

STRICTLY EMBARGOED - 12.30pm Monday 15 January 2018

Delivery of babies set to resume at South Tyneside hospital

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust has today confirmed that the delivery of babies at South Tyneside District Hospital is planned to resume from Monday 22 January 2018.

Births have been temporarily suspended at the hospital since the 4 December 2017 and this was following the temporary suspension of the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) service on 30 November 2017 due to acute staffing pressures within SCBU.

Healthcare leaders had to make a very important safety decision to suspend births at the hospital while the SCBU service was unavailable due to staffing shortages. This was to ensure ongoing safe care for pregnant women and babies and the decision was taken in conjunction with NHS partners around the region in the very best interests of patient care.

After working closely with staff over the past month to find a solution to the immediate staffing pressures, the Trust has today confirmed that a safe staffing rota for SCBU has now been secured for the next three months. Work remains ongoing to ensure a safe staffing rota is secured beyond this time frame.

Local pregnant women should contact their midwives in the usual way to discuss their birthing plans. In recent weeks, the Trust has already been in touch with women who are due to deliver up until the 22 January and any women who are due to deliver soon and have immediate queries can call the Trust's midwife-led telephone advice service which is available 24/7 on [0191 2024190](tel:01912024190).

The Trust has thanked staff in SCBU and maternity services, as well as union colleagues, for their understanding and commitment to deliver safe patient care. Healthcare leaders are keen to emphasise, however, that the SCBU service

still remains very fragile due to staffing pressures and the situation will continue to be monitored closely on a daily basis as work progresses to bolster the staffing position.

The Trust has also thanked NHS colleagues at the region's neonatal and maternity networks, neighbouring maternity services and the North East Ambulance Service for their help and support during this temporary suspension of services in South Tyneside.

Dr Shahid Wahid, Medical Director at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust said: "We are very pleased that we have been able to find a safe solution to the immediate staffing challenges in SCBU and I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this positive outcome.

"I must stress, however, that the SCBU rota that we have been able to secure is for a three month period only and is once again reliant on the tremendous goodwill of our amazing staff who have pulled out all the stops to get us to this position.

"The safety and wellbeing of the mothers and babies in our care must always come first and we thank patients and staff for their understanding as we have worked through this difficult situation for everybody. We will continue to monitor the position on a daily basis to ensure that we continue to have safe staffing in place in the months ahead.

"We also now look forward to the outcome of the formal consultation process into local maternity services which will allow us to develop a robust, sustainable service in the long-term and help avoid any such crisis situations occurring again."

The future of local maternity services has recently been consulted on as part of phase one of the Path to Excellence programme. The formal public consultation for this concluded on 15 October 2017 and a decision about the long-term future is expected from NHS South Tyneside CCG and NHS Sunderland CCG in February 2018.

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Dr Shahid Wahid, Medical Director, will be available for interview between 2pm and 3pm at South Tyneside District Hospital on Monday 15 January.