

# The future of the Brent Birth Centre

## A public consultation

A report summarising responses to the consultation

Brent   
Teaching Primary Care Trust

February 2008

The North West London Hospitals   
NHS Trust

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# 1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the feedback received during the formal public consultation about the future of the Brent Birth Centre (BBC). The consultation started on Friday 2 November 2007 and ended on 8 February 2008.

The report also provides information about the activities held before and during the consultation to ensure engagement with the local community, users of the service and NHS staff.

This report will be considered by the Boards of The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust (the Trust) and the Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT).

A decision about the next steps will be made by Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust after it has considered the responses to the consultation at its Board meeting in March 2008. The response to the consultation is also subject to endorsement from the Brent Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This report will also be distributed to those organisations that took part in the consultation and will be made available on the website [www.nwlh.nhs.uk/brentbirth](http://www.nwlh.nhs.uk/brentbirth) following discussions at the board meetings of the PCT and the Trust.

## 2. Background and key events in the period before statutory consultation

In August 2007, The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust started informal discussions with key stakeholders about the future of the Brent Birth Centre and some possible options including moving the service to Northwick Park Hospital.

Whilst the centre, which is a midwifery-led unit based on the site of Central Middlesex Hospital, provides a good service to local women the Trust and PCT started to consider a number of options for the future of the centre. This was due to a number of factors including:

- **Lack of demand for the service:** Despite actively promoting the centre, the vast majority of women from Brent and Harrow who are suitable for a midwifery-led unit are not choosing the Brent Birth Centre. Midwives deliver in the region of 300 births a year – just 25 a month - when they would expect to be delivering more than 1,000.
- **Strengthening services:** By moving the service to Northwick Park Hospital, women would have on-site access to obstetric care - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. One in four of the women who have their babies at the BBC have to be transferred by ambulance to the obstetric unit at Northwick Park Hospital in labour because they need medical help.
- **Preparing for the future:** London is facing an increasing number of births. It is important that the Trust and PCT are able to support these changes so that we can provide enough midwives and obstetricians to care for future mothers and babies in an effective, efficient and safe environment.
- **Choice for women:** Moving the service to Northwick Park Hospital would enable women from across Brent and Harrow to access midwifery-led care. Moving the service to Northwick Park Hospital would still allow women to be cared for in a 'home from home' environment similar to the Brent Birth Centre but with the comfort of knowing there is on-site obstetric care available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Making the best use of taxpayer's money:** The centre costs the local NHS £1.2m a year to run but, because of a lack of demand, the Trust is running it at a loss of £300,000 a year.

As part of these informal discussions stakeholders - including staff, patient forums, local MPs, local councils and health partners - were asked whether they felt the Trust and PCT had considered the possible options available to them, as well as inviting them to suggest alternatives to the four options which were laid out in an initial paper.

These options were:

- 1) Do nothing - the Trust would continue to provide midwifery-led services at the Brent Birth Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital.
- 2) Transfer all maternity care to Northwick Park Hospital's Maternity Unit. This would mean that there would no longer be a midwifery led unit at either Northwick Park or Central Middlesex hospitals. There would also be no antenatal services provided at Central Middlesex Hospital
- 3) Transfer inpatient (delivery) maternity care to Northwick Park Hospital's Maternity Unit. Create a dedicated midwifery-led unit within Northwick Park Hospital's recently refurbished maternity unit. Continue to provide antenatal care at the Brent Birth Centre.
- 4) Transfer inpatient (delivery) maternity care to Northwick Park Hospital's Maternity Unit. Create a dedicated midwifery-led unit within Northwick Park Hospital's recently refurbished maternity unit. Provide antenatal services at Central Middlesex Hospital, but not within the Brent Birth Centre.

Stakeholders were also asked to inform the Trust and PCT of any additional groups or organisations that they thought should be involved in the formal consultation process.

Please see appendix one for a copy of the letter sent to stakeholders. Appendix four includes a list of meetings the Trust and PCT attended.

### **3. The formal consultation**

The formal consultation process ran from Friday 2 November to Friday 8 February 2008.

The following actions were taken in order to listen to and understand the views of stakeholders both before and during the consultation period:

#### **3.1 Publications**

To support the consultation process a number of documents were produced including:

- A consultation document including a free post envelope and pull out feedback form
- A summary consultation document leaflet
- Posters advertising the consultation and the public meetings.

A distribution list for the documents is included in appendix three.

#### **3.2 Survey of local women**

As part of the consultation, more than 4,000 questionnaires were sent out to women who had registered to deliver their baby at Northwick Park Hospital's maternity unit and the Brent Birth Centre.

The PCT and the Trust hoped to gain a clearer understanding of the reasons why the Brent Birth Centre is not popular with mothers as well as grasp the factors which influence the choice of unit for expectant mothers. This survey was also made available online.

A summary of the feedback received from this survey is included on page 12.

#### **3.3 Public meetings**

Two public meetings were held at the Wembley Centre for Health and Care on Wednesday 21 November and Wednesday 28 November at Central Middlesex Hospital.

The meetings were advertised in the Brent and Willesden Times and the Harrow and Wembley Observer newspapers, throughout November. The dates were also included in the consultation document, summary leaflet and posters, both PCT and Trust websites as well as covering letters to stakeholders and press releases for the local media.

Attendance at these meetings was very low. One member of the public and a journalist attended the first meeting on 21 November. One member of the public and a staff member attended the second meeting on 28 November.

### **3.4 Other meetings**

Members of local voluntary organisations were offered the opportunity for representatives from the Trust or PCT to come and talk to their organisation about the consultation.

Members of the Trust and PCT also presented the rationale around this consultation and the options to a range of local stakeholder meetings including the Brent and Harrow Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Brent PCT Patient Forum, the NWLH Patient Forum, Maternity Services Liaison Committee and the Patient and Public Involvement and Participation Committee (PIPPCO).

