

Agenda item 3

For discussion and decision - Possible next steps as a result of current closure of Frome Birthing Centre

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This report recommends a series of actions to address the current closure of the Frome Birthing Centre.

Background to the issue

Frome Birthing Centre is located in Frome Hospital and normally offers ante natal care, births at the centre (community births), home births and post natal care. There have been a series of disruptions to these services that I believe are due to staff shortages (mainly midwives but also ambulance services) resulting in the birthing centre being closed since December 2021. Currently, women are advised to go to the RUH for their births. The Frome Centre is still open for ante natal and post natal appointments. These closures have been announced mainly via social media, each time with a review date to possibly reopen. The next review date is 30 September.

Why is this a problem?

1. *Rights*

Not all women want to give birth in a hospital and, I believe, it is their right to choose where they give birth. They can choose to give birth in a hospital, in a birth centre, or at home. Due to the closures, women in and around Frome have had their rights eroded.

2. *Inclusivity*

Even if they wanted to, not all women can easily or safely get to the RUH from Frome and the surrounding rural areas. Telling women to give birth at the RUH assumes that the woman has access to a car, has someone who can drive her, someone who can look after the other children and, finally, that there is no traffic on the way to Bath!!! It will be the most vulnerable who are affected the most.

3. *Commitment*

We have a fantastic facility in our town that cost a lot to be built that is just sitting empty and unused. How can FTC help the RUH address the closure of a major public facility in our town?

What can FTC do?

The following organisations have been invited to the Council meeting to explore a way forward:

- RUH Maternity Services on behalf of Frome Birthing Centre
- Frome NCT (who have created a petition objecting to these closures
- <https://www.change.org/p/reinstate-community-and-home-births-as-part-of-ruh-maternity-services>)

- Maternity Voice Partnership Somerset
- Frome Birth Talk
- Friends of Frome Hospital

Recommendations

1. Support the Frome NCT campaign.
2. Write to the NHS decision makers inviting them to discuss possible solutions and how FTC and the Frome community might be able to help.