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TEMPORARY PAUSE IN DELIVERY OF BABIES AT SOUTH TYNESIDE MATERNITY UNIT

Healthcare leaders in South Tyneside have today taken an important safety decision to suspend the delivery of babies at South Tyneside District Hospital with effect from 8.00am on Monday 4 December 2017.

Working together with NHS partners across the region including commissioners, regulators and the professional voice of the Northern Neonatal Network* and Northern England Maternity Network**, the Trust is now implementing urgent measures to ensure ongoing safe care to pregnant women and babies from South Tyneside.

Following the temporary suspension of the special care baby unit (SCBU) due to extreme staffing pressures, the hospital's maternity unit has been unable to accommodate any high risk births since Thursday 30 November and a number of urgent safety protocols have been put in place to accommodate a very small number of low risk deliveries over the weekend.

After seeking further specialist advice from maternity experts around the region who are independent of the Trust, leaders at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust are now following clear advice to pause all deliveries whilst SCBU services are suspended. This will allow time for robust processes to be further developed to support low risk deliveries during the temporary suspension of SCBU services.

A total of 165 women who were booked in to deliver at South Tyneside maternity unit up until 15 January will be contacted personally by healthcare professionals involved in their care to ensure safe alternative arrangements are made for the delivery of their babies. All women who are currently under the care of maternity teams within South Tyneside will also receive information confirming details of these urgent necessary measures.

The Trust is working closely with its strategic partner City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust who will help accommodate deliveries within the maternity unit at Sunderland Royal Hospital and is also working with other neighbouring maternity units to offer women a choice of where they would like to give birth. The North East Ambulance Service is working closely with the Trust to ensure the safe transfer of women in labour.

Dr Shahid Wahid, Medical Director at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust said: “This has been a very difficult decision and I would like to thank colleagues from around the region’s NHS for their advice and support over the past few days.

“Although we have been able to put urgent safety protocols in place for a very small number of low risk deliveries since the suspension of our SCBU service on Thursday this is not something which can be sustained. The very clear and resounding advice that we have now had from maternity and neonatal experts around the region is that we need to pause all births so that we can ensure further robust processes are developed for low risk deliveries at South Tyneside hospital during the suspension of SCBU services.

“We recognise that this is very upsetting news for our staff, patients and the local community but the clinical safety of women and babies in our care simply must come first. We are working to support our maternity teams and talking to the women and families affected by this urgent safety measure.”

Dr Stephen Sturgiss, Clinical Lead for the Northern England Maternity Network said: “We fully support this essential safety measure which is being taken by the Trust and have given a strongly agreed clinical view that the safest option is to temporarily pause births in South Tyneside as a consequence of the critical staffing issues in SCBU. We are actively supporting the Trust to manage this very difficult situation and ensure continuity of care for those women and families affected. I would like to thank colleagues across the region for the unwavering support and help offered to South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust at this extremely challenging time.”

Martyn Boyd, Manager of the Northern Neonatal Network said: “We are working closely with South Tyneside and other neighbouring Trusts to support this difficult situation. Despite extensive discussions and concerted efforts with all partners throughout the region, it is simply not possible to find extra appropriately skilled staff from other neonatal units to support the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) in South Tyneside in the short term. This has left no option other than to temporarily suspend the service, meaning it is also therefore no longer possible to continue delivering babies on site due to possible safety risks without the SCBU facility being available.

“Unfortunately there is simply no extra workforce capacity to fill the gaps in rotas. Neonatal care is a highly specialised area of nursing which requires extensive experience and the issues being faced in South Tyneside reflect the very real challenges facing the workforce

who have worked tirelessly to maintain a safe service there, but this has not been sustainable. We have thus supported the very difficult decision taken by the Trust in the short term and will continue to help in any way we can with all those trying to explore solutions beyond the initial crisis.”

Dr David Hambleton, Chief Officer at NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), said: “We fully support the difficult decision by the Trust to temporarily suspend births at South Tyneside District Hospital and our primary concern is the safety of women and babies and our duty of care to patients in South Tyneside.

“We will continue to support the Trust and do all we can to ensure that the necessary work takes place as soon as possible to allow low risk deliveries to take place in the hospital during the temporary suspension of SCBU services.

“The immense pressure on incredibly hardworking clinical staff demonstrates exactly why we are currently talking with patients about possible changes to maternity services through the Path to Excellence consultation so that we can avoid this sort of situation in future.”

A joint statement from NHS England and NHS Improvement said: “We appreciate that the decision by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust to temporarily suspend its special care baby unit and obstetric unit services has been a very difficult one to make. Ensuring the safety of mums and babies must be the absolute priority.

“We will continue to work closely with South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and other Trusts in the region to help maintain the safe and sustainable health care of mums and their new born babies and to support plans to re-instate births in South Tyneside as soon as possible.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

* The Northern Neonatal Network is one of the 16 (11 in England) Managed Clinical Networks for neonatal care in the UK. The Network was brought together as a formal group following recommendations from the Department of Health to ensure babies and their families’ receive the highest quality of care.

The Northern Neonatal Network is the largest of the neonatal networks in England in terms of geographical area covered. It stretches from the borders of Cumbria and Northumberland

down past the Tees valley into North Yorkshire, where it borders the Yorkshire & Humber Neonatal Network. There are a total of 11 units within the Network. Four of these are designated as Level 3 or Neonatal Intensive Care (NICU), and seven are designated as Level 1 or Special Care Baby Units (SCBUs). The eleven units working collaboratively with the Network to cater for a population of over 3 million people and an annual birth rate of approximately 35,000. It covers all Local Authorities in the North East and North Cumbria and care is provided on the 11 sites by nine different NHS Foundation/Acute Hospital Trusts

**The Northern Maternity Network covers includes obstetricians, midwives, and a wide variety of other professionals from across the region's NHS who use their expert knowledge and experience relating to maternity care provision in the North East and North Cumbria. The main discussion forum in which the Network comes together in order to discuss and set policy is the Maternity Clinical Advisory Group