A Trust representative also met with the Brent BME forum after the formal consultation period following a request from the group to do so.

Staff briefings and discussions were also held at the maternity department and a general staff briefing was also organised at Central Middlesex Hospital. The matter was also discussed at Joint Staff Consultative Committee meetings.

The Brent Birth Centre was discussed at two of the Trust's public Board meetings on 15 August and 26 September 2007, which are held in public and publicly advertised in the local papers and on our websites.

The Brent Teaching PCT discussed and approved the formal consultation at their board meeting in September 2007.

See appendix four for diary of main events.

### **3.5 Media**

A special press briefing was held with local newspapers on Wednesday 15 August to inform them that both the Trust and PCT were planning to publicly consult on options for the future of the centre.

This briefing was attended by the Brent and Willesden Times and the Harrow and Wembley Observer. The briefing was led by Fiona Wise, Chief Executive of the Trust and a question and answer session was held. When the consultation launched in November, a press release was issued at the same time with a view to publicising public meetings and explaining ways the public could have their say. A further press release was issued in January as a reminder of the deadline for the end of the consultation.

See appendix two for press releases.

### **3.6 Website and email**

A dedicated section of the Trust's website was developed for the consultation [www.nwlh.nhs.uk](http://www.nwlh.nhs.uk) which included online feedback forms, the consultation documents and press releases. The website address was included in all the publicity documents and letters. A link was also included on the PCT's website.

A dedicated email address for the consultation was also set up – [brent.birth@nwlh.nhs.uk](mailto:brent.birth@nwlh.nhs.uk) so people could email their feedback forms, comments and responses to the consultation.

### **3.7 Distribution of documents**

The consultation document and summary leaflets were distributed to a wide variety of individuals and community groups along with a letter of explanation. A list of these organisations are included in appendix three.

## **4. Summary of responses received during the consultation**

This section summarises the responses received during the consultation process which need to be considered as part of the decision making process on the future of the Brent Birth Centre.

Firstly, it deals with responses to the main questions asked within the consultation materials and feedback forms. It then goes on to highlight responses to the survey and those received from key organisations.

Section five brings together the main themes raised from the above and other meetings, letters and emails received.

### **4.1 Responses to questions asked during the consultation process**

Twenty-six feedback forms were received from individuals during the consultation period.

Of these:

- nine were users of the service
- nine were members of the public
- three were NHS staff
- two community representatives
- three other

The feedback forms asked four specific questions and asked for any other comments. These questions and a summary of the responses received are as follows (more information is also included in appendix five).

#### **4.1.2 Responses to question one**

**Question one: Do you have any other options which you feel we should consider?**

Out of the 26 responses, six said they felt all options had been explored and 13 did not answer the question. Three feedback forms suggested another option should be that full obstetric services be added to the BBC or CMH. Two forms said the Brent Birth Centre ought to stay and that it should be better publicised to local women; this was a common theme throughout the answers to the questions.

#### **4.1.3 Responses to question two**

**Question two: If you had to choose a preferred option from this list, what would that be and why?**

Of the nine respondents that favoured option one, two suggested a publicity campaign for the Brent Birth Centre should go hand in hand to maximise take-up in Brent and also Ealing.

<b>Option 1</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Option 2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Option 3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Option 4</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Option 2 or 3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Option 3 or 4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Did not specify</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

#### 4.1.4 Responses to questions three

**Questions three: If we were to go ahead with option four, what do you think would be the important issues for us to take into account?**

There was a wide variety of answers to this question but the most significant theme to come out of the responses to this question was recreating a "home from home" environment like the Brent Birth Centre's and ensuring the same services, staff and facilities were available if a new centre was created at Northwick Park.

Other important factors included:

- Staff: knowing your midwife before giving birth, feeling supported and having a midwife with you all the time
- Option of water births
- Partners being able to stay the night
- Ensuring waiting areas for relatives and provision for siblings

In terms of the location of Northwick Park, key factors to consider were:

- **Transport links:** there were concerns that Northwick Park was too far away for Brent families and transport links from Brent were poor, or at least needed to be publicised
- **Staff:** reassurances were sought that staff would not lose their jobs
- **Signposting:** several responses listed signage as important; there was criticism of the signage at Central Middlesex Hospital and one response said the Brent Birth Centre was difficult to find
- **Parking:** several people said parking was expensive at Northwick Park and if the Brent Birth Centre was relocated there, the unit ought to have its own separate car park that was free of charge
- **Reputation:** Northwick Park's reputation was mentioned as being a source of concern

#### 4.1.5 Responses to question four

**Question four: If you are a current or previous user of the Brent Birth Centre, what do you think works well and what do you think we could**

### **improve on? What would you see as important features of the service if it should be provided at Northwick Park Hospital?**

The answers to this question were similar to the answers to the previous question. In terms of what works well, again the overwhelming response was the Brent Birth Centre's comfortable, home-from-home environment. People also liked the water births option, partners having the option of staying the night, the kitchen, having a bathroom in every room and said it was important to have a good relationship with their midwife. It was clear that respondents felt a midwifery-led centre at Northwick Park should be as much like the Brent Birth Centre as possible.

In terms of improvements, one response said that the availability of air and gas needed to be more flexible. Signposting was mentioned again as were transport links. Only one response was critical of the service and care at the Brent Birth Centre, while another praised the post-natal care but criticised the ante-natal care and said they had missed out on scans due to a shortage of staff.

Another theme was the perceived reputation of Northwick Park Hospital's maternity unit and that women might be nervous to have their baby there because of 'special measures'.

#### **4.1.6 Responses to question five**

Question five on the feedback form asked for other comments. These are summarised in section five and have been combined with other general responses received via emails, letters and comments from meetings.

## 4.2 Responses received from survey

As part of this consultation both Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust and The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust surveyed mothers who had used local maternity services in order to understand the reasons why they chose to have their baby at particular maternity units over others.

