

Maternity and Neonatal Engagement Project – Summary

What we heard from local communities



About this project

This project was led by community groups across Derby to listen to people's experiences of pregnancy, birth, and early parenthood.

The works focuses on listening to communities who are more likely to have poorer health outcomes. This includes people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, and people living in the most deprived areas.

It was supported by the NHS, Derby City Council, Community One, Derbyshire Maternity and Neonatal Voices, Connected, Derby Health Inequalities Partnership, and local leaders.

Community organisations spoke to families in safe and trusted spaces. People shared their experiences, asked questions, and talked about what works well and what needs to improve.

In total:

- **15 sessions were held**
- **184 people took part**
- People came from many different communities across Derby

What we learned

1. Communication needs to be clearer

Many people said it can be hard to understand information about maternity and baby care.

Common issues included:

- Information is often too complex or given too quickly
- People are not always sure who to ask for help
- Written information alone is not enough

Some people needed:

- Information in their own language
- Simple words and clear explanations
- Time to ask questions and check understanding

2. Feeling listened to really matters

People said that being listened to and taken seriously is very important.

Positive experiences often happened when:

- Staff showed kindness and empathy
- Time was given to ask questions
- People were involved in decisions

However, some people said they felt:

- Ignored or rushed
- Not involved in decisions about their care

This affected how much they trusted services.

3. Many people do not know about available support

Awareness of services, especially **Family Hubs**, was often low.

Some people:

- Had never heard of them
- Did not understand what they offer
- Found services by chance instead of being told

People said they need:

- Clear information earlier in pregnancy
- Regular reminders
- Clear guidance on how to access support

4. Trust affects whether people use services

Trust is very important in deciding whether people seek help.

Some barriers included:

- Fear of being judged
- Worries about social services
- Past negative experiences

People were more likely to engage when:

- Information came from trusted community groups
- Staff were friendly and respectful
- Services felt welcoming and safe

5. Cultural understanding needs to improve

Many people said their cultural or religious needs were not always understood.

For example:

- Language support was not always available
- Cultural practices were sometimes not recognised
- Some people felt misunderstood or uncomfortable

People want:

- Staff to ask about their needs
- Services that respect different cultures
- More inclusive care for everyone

6. Emotional support is not always strong enough

While medical care was often described as safe, emotional support was not always there.

People said:

- They sometimes felt alone or anxious
- Support after leaving hospital was limited
- The move from hospital to home can be difficult

More support is needed:

- During pregnancy
- After birth
- When adjusting to life at home

7. Support after baby loss needs to improve

People who experienced baby loss said support was not always consistent.

Some challenges included:

- Not enough follow-up after leaving hospital
- Limited emotional support
- Lack of clear information about help available

People said support should be:

- Kind and compassionate
- Easy to access
- Ongoing, not just at the time of loss

8. Community support makes a big difference

Community groups played a very important role.

People valued:

- Talking to others with similar experiences
- Support from faith groups and local organisations
- Safe spaces where they felt understood

Community support was often:

- Easier to access
- More culturally appropriate
- Less formal and more welcoming

What worked well

Even with challenges, many people shared positive experiences.

These included:

- Kind and supportive staff
- Good care during hospital stays
- Community midwives providing reassurance
- Staff who took time to explain things clearly

These positive experiences show what good care looks like.

What needs to improve

Based on what people told us, key areas for improvement are:

Communication

- Use simple language
- Give information more than once
- Provide translation and interpreters

Listening and respect

- Take concerns seriously
- Involve people in decisions
- Build trust through kindness

Awareness of services

- Share information earlier

- Use community groups to spread messages
- Make it easy to find support

Cultural understanding

- Understand different backgrounds
- Ask about individual needs
- Make services inclusive

Emotional support

- Offer continued support after discharge
- Help people feel less alone
- Provide clear pathways for support

Bereavement care

- Improve follow-up support
- Offer ongoing emotional care
- Make services easier to access

What happens next

This project shows how important it is to listen to people and work with communities.

A new Maternity and Neonatal Health Inequalities Forum is being set up. This forum will bring together communities and service providers so they can work together to improve services. It will be a safe and open space where people can share ideas and help find solutions together.

The first meeting will take place on **23 September 2026**.

The learning from the Maternity and Neonatal Engagement Report will be used to create an action plan. This plan will be led by the forum and will focus on making real improvements based on what people have told us.

You can keep up to date with this work on the Engagement platform:

<https://derbyshireinvolvement.co.uk/maternity-and-neonatal-services-derby>