Trust’s maternity services praised by independent health watchdog

Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust is one of the “better performing” trusts at providing maternity services, according to a review published today (Fri) by the independent watchdog for healthcare in England.

The Healthcare Commission’s report has been welcomed by the Trust whose staff helped to deliver 3,744 babies in Colchester, Tendring and the Colne Valley in 2006/2007.

As well as running maternity units at Colchester General Hospital and at the community hospitals in Clacton and Harwich, it also provides community midwifery services throughout north east Essex.

Following a review carried out in the summer of 2007, all 148 NHS trusts providing a full maternity service in England were today given an overall assessment rating of “least well performing”, “fair performing”, “better performing” or “best performing”.

According to the Healthcare Commission’s own definition, better performing trusts “demonstrated good performance in some key areas which was better than many other trusts, but . . . there is scope for improvement in some areas.”

Anne Ferris, Associate Director of Midwifery and Governance at Essex Rivers Healthcare, said the Healthcare Commission’s detailed review was the most comprehensive ever study of NHS maternity services.

“We welcome today’s review which gives a clear and reassuring message to the public that the overall standard of maternity services in north east Essex is good,” she said.

“We will be drilling down into the detail to see which areas of our service are performing well but also to identify those areas where we need to make improvements.

“Because the Healthcare Commission is looking at the whole of England, it also gives us an opportunity to identify examples of best practice from elsewhere and to see whether they can be applied locally.”

The review contains 25 scored indicators of performance divided into three themes – “clinical focus”, “women-centred care” and “efficiency and capability”.

Each indicator is scored on a scale of 1 to 5. Organisations with an average performance are given a score of three. Better performing trusts are given a score of four or five and poorer performing trusts are given scores of two or one. Essex Rivers Healthcare scored eight 4s, ten 3s and seven 2s.

The indicators include postnatal care of women and babies, staff training, extent of choice in labour, support for infant feeding and homeliness of delivery rooms.

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In 2006/2007, a total of 3,314 babies were born at Colchester General Hospital and 137 and 126 at the midwife-led units at the community hospitals in Clacton and Harwich. In addition, there were a total of 140 home births in Colchester and 27 in Tendring, making an overall total of 3,744.

Essex Rivers Healthcare employs 110 midwives (whole-time equivalents) and a total of 30 midwifery support workers and healthcare assistants (whole-time equivalents) in maternity services.

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