Over four thousand questionnaires (4,301) were sent to new mothers in Brent and Harrow whose details were registered on the maternity database held by The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust in November 2007.

A total of 392 (9%) mothers completed or part completed the questionnaire within the deadline for the consultation. They were returned either online or via the free postal address set-up.

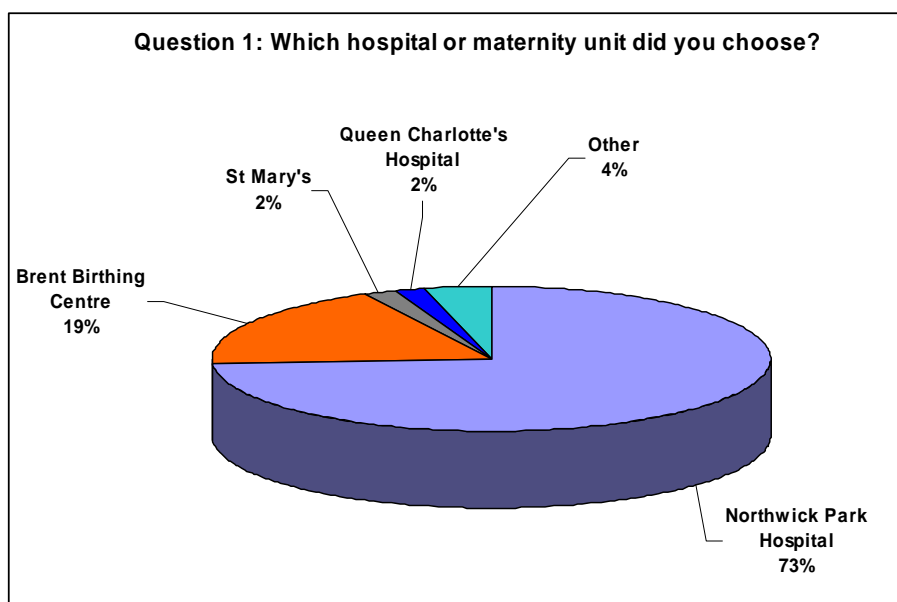
The survey included seven questions and an opportunity for women to add any further comments.

The vast majority of women who responded felt their experiences to be excellent (33%) or good (36%). The major factors which influenced their choice of unit were distance, availability of medical staff on site and previous experiences. Most women relied on their GP or midwife to advise them about which maternity unit or hospital to choose.

A summary analysis of the responses is given below.

### Question one: Which hospital or maternity unit did you choose?

The vast majority, 73%, chose Northwick Park Hospital followed by the Brent Birth Centre which is to be expected given that the survey was of women living in Brent and Harrow.



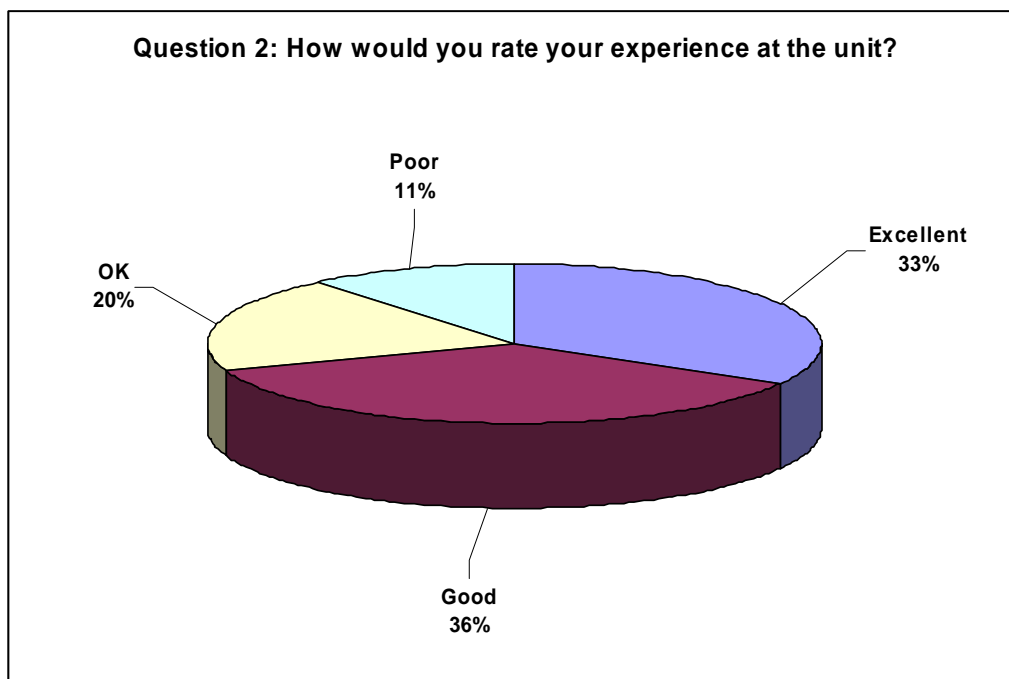
Question 1: Number of respondents and maternity unit chosen					
Northwick Park Hospital	Brent Birth Centre	St Mary's	Queen Charlotte's Hospital	Other	Total
289	73	7	7	15	391

Others	
Edgware Birthing Unit	8
Watford	2
Home	2
Hillingdon	1
Royal Free	1
St John & St Elizabeth	1
Total	15

### Question two: How would you rate your experience at the unit?

The majority of respondents indicated that their experience had been either excellent or good at their chosen unit.

