

Maternity Voices Partnership

Lothian Birth Centre Visit



Visit held on 29 September 2025



Who took part

Maternity Voices Partnership	Lothian Birth Centre
<p>Vivianne Carter, lay member Maria Fanourgiaki, lay member Kate Florio, Doula Sophie Orton, Doula Gemma Skinner, Breastfeeding Network Rosie Smith, Midlothian Sure Start Kirstin Worsley, Breastfeeding Network Mathilde Peace, MVP lay Chair</p>	<p>Fiona Lumber, Charge Midwife</p>

Fiona, Charge Midwife at the Lothian Birth Centre (LBC), welcomed the MVP members. We were invited to make ourselves comfortable in the lounge area near the entrance and introductions were made.

Emma Campbell, Clinical Governance, and Corinne Love, Consultant Obstetrician, stopped by to meet the group. Angela Watt, Clinical Manager, was able to join us for the start of the visit.

Fiona's dedication to the LBC and love of her job shone through. She explained that understanding and respecting individual choices is central to the philosophy of care at the LBC.

We learned a lot from listening to Fiona and we are very grateful for her sincerity, openness and the time she kindly spent with us. Thank you!





Facts and Figures about the LBC

- Around 1300 babies are born every year in the Birth Centre
- There are 6 birthing rooms, all with en-suite shower room
- There is a birthing pool in each room
- Most mothers and birthing people go home with their baby directly from the birthing room but there is a 4-bedded bay for postnatal care if required.





Key messages for future parents



Ask your midwife about the birth centre



Focus on individualised care

Having a baby at the LBC is an option open to many women and birthing people. Fiona's message is to "ask your midwife about the birth centre".

Individual care plans for labour and birth (including emotionally informed plans) can be discussed with senior midwifery staff and a multi-disciplinary team to find the best plan for each individual. Some women and birthing people will want reassurance that the labour ward is close-by if they want an epidural or if continuous monitoring of the baby becomes necessary. Others want to know that their wish for midwifery-led care and low intervention will be supported for as long as safely and medically possible.



Even if you think (or are told) it is not for you



Extended criteria

The LBC is recommended for women and birthing people who had a straightforward pregnancy and no medical condition but Fiona stressed that individualised birth plans can be put in place in other circumstances and that the admission criteria can be extended. The LBC midwifery staff and the Medical Team will work together with the woman or birthing person to design a birth plan that considers both emotional and medical safety.



Admission and Transfers

► Labour Line

Every woman and birthing person planning to give birth at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh is given a central phone number - **the Labour Line** - to call when they think they are in labour or their waters have broken. The LBC option is offered as a first choice to everyone who meets the admission criteria and women and birthing people are invited to come straight to the LBC to be examined. They can then decide to stay or go to the Labour Ward if this is their preference.

► Transfers

Around one in three women or birthing people are transferred to the Labour Ward. This reflects the approach adopted by the LBC to extend the admission criteria through individualised birth plans.



Options to manage labour pain

- ▶ The LBC offers a range of methods for pain relief, including aromatherapy oils, TENS machines, the birthing pool, gas and air (Entonox) and sterile water injections.
- ▶ Epidural analgesia is not available in the birth centre but it is possible to start labouring in the birth centre and transfer at any time to the labour ward, should you wish to access this form of pain relief.
- ▶ Sterile Water Injections
Fiona talked about a fairly recent option: sterile water injections. She explained that this works by counteracting backpain and provides effective relief in early labour. The effect lasts between 90 mins and 2 1/5 hours.

Pros of Sterile Water Injections

- Instant pain relief
- Drug free

Cons of Sterile Water Injections

- Painful (like bee-stings) when the water is injected but this is short-lasting.



Is the LBC often closed to new admissions?



LBC closures

Fiona explained that, on occasion, the LBC has to stop taking new admissions. This happens when there are concerns with staffing levels in the maternity unit and staff are redeployed to the labour Ward to ensure everyone's care is safe.

In these circumstances, women and birthing people are admitted to the Labour Ward.

The closure may last a few hours but rarely for a whole day so Fiona encouraged women and birthing people to keep asking if the LBC could be opened for them or if they can be admitted or transferred when the facility re-opens.



Useful to know

- ▶ Lighting can be adjusted in the birth room.

Fairy lights and galaxy lights are available. The lights in the bathroom are triggered by a sensor so it is handy to bring some masking tape if you wish to avoid full lights when, for example, relaxing in the shower.

- ▶ Food and drink

Snacks, ice cream and toast are readily available as is cooled water and diluted juice.

- ▶ Newborn checks

LBC midwifery staff are trained to do all the newborn checks.

