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29<sup>th</sup> April 2016

Lisa Ramsey  
Chair  
Maternity Forum (MSLC)  
Reading, Wokingham and West Berks

Dear Lisa,

Thank you for your letter regarding midwifery staffing and for the suggestions of the maternity Forum to aid retention of staff. I am pleased to say that some of your suggestions have already been implemented such as: the survey of staff, networking with other maternity units to share good practice on recruitment and retention and recognition schemes for valuing employees. The issue of London weighting is a rather more complicated and we are not funded at a level that enables us to offer this at present, although the Board is discussing this issue.

I am pleased to say that our efforts have resulted in 17 midwives being appointed to take up posts and 43 more shortlisted for interview for the 10.5 vacant posts. This is the most positive position the maternity service has been in for some time. Many of the appointed midwives will be taking up posts in September and October when they qualify.

I have asked the Director of Midwifery to discuss your other suggestions with staff and she has advised me that she will put these forward to a recruitment and retention action learning set which is being established at the beginning of May.

The turnover rate of midwives at RBFT in quarter 4 was 0.97% which is below the Trust turnover for that period, 3.77%. We will continue to review this on a monthly basis and seek to understand reasons for staff leaving.

RBFT have a long and strong history of working with a Maternity Services Liaison Committee and many service developments have been informed by collaborative working between Trust staff and the Committee over the years. I am sorry that you consider that the MSLC and service users' voice has been 'silenced' over the past 12 months. This is certainly not our intention. Whilst I acknowledge our staffing levels have been a constraint, many of the recent service developments have involved and been informed by service users views and feedback.

There are many service improvements that have been implemented in the last 12 months which have benefitted staff and women.

Examples include:

- The refurbishment of 4 birthing rooms on delivery suite informed by the views of recent service users,
- Increased provision of specialist diabetes midwives in response to the increasing number of women with gestational diabetes,
- Midwifery led external cephalic version clinic,
- Partnership work with South Central Ambulance Service to provide training for midwives and Ambulance staff on obstetric and neonatal emergencies in the home.
- Increased provision of birthing pools on delivery suite.

The recent Care Quality Commission report evidences the significant improvements made in the Maternity service.

We strive to provide outstanding services but have to work within the available resources both physical and human to provide safe care to all mothers and babies. This sometimes requires difficult decisions to suspend parts of the service and as I have highlighted we are working hard on recruitment and retention to avoid this happening in the future. None the less, we do need to maintain the balance between safety for everyone and individual choice, which sadly will sometimes result in expectations around choice not being met.

With regards to the issues you raise about the homebirth service, an options appraisal for the provision of homebirth services is being considered by the Urgent Care Board which includes the option of outsourcing and will be discussed with the CCG and Maternity Steering group.

I acknowledge the concerns raised in your letter and look forward to working with the Maternity Forum on the solutions over the coming months. I enjoyed meeting with you and would be very happy to do so again.

Yours sincerely,



Jean O'Callaghan  
CEO