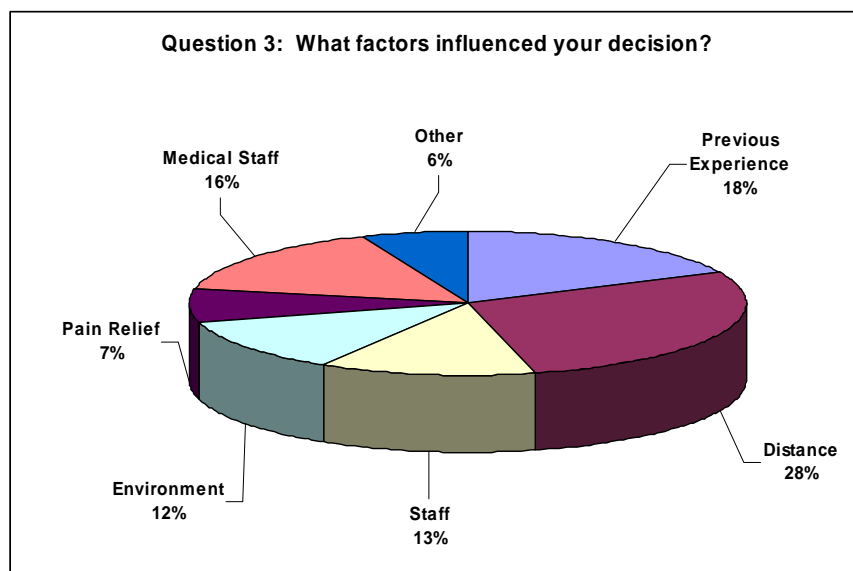
Experience of respondents				
Excellent	Good	OK	Poor	Total
129	140	76	43	388



### Question three: What factors influenced your decision?

There were 684 responses to this question with many mothers choosing more than one factor. The overwhelming response was distance with 191 women picking distance as their first consideration followed by previous experience, staff and environment.

What factors influenced your decision?	
Previous experience	124
Distance	191
Staff	86
Environment	83
Pain Relief	51
Medical Staff	107
Other	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>684</b>

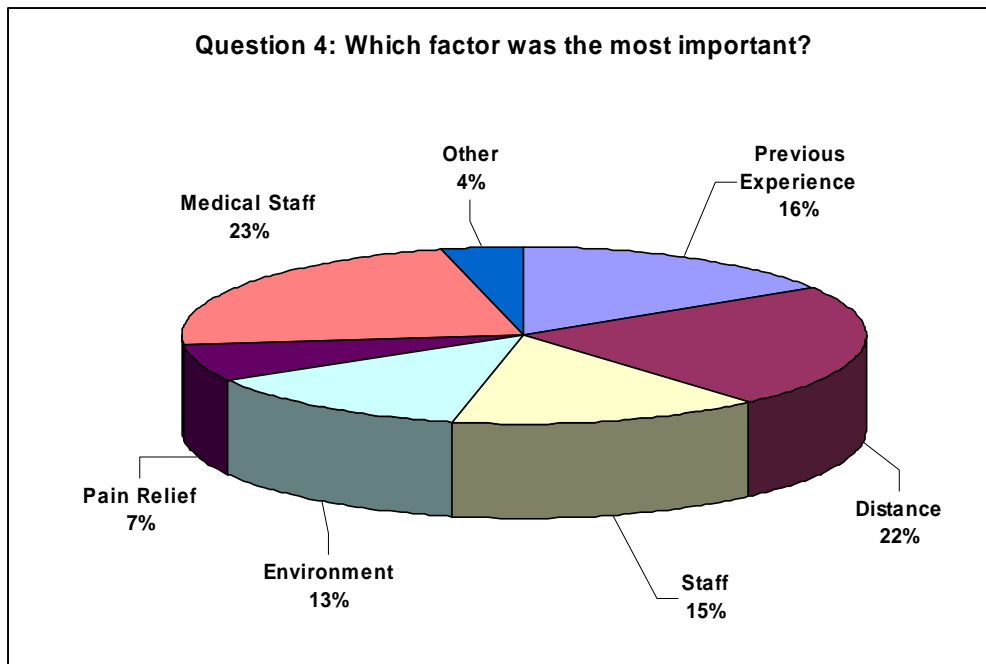


### Question four: Which factor was the most important?

501 responses were given and of these 114 women said distance and 114 women said availability of medical staff on site.

Question 4: Which factors were the most important?							
Previous Experience	Distance	Staff	Environment	Pain Relief	Medical Staff	Other	Total
80	114	73	67	34	114	19	501

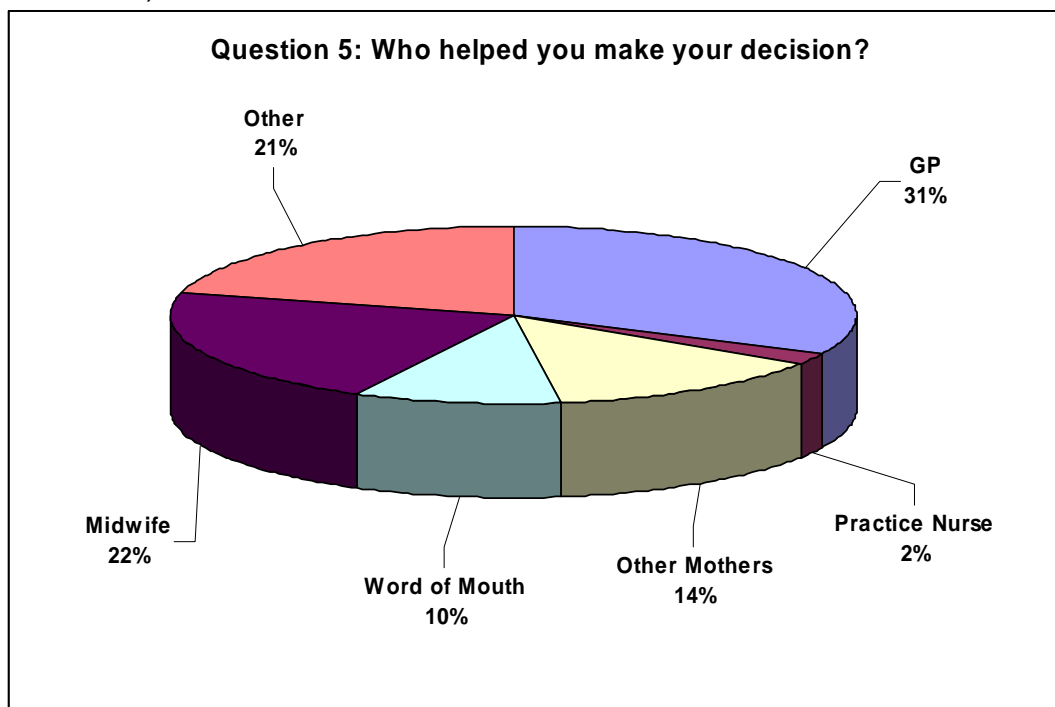
Other			
No Choice	3	Parking	1
Good care and communications	2	Close to home	1
Staff attitude	2	C Section	1
Partner	1	Reputation	1
Experience	1	Labour, partner, god, faith, husband	1
Medical staff	1		
Equal importance	1		
Very short labour	1		
Cleanliness	1		
Trusted midwife	1		
<b>Total</b>			<b>19</b>



