

Role Description: Service User Representative



**Maternity
Forum MSLC**
Reading, Wokingham
& West Berkshire

Working as a service user representative can be a very rewarding experience. The following guide provides suggestions for working effectively in your role and getting the best out of your committee in order to make real changes to local maternity services.

Effective service user representatives...

- **Are well prepared** - begin by reading the relevant paperwork before the meeting; if you have the opportunity you can add to this by researching the issues under discussion, finding out about the Trust's performance and how it compares with other trusts, exploring the latest research evidence.
- **Work with others** - both who share similar interests and perspectives, to prepare agenda items or contribute to discussion, and with those who hold differing views and priorities, so you show them respect and understand their position.
- **Understand the remit of the committee and their own role** - familiarise yourself with the committee's terms of reference, requesting a copy, and clarification for yourself and other members if necessary. The [National Guidelines for MSLCs](#) (England) contain information on the remit of MSLCs and role specifications for different members.
- **Avoid being seen as a single-issue lobbyist** (eg. home birth, breastfeeding) - be an expert by all means but you will be noticed and appreciated more for contributing to a range of topics.
- **Encourage the committee to function well** - papers should be circulated well in advance of meetings and key notes and action points soon after; so suggest this to the chair if necessary.
- **Keep up to date with all national and local maternity issues** - service user reps are often better informed than some of the health professionals. Access to the internet and email helps considerably.
- **Rarely refer to personal experience** - and only in the abstract to illustrate a point. Ensuring this will maintain your credibility and focus. Although your own experience is important your role is to represent all users.
- **Have an understanding of the structure of the NHS and Maternity Services' place within it** - increase your knowledge of the functioning of the NHS.
- **Are confident, assertive and persistent** - avoid using phrases such as 'I'm only a mum and volunteer' or 'I'm not a health professional'. The committee should work and consult with users of maternity services. As a user your views are valuable so express them clearly and assertively.

Getting items on the agenda and using examples of good practice

A great way of inspiring the group or committee to take action is by taking ideas and examples of good practice and positive changes from other areas to meetings. Using these as suggestions for issues the committee can work on is an effective way of encouraging the group to take action. Case studies of programmes and initiatives bringing improvements to all sorts of issues, such as high caesarean rates, low breastfeeding initiation and high smoking rates amongst teenage mothers, can be found in documents and websites listed elsewhere on this site.

If there is an issue you would like the committee to work on, ask the chair to schedule this on the agenda for the next meeting. Once agreed, circulate papers well in advance of the meeting. You could offer to prepare a presentation and handout for the meeting. Be sure to have done your background research and detail clearly the issue needing to be addressed. Set out the underlying evidence and make suggestions of how the committee/forum/NHS trust could address this. Consider using a positive case study from a similar initiative if possible. Be brief and succinct without extraneous information unless asked, so the decision to be made is clear.

A good presentation, arguing your case for change, will prompt discussion from the group. During the discussion ask for decisions to be made about specific actions and follow up at the next meeting, or better still, in between. Friendly, patient, encouragement and support are always appreciated. You may need to listen to a lot of excuses before anything tangible is achieved, but keep at it. Ideally, the meeting should agree and minute what will be done and by whom, and by what date. If you can agree objectives as well as means, that is very positive. However, you may need to go one step at a time, investigating what is known before an objective for change is agreed. Make sure the decisions are recorded in your notes, so you can check when the minutes are circulated to the group afterwards that everything has been recorded properly. Ensure that appropriate items are on the agenda for follow up at the next meeting.