

Changes ahead for Weston's maternity unit, but bosses vow its future remains secure

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Weston General Hospital's midwives are said to be 'shocked and disappointed' by plans to alter maternity services in the town in favour of working more with St Michael's Hospital in Bristol.

Shortly after the hospital announced plans to temporarily close its A&E service overnight, the Mercury was contacted by concerned staff fearing for the future of its maternity unit, called Ashcombe Ward.

The hospital has launched a month-long consultation to see how its maternity team can work with the midwifery unit at St Michael's and bosses say North Somerset mothers will benefit from staff working across both hospitals.

The consultation comes shortly after the number of postnatal beds in Weston was reduced by 40 per cent, to make way for improvements to its endoscopy unit, but the



Weston General Hospital.

hospital's associate director of nursing Julia Stroud insists there is 'no truth' to rumours Ashcombe Ward will close.

Around 170 women give birth in Weston's hospital each year, and Ms Stroud described it as a 'highly-valuable' service for these women, as well as for new mums receiving postnatal care.

At the moment, some new mums in parts of North Somerset will be visited at home by a midwife from Bristol, even

though Weston hospital is closer to them – but if the planned changes go ahead, midwives will be able to provide community-based services to new and expecting mums across both areas.

Ms Stroud said: "We've had a long-standing working relationship with St Michael's Hospital and we are developing this further so midwives from Bristol can work in our Ashcombe unit as well as

surrounding areas and vice versa.

"That will improve quality of care for all mothers, especially in the community, as it will allow the nearest midwife available to respond quickly to a patient that needs them."

No positions will be made redundant as a result of the change, but a relative of one of the affected midwives told the Mercury: "All the staff are shocked and very disappointed in the decision."

"All midwifery staff will be part of this change to the service at Weston."

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