**Question five: Who helped you make your decision?**

An analysis of responses shows that the majority of women relied on their GP (136) to help them choose the most appropriate delivery unit. However midwives (92) were nominated as second most likely to assist with choice of delivery unit.

Interestingly 187 women in total responded by saying they had help making their decision from word of mouth (41), other mothers (58) and other (88) (which included partners, own decision, having no choice and their consultant).

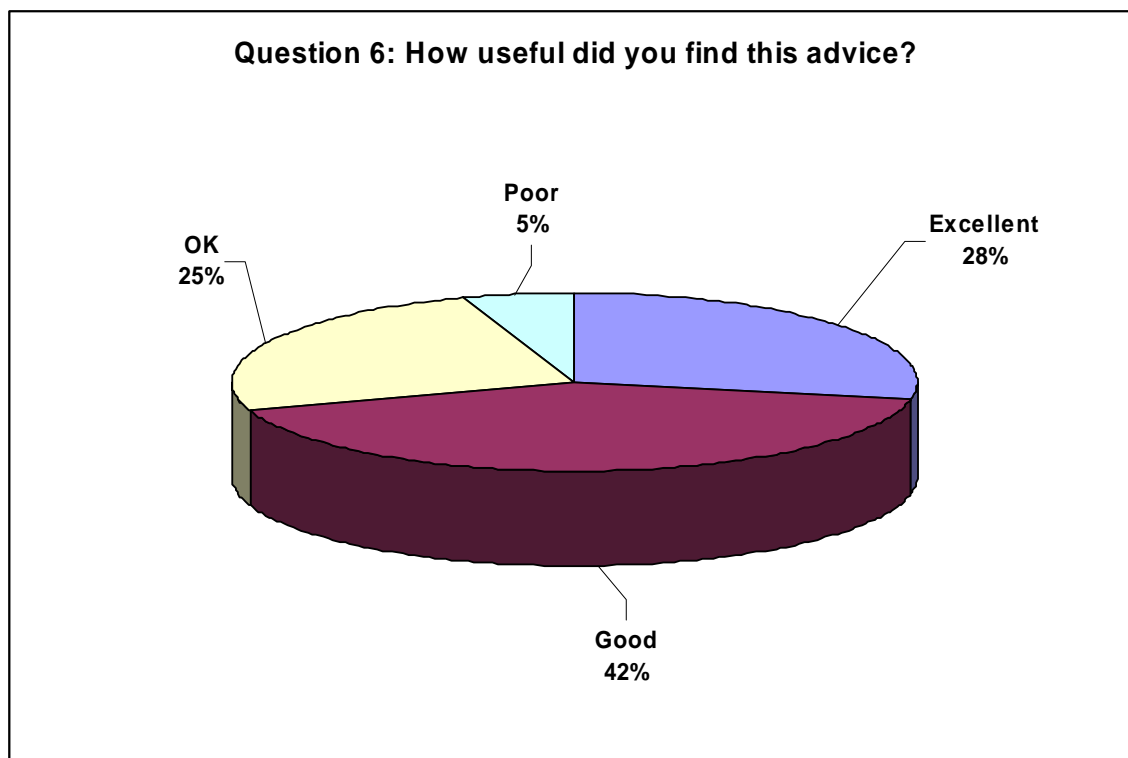


Who helped you make your decision?						
GP	Practice nurse	Other mothers	Word of mouth	Midwife	Other	Total
136	8	58	41	92	88	423

Other			
My own decision	24	Neighbours	1
Husband/partner	20	Private doctor	1
No choice	11	Health visitor	1
Consultant	6	Read a report on the internet	1
Not disclosed	6	Conjoined clinic	1
Previous experience	4	Experience in pathology	1
Ambulance	2	Word of mouth	1
Visit	2		
Friends/ family	2		
<b>Total</b>			<b>84</b>

