all our diverse population.

We are delighted to receive positive feedback across the services involved in the visit. We are proud of reports that our areas are welcoming and bright, our staff are friendly, caring, and supportive towards our women and families and staff morale is generally high with a strong sense of teamwork and support for one-another.

In response to feedback included in the report, we would also like to make the following comments:

- We acknowledge feedback raised by both staff and patients regarding the length of appointments and delays to appointment start times that women and families are experiencing. We can assure our service users that this is under consistent review with a recent demand and capacity exercise to facilitate more appointments with particular reference to our diabetic clinics being undertaken. We commit to continue with such exercises to improve this challenging position in view of high numbers of patients requiring both consultant and midwifery-led care. This challenge is nationally recognised within maternity services, ELHT seek to align to any national guidance to inform local reviews to improve antenatal clinic and community midwifery clinic appointment length and wait times. The next direct focus is a demand and capacity exercise on booking appointments and community clinic appointment times.
- We are pleased to receive positive feedback in general regarding the Badgernotes app being of benefit, easy to use, and providing information in a way that is easy to understand. However, navigating the system for diverse groups one example being non-english speaking is an area we wish to focus on and improve, hence ELHT have designed a step-by-step patient information leaflet to be provided in the top required languages for our demographic, detailing the initial important information every women may need about our services from the point of known pregnancy. We continue to review and optimise the system regularly through our Digital Optimisation Group and the comments made within these reports regarding improvements needed will be addressed through this process. We acknowledge that the main improvement evident is with regards to the appointments in terms of detail of appointment type, notification of appointment changes and publication of notes following appointments.
- Maternity staffing is under constant review and managed as per local and national guidance. Any safety concerns relating to multi-disciplinary team staffing would be raised at divisional management boards with escalation to the executive and non-executive maternity safety champions aligned with CNST Safety Action 9 guidance. Such concerns of this nature would be further discussed at Trust Board level meetings. The review of safe maternity staffing levels is

completed using the nationally recognised staffing establishment tool Birthrate+ with the application of professional judgement. ELHT introduced the Birthrate+ acuity app in 2023 which assesses point prevalent staffing levels based on the clinical needs of every woman and infant for most areas of the maternity services. This enables service leaders to determine whether their unit is adequately staffed as safe levels throughout the day and night.

- We continuously review the information we provide to our women and families and look to ensure this is available through a range of sources and formats to meet the preferences and accessibility needs of our women and families. We are therefore pleased to receive feedback that our website is most useful, and that the displayed information on our wards supports understanding of a range of topics such as health promotion and promotion of Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership and Family Hubs. We acknowledge feedback that in some areas there is a lot of written information displayed especially in poster formats. We will work closely with our team and communication colleagues to ensure the posters displayed are relevant, up to date and where possible reduce the number of posters. We are currently working to implement key information being available in digital video formats including being provided in the languages required by our women and families and look forward to hearing the feedback on this new and innovative information channel in future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank “Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen volunteers and staff for the work undertaken to support the Trust in highlighting positive findings from service user, carers, families, and staff, as well as highlighting areas for improvement.

With kind regards,

Tracy Thompson

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