



30 March 2017

RQIA Publishes Findings of its Review of Northern Ireland's Strategy for Maternity Care

Today, RQIA has published the findings of its review of the Strategy for Maternity Care in Northern Ireland 2012-18. The review team assessed progress on the implementation of the strategy and aimed to identify issues affecting its delivery. During the review, RQIA's expert team engaged with health and social care staff responsible for commissioning and delivering maternity services, the Public Health Agency and the Safety Forum. We also held focus groups to hear GP views on the implementation of this strategy.

Olive Macleod, RQIA's Chief Executive, said: **"RQIA found that significant work has been undertaken to progress the strategy, and while there is good support for its implementation, further work is required to fully deliver its objectives."**

Mrs Macleod continued: **"Our review team found a wide range of health initiatives has been developed within trusts to promote healthy lifestyles, and to support women before and during their pregnancy. However, the review team found a need for a more coordinated regional approach to pre-conceptual care for women. While significant progress has been made in antenatal care and for safe labour and birth, there is a need for the establishment of midwifery-led care at every obstetric unit in Northern Ireland, in addition to the freestanding midwifery-led units in some hospitals."**

The review team identified perinatal mental health as an ongoing challenge – and in RQIA's recently published review we recommended the development of specialist perinatal mental health services in each HSC trust. The team also highlighted the need for a further focus on postnatal care during the remainder of the strategy implementation period.

RQIA's Chief Executive said: **"During the review, we found committed leaders and evidence of multi-disciplinary working. However, workforce issues have been highlighted in all aspects of the service, particularly in relation to the heavy reliance on locum staff and retirement of midwives,**

which has the potential to impact significantly on maternity services across Northern Ireland.”

RQIA's Chief Executive concluded: **“This review makes 19 recommendations to support improvement in the implementation of the maternity strategy. Key recommendations include: reviewing the transfer arrangements for women between midwife-led units and consultant-led units; consideration of consultant obstetrician and anaesthetic cover in labour wards; and greater clarity around the role of GPs in supporting women making informed choices about their care, including referral to midwifery led units.”**

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Editors' Notes

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, established in April 2005 under *The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003*, is the independent health and social care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. In its work RQIA encourages continuous improvement in the quality and availability of health and social care services through a programme of inspections and reviews.

Review of the Strategy for Maternity Care Northern Ireland

RQIA's Review of the Strategy for Maternity Care Northern Ireland (2012-18) was undertaken as part of RQIA's Three Year Review Programme 2015-18.

The terms of reference for this review are:

- To assess the interim progress on the implementation of the regional strategy (2012-18).
- To identify whether any issues have arisen that may affect the future delivery of the strategy.
- To report on findings and make recommendations as a single report for publication.

RQIA's report of this review is available at: www.rqia.org.uk from 30 March 2017.