### Questions six: How useful did you find this advice?

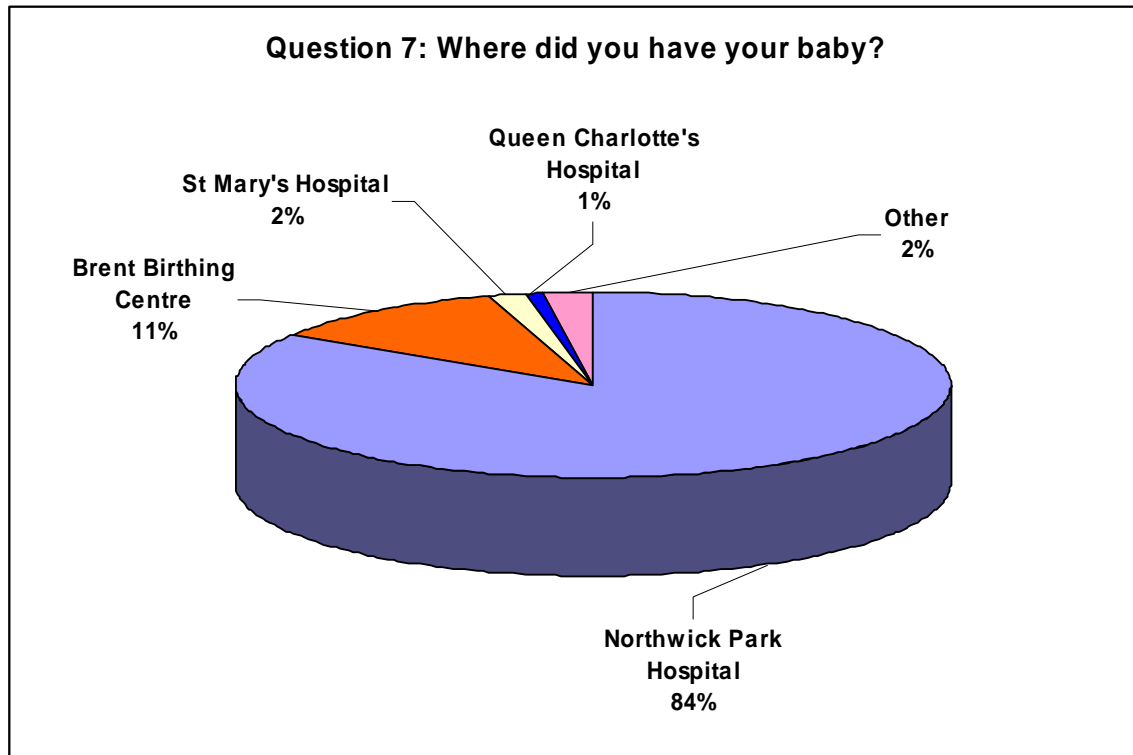
95% of women said they found the advice excellent, good or ok.



Question 6: How useful did you OK find this advice?				
Excellent	Good	OK	Poor	total
96	142	86	18	342

### Question seven: Where did you have your baby?

Of the 73 women who selected the Brent Birthing Centre as their first choice only 42 were able to deliver there. Whilst the number who gave birth at Northwick Park Hospital went up to 320 (from 289) confirming that 31 of these women needed medical assistance requiring transfer to Northwick Park.



Where did you have your baby?					
NPH	BBC	St Mary's	QCH	Other	Total
320	42	6	4	8	380

Other	
Watford	1
Hillingdon	1
Home	1
Not born yet	1
Royal Free	1
Unknown	1
St John and St Elizabeth	1
Edgware Birth Centre	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

## Other comments

The questionnaire also allowed women to include comments about the care they received and their contact details.

Of the 392 respondents, 185 chose to make detailed comments about their experience which is indicative of the emphasis women place on having high-quality local maternity services.

There were a range of comments from considerable praise for both the Northwick Park Maternity Unit and Brent Birth Centre to issues about midwife staffing levels as well as antenatal and postnatal care.

A number of comments addressed choice of delivery unit and stressed the importance of midwifery led units being in 'hospital grounds' to be considered a valid choice. Distance and the creation of an aesthetically comfortable environment were also raised within a number of respondent comments.

Many respondents commented that they chose not to use the BBC due to the absence of onsite medical assistance should this become necessary.

One respondent commented:

"I find it absolutely astonishing that a Birth Centre was set up on a site without medical back-up. Did someone honestly expect especially first-time mothers to take such an unnecessary risk?"

Equally, many respondents suggested that if the midwife led unit was available with this support they would have no hesitation in selecting it. This was demonstrated in the following comment:

"I would love to have my second baby at a midwifery led unit but both Edgware and Brent do not have the back-up emergency medical support. It would be lovely to see the BBC move to Northwick Park Hospital."

The more critical comments made about midwife capacity, antenatal and postnatal services will be used to improve service delivery and inform future maternity service planning for Brent and Harrow.

The outcome of the survey clearly demonstrates the importance that women place on having a first-rate maternity care that is easily accessible and ensures that medical staff are readily available in the event of complications.

### **4.3 Responses from key organisations**

Eleven statutory/voluntary organisations responded to the consultation and a short summary of these is detailed below. The responses are included in full in appendix six.

Eight organisations supported option four but several also sought reassurances. The National Childbirth Trust requested more information and data before a final decision on the future of the centre was made, while the Brent and Harrow Supervisors of Midwives said they wished the Brent Birth Centre to remain in its present state.

The Trust's response to some of these concerns is detailed in section five. They will all be responded too once a decision has been made by Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust.

#### **4.3.1 Brent Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The committee provided a detailed response and agreed it was "clear and sensible" that the Trust and tPCT favour Option Four and it accepted the case for change as outlined in the consultation document.

It questioned how genuine the option to do nothing was, as it had been made clear that the centre could not continue to operate in current circumstances.

The committee said it would have been helpful to have further information on the possible future uses of the Brent Birth Centre and a breakdown of possible areas of future use would have been useful in conjunction with an outline of any restrictions on use which may apply.

#### **4.3.2 Harrow Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The committee said if favoured option four, as it would strengthen maternity provision for Harrow women and use NHS resources more effectively. In supporting option four, it was concerned that it ran counter to the *Healthcare for London: A Framework for Action's* emphasis on midwifery-led units and community-based maternity service.

#### **4.3.3 National Childbirth Trust (NCT)**

The National Childbirth Trust provided a detailed response to the consultation and requested more information and clarity on a number of issues before a decision is taken regarding the future of the Centre. Two local members of the NCT also responded to the consultation, both echoing their national body's sentiments.

#### **4.3.4 Brent and Harrow Supervisors of Midwives**

The Supervisors of Midwives recommended the Brent Birth Centre remain where it is and continue as normal. It asked for the implementation of integrated teams in Brent to promote choice of birth location and recommended the centre be actively promoted.

