Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Weekly update on the temporary suspension of birth services at North Devon District Hospital

22 September 2026

We know the continued suspension of birthing services at North Devon District Hospital is causing worry and uncertainty for women, birthing people and families across North Devon.

We are sorry that the service has not yet been able to reopen. This update explains the current position, the work under way to reopen safely and the support available while the temporary arrangements remain in place

Latest update at a glance:

- Birthing services at North Devon District Hospital remain temporarily suspended.
- We remain committed to reopening the service as soon as it is safe to do so.
- We will review our readiness to reopen every two weeks. The next formal review is on Monday 28 September.
- We will not lower the staffing requirements needed for a safe and sustainable service.
- To support patient safety and provide clarity for women and families, we will only announce a reopening date once all safety criteria have been met and a formal decision has been made. We are not sharing potential dates or encouraging speculation about reopening.
- Since 11 August and up to 21 September, 127 women and birthing people from North Devon have given birth at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.
- There have been no clinical safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension.
- Community midwifery, antenatal appointments, scans and outpatient maternity services continue in North Devon.

Reopening update

On Monday 14 September, we confirmed that we had not met all the requirements needed to reopen birthing services safely.

We understand how disappointing and upsetting this is, particularly for people whose birthing plans have already been affected. We are sorry that reopening could not take place when expected.

The requirements are designed to make sure the service has enough experienced medical staff to reopen safely and remain open. We cannot reopen until all the agreed criteria are met as we do not want to reopen the service and then risk having to suspend it again at short notice. This is important because we do not want to reopen the service before it is ready and risk having to suspend it again at short notice.

Future reopening dates

Our next formal readiness assessment will take place on **Monday 28 September**. If all the criteria have not been met, assessments will continue every two weeks.

We will not announce a reopening date until the assessment confirms that we have the medical staff and other safeguards needed to reopen safely.

Women and families have told us that possible or unconfirmed dates create further uncertainty and anxiety, particularly when people are trying to make important decisions about where they will give birth.

We are sorry that our previous cautious optimism about reopening towards the end of September raised expectations. We have listened to this feedback and will only share a reopening date once it has been formally confirmed.

Recruitment update

Recruiting the permanent doctors needed to support the long-term future of maternity services in North Devon remains a priority.

Recruitment is taking place in a very competitive national market, with many similar consultant vacancies across the NHS. We continue to look for both permanent and temporary staff, have formally asked the wider NHS for support and are exploring international recruitment.

The consultant vacancy republished on 10 September has received one completed application, which is being reviewed, and one application that has been started. Three applications were received during the previous recruitment round in August, but none could be taken forward. We are continuing to follow up potential candidates and promote the vacancies. We are also developing support for international

candidates, including help with eligibility, relocation, visas and joining the Trust. The vacancies will also be advertised in New Zealand and Australia.

Service update

Since the temporary suspension began on 11 August, and up to Monday 21 September:

- **127** women and birthing people from North Devon gave birth at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.
- **293** attended maternity triage at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.
- **Seven** babies returned to transitional care at North Devon District Hospital.
- There were **no clinical safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension**.
- There were **no births before arrival**, meaning births that happened before a midwife or obstetric doctor arrived.
- Community midwifery, antenatal care, scans and outpatient maternity services continue in North Devon.

What we mean by a 'clinical incident'

A clinical incident is defined using nationally agreed NHS guidance.

We recognise that this definition may be different from how an individual or family describes their personal experience of birth.

Every reported incident is reviewed by senior clinical staff. This review includes checking whether it may be connected to the temporary suspension.

There have currently been no clinical safety incidents directly related to the temporary suspension. If the number of incidents increases but remains very small, we may report it as “fewer than five” to protect patient confidentiality.

What we mean by birth before arrival

A birth before arrival is a birth that takes place before a midwife or obstetric doctor is present.

There have been no reported births before arrival during the temporary suspension. If this changes but the number remains very small, we may report it as “fewer than five” to protect patient confidentiality.

Births before arrival can also happen when birthing services at North Devon District Hospital are open.

Patient experience feedback to date

We are continuing to listen to women, birthing people and families from North Devon. This feedback is helping us understand people's experiences and improve the support and information we provide.

The Devon Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) survey remains open and can be accessed here. We would like to share our thanks to the Devon MNVP team for this work and all the fantastic support they provide.

Around 20 responses had been received at the time of this update. Early feedback indicates that people have generally felt safe and well cared for during birth, although we would like to hear from more people to help us understand their experiences.

People can also share feedback anonymously through Care Opinion, which sends comments directly to our maternity team.

In response to feedback, we have:

- Strengthened our advice to call maternity triage early and come to hospital earlier than usual when advised.
- Increased staffing for the 24-hour maternity triage line to help calls be answered more quickly.
- Added additional 30-minute appointments for women and birthing people to discuss their birthing plans and support needs. We hope this helps reduce anxiety and provide reassurance.
- Made MY CARE a priority channel for important direct updates.
- Worked with Devon County Council and NHS Devon to develop free taxi support for people experiencing travel difficulties.
- Shared more information about travel, triage, financial help and mental health support.
- Produced guidance to help midwives give families clear and consistent information.
- Asked our community midwives to share feedback from North Devon families who have used maternity services in Exeter.
- Continued regular meetings with staff and launched a staff survey.
- Continued to update the frequently asked questions on our website.

Road closure concerns

We are working with Devon County Council to help maintain the main road links between North Devon and Exeter while birthing services remain temporarily suspended.

Families travelling to maternity services in Exeter or Taunton are advised to use the **A361 North Devon Link Road**. The route from Ilfracombe to the M5 will remain open to all southbound traffic for the coming two months.

The **A386** is also expected to remain open during this period. This provides an alternative for people travelling from Torridge or North Cornwall, either via the A30 to Exeter or continuing along the A386 to alternative services in Plymouth.

The **A377 at Weirmarsh, south of Umberleigh, will be fully closed** for essential road stabilisation work.

Devon County Council will continue to monitor these routes and work to reduce disruption. Please plan your journey in advance and call maternity triage early if you have any concerns.

Where to find more information

For the latest updates, FAQs and support information visit our website.

Our online patient information pack includes details about:

- What the temporary changes mean.
- Travel and accommodation support.
- Contact numbers and advice.
- Frequently asked questions.

We will continue to provide regular updates as we work towards the safe reopening of birth services at NDDH and thank you for your continued support.