Birthing room



Birth affirmations posters



Birthing pool



Galaxy lights, aromatherapy and candles



Birthing aids



En-suite Shower room



Folding Cozy-Chair for Partners

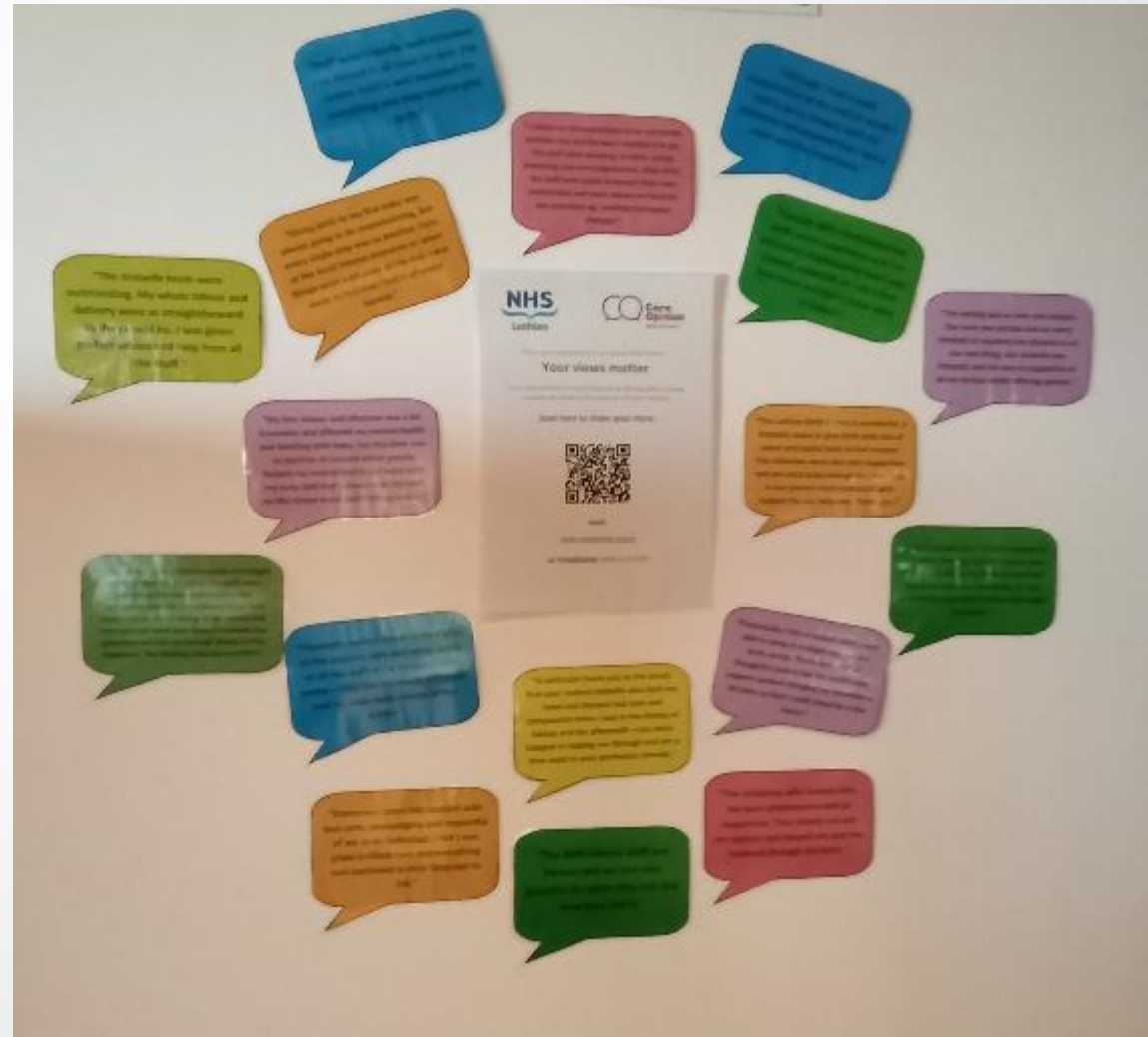


Knitted hats and gifts



Feedback Board

We liked how the voices of women, birthing people and their family are displayed.



Staff from all maternity areas in the hospital were invited to come and meet the MVP members after the visit. We had great conversations (and shared cake) with around ten midwives and Clinical Support Workers who kindly came to see us.





Conclusion

- Our main take-away message is that the LBC is a real option for many women and birthing people. This might include those who, for a range of reasons, may not have considered it or think that it is not for them.
- We would like this message to be communicated consistently during antenatal care.
- It is important that the women and birthing people who may not meet all the admission criteria know that they have the option and the right to be seen by the LBC senior midwifery staff in order to discuss and put in place an individualised birth plan for the birth centre .
- [Lothian Birth Centre – Maternity Services](#)
- [Virtual tours of units – Maternity Services](#)