#### **4.3.5 Ealing PCT**

Ealing PCT said it supported the position taken by Brent PCT and the Trust in preferring option four. It emphasised that access to maternity services to its population had been severely restricted as a result of Northwick Park being on special measures and that in supporting option four its "explicit expectation" was that the service change would result in Ealing's population having access to the birth centre and increased hospital-based activity.

#### **4.3.6 Brent PCT Patient and Public Involvement Forum**

The Forum said it would ideally support Option 1 (keeping the Brent Birth Centre open) with the addition of extended obstetric services, but said since it had been made clear that the current situation was not viable it supported option four and with ante-natal services at Central Middlesex Hospital.

It suggested a survey of public transport routes to different maternity services and asked for data on the number of births at the BBC by ethnic group so that the impact of proposals on these groups could be assessed. It also sought assurances the proposals were in line with the London-wide strategy for health.

#### **4.3.7 NWLH PPI Forum**

The Forum supported option four and said antenatal services should be provided at Central Middlesex Hospital but not necessarily at the Brent Birth Centre. The Forum requested a number of assurances including information about the cost of the proposed new unit at Northwick Park and that arrangements with neighbouring boroughs had been fully explored to maximise take-up at the Brent Birth Centre.

#### **4.3.8 BME Forum**

Just after the consultation period ended the BME forum requested a presentation and the Director of Nursing of the Trust attended their meeting to discuss issues and answer questions. The key messages that came out of this meeting were:

- There were concerns about reputation of Northwick Park's maternity unit and one GP raised lack of confidence in Northwick Park Hospital.
- There was a request that full maternity services are reinstated at Central Middlesex Hospital.
- Assurances were requested that the PCT and Trust had liaised with Barnet and Ealing PCTs in an effort to improve take-up.

- Details of the cost of moving the unit to Northwick Park Hospital were requested.
- The Forum requested that the Brent and NWLH PPI forums be issued ahead of time with a copy of the response to consultation report that goes to the Boards of the two Trusts.

#### **4.3.9 Harrow PCT**

The Chief Executive of Harrow PCT wrote to Brent tPCT in support of option four. The letter highlighted that this was the preferred option of its board; the practice based commissioning consortia, the local health and social care professionals, the Harrow PPI Forum and the Young People's Partnership.

#### **4.4.0 Maternity Services Liaison Committee (MSLC)**

The MSLC confirmed their support for option four in their response to the consultation. The Committee sought reassurances that:

- The unit demonstrate a commitment towards achieving Unicef Baby Friendly breast feeding status.
- Access to local services for the women of Brent and Harrow is prioritised taking into account the potential increase in demand.
- That the standard of the environment in outreach clinics at Central Middlesex for ante and postnatal care is good.

The committee also welcomed potential links to children's centres sites in Brent and Harrow and congratulated the unit on recent service improvements which are reflected in the maternity services review and acknowledged the work to improve services for vulnerable women.

#### **4.4.1 Harrow Local Safeguarding Children's Board**

The Children's Board response supports option four and believes this as the most effective option. The response also suggests further joint working with mothers and children to improve Harrow's infant mortality rate.

## 5. Main themes arising from responses

This section pulls together the main themes raised and responses to them from The North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust.

### 5.1 Preferred option

Not all respondents stated their preferred option however some analysis of those that did is given below.

#### Organisations

- Eight out of eleven organisations said they supported option four.

#### Feedback forms

- Nine favoured option one
- One considered option two to be the best option
- Four favoured option three
- Six favoured option four.
- One response favoured option two or three and one favoured option three or four.

Four people did not answer the question.

#### Emails responses

- Of the nine email responses, only one commented specifically on which option they preferred and this was option four.

### 5.2 Expand maternity services at Central Middlesex Hospital

A number of responses suggested that the Brent Birth Centre be expanded to include a full obstetric service or suggested that a full maternity service be set up at Central Middlesex Hospital as a way to encourage women to choose the Brent Birth Centre. Several respondents said they had wanted to have their baby at the Brent Birth Centre but ruled it out because of the risk of having to be transferred to Northwick Park if problems arose.

#### Response from the Trust and PCT

- Providing an obstetric service or basing doctors at the Brent Birth Centre is not an option for a number of reasons. National guidance recommends that maternity units have a minimum of 4,000 births a year. Given the close proximity of other maternity units to Central Middlesex Hospital and the size of the catchment area there would not be a sufficient number of births to sustain a full maternity unit. This is one of the reasons why changes to maternity services were consulted on in 1999.

### **5.3 More publicity about the Brent Birth Centre**

Comments from local women suggested there was not enough awareness in the community about the centre and several suggested that GPs and midwives in both Brent and Harrow were not offering it as a choice for women when considering options for the birth of their baby.

Other responses pointed out that the centre opened only three years ago and said that the demand for the birth centre, while low, was steadily increasing and that the service needed more time and that, combined with more publicity, it could be viable in the future.

During the consultation Fiona Wise, Chief Executive of NWLH NHS Trust wrote to Chief Executive of Harrow PCT, David Slegg about this issue. He replied stating that he would ensure relevant practitioners were made aware of the choice of the Brent Birth Centre for expectant mothers after the Trust alerted him to initial responses from Harrow women saying they were not being made aware of the Brent Birth Centre's existence.

#### **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- The Trust has promoted the service using leaflets and posters and by holding tours for women. The service has also been promoted through GP forums, Women's Partnership, Maternity Services Liaison Committee and Harrow National Childbirth Trust.
- All GPs have received copies of the eligibility criteria so that they can help to identify women who may wish to deliver their baby at the Centre.
- The service is also offered as an option to all 'low risk' women when they first book to have their baby with the Trust. It is then further promoted at their later appointment with a midwife.
- Despite the publicity during pre-consultation and consultation there was no increase in bookings for the Brent Birth Centre.

### **5.4 Choice and accessibility**

Several responses noted that while Harrow women would benefit from having the Brent Birth Centre situated at Northwick Park, it would limit choices for women living in Brent, many of whom feel Northwick Park is too far away, particularly for those in the south of the borough.

Other comments included concerns about the expense of parking at Northwick Park and questioned whether there would be enough available parking once a new unit was up and running.

The Trust was also encouraged to publicise transport links from Brent to Northwick Park.

Several comments, mainly from Harrow women, said they would welcome a midwifery-led unit at Northwick as it would enhance the already good service available there.

### **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- At present a high percentage (44%) of women living in Brent use the Northwick Park Hospital maternity unit. This compares to less than 1% who use the Brent Birth Centre. This suggests that women living in Brent are willing to travel to Northwick Park Hospital.
- Other choices for women in the south of Brent include St Mary's Hospital and Queen Charlotte's Hospital. Both of these hospitals are less than 5 miles from areas in the south of Brent.
- St Mary's Hospital is increasing their capacity for Brent births and has opened a midwifery-led unit. The women of south Brent will therefore have access to both an obstetric unit and midwifery led unit at St Mary's and at Northwick Park Hospital. The opening of the midwifery led unit at St Mary's Hospital may also result in demand for the Brent Birth Centre dropping further.
- A midwifery-led unit at Northwick Park will also allow more women increased choice as they will automatically have access to this unit should they meet the criteria as well as being able to give birth in the delivery suite.

## **5.5 Capacity at Northwick Park Hospital**

Several responses questioned whether there was room at Northwick Park for a midwifery-led unit to be built and also whether it had the capacity to take on more births given it was already very busy unit. Brent Birth Centre staff were also concerned that they may be brought in to work in the main maternity unit if things got busy or if there was a staffing shortage. They sought reassurances that they would not have to do so.

### **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- Space for a dedicated Midwifery Led Unit has been identified at Northwick Park Hospital.
- Brent Birth Centre staff will be able to transfer to this unit. The staffing of the overall Maternity Unit is flexible and the Trust may need to ask staff to work certain shifts in different areas of the department as per current practice.

- In addition, the Unit is working with the local PCTs to develop a new model of midwifery led care, in which the community and hospital services will be more fully integrated to allow women continuity throughout their pregnancy.

## **5.6 Reputation of Northwick Park Hospital**

Several respondents said they would not want to go to the maternity unit at Northwick Park because it had a bad reputation. Others said they knew that Northwick Park's maternity unit was now good, but that its image needed improving.

### **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- Special measures were lifted from Northwick Park Hospital's maternity unit in September 2006. There has been a £19m refurbishment including a new delivery suite, two dedicated obstetric theatres and fully refurbished wards. Four additional consultant obstetricians with specialist skills in the management of complex pregnancies have been introduced as well as twenty additional community midwives in the past year. There are 10 additional midwives at the hospital. Clinical governance structures have been overhauled.
- A Day Assessment Unit providing care to antenatal and postnatal women has been set up as well as an integrated fetal medicine unit. A full interpreting service in more than 100 languages has been introduced.
- The unit was also recently awarded CNST Level 2 which means the Unit has passed a number of rigorous quality and governance standards.
- In the Healthcare Commission's recent review of maternity services, the unit was rated as fair performing and was in the top eight maternity units in London.

## **5.7 Impact on staff**

Throughout the consultation period, the Trust has offered reassurances that staff would not be made redundant or lose their jobs.

Staff suggested that the Birth Centre should be publicised again more fully. They also raised concerns about whether Northwick Park Hospital would be able to absorb the additional number of births.

Staff also highlighted that students enjoy working in the Birth Centre and the midwives believe the midwife-led environment needs to be encouraged to promote normal delivery.

## **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- If Option 4 were to go ahead. The Trust would offer staff the opportunity to move across to the maternity unit at Northwick Park Hospital. There would be no redundancies.
- Publicity for the Centre - see section 5.3
- Capacity at Northwick Park -see section 5.5
- Promotion of normal delivery will continue through the proposal to transfer the Birth Centre to a midwifery led unit at Northwick Park Hospital. This will also continue to provide a training environment for student midwives.

## **5.8 Criticisms of initial decision**

Several responses questioned the reason for opening the Brent Birth Centre and questioned whether appropriate research had been done beforehand to find out if there was going to be demand for the centre.

## **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- The Brent Birth Centre was developed as a result of a public consultation with local women who said they wanted a midwifery-led unit. When the Trust opened the unit it anticipated more women using the service than has been the case.
- The Trust has an obligation to review the service to ensure that it is giving taxpayers value for money and giving all local expectant mothers equal access to a service that they can use.
- Strengthening services as referred to on page 4
- Preparing for the future as referred to on page 4
- Choice for women as referred to on page 4

## **5.9 Future uses of the centre**

One submission suggested that the Trust could consider collaborating with neighbouring hospitals who might be interested in using the BBC for low-risk deliveries. These hospitals could then contribute to some of the running costs.

Another suggested that the BBC could be modified and used as a polyclinic for Brent PCT to deliver community-based women's and children's care.

## **Response from the Trust and PCT**

- No decision has been made about the future use of the building at this stage as this is subject to the outcome of the consultation. However, it could be used to accommodate health services. The Trust and PCT would want to ensure that any services provided from this building in the future are appropriate.

## **6.0 User satisfaction**

Many responses from users of the service praised the level of care and facilities of the Brent Birth Centre and its staff.

It will be important for the Trust and PCT, should it transfer the service to Northwick Park Hospital, to ensure that the positive aspects of the service are also incorporated into the new service. For example - suggestions made during the consultation about facilities such as birthing pools and creating a home from home environment.

The consultation provided an enormous amount of general feedback about maternity services. This will be reviewed by the Trust to ensure further improvements can be made to services.

## 7. Appendices

- Appendix one: Letters issued by the Trust
- Appendix two: Press releases
- Appendix three: Distribution list of stakeholders
- Appendix four: Dairy of main events
- Appendix five: Summary of feedback form responses
- Appendix six: Copies of formal responses from organisations