



TOWER HAMLETS - NEWHAM -
WALTHAM FOREST
Maternity &
Neonatal Voices

Working in partnership to improve maternity & neonatal services

Maternal Mental Health Listening Event

Thursday 30th April 2026



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About the Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership

The Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) works across Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Newham to ensure that the voices of women, birthing people and families shape maternity and neonatal care. By bringing service users, clinicians, commissioners and community partners together, MNVP supports co-production with Barts Health NHS Trust and helps address local health inequalities through lived experience.

Executive Summary

The April 2026 Maternal Mental Health Listening Event brought together mothers, families, professionals and community partners to share experiences of maternity care, maternal mental health and postnatal support across Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest.



The event created a supportive space for participants to discuss antenatal, birth and postnatal experiences, with a strong focus on communication, informed choice, continuity of care, breastfeeding support and access to mental health services. Service users shared reflections on both positive experiences and areas where care could be improved.

Several consistent themes emerged across all borough discussions:

Postnatal Support

Mothers need stronger emotional and practical support after discharge from hospital.

Mental Health Support

Mental health support should be proactively offered, clearly signposted and followed up.

Clear Communication

Communication should be clearer, more compassionate and more consistent.

Personalised Care

Parents value continuity, personalised care and being listened to.



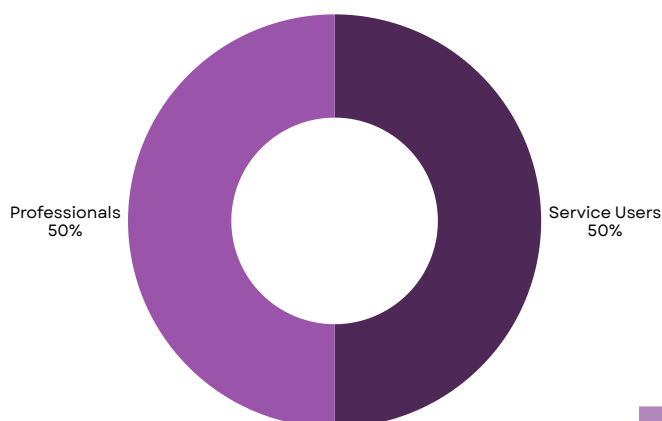
Event Overview

The listening event aimed to:

- Gather lived experience feedback relating to maternal mental health, maternity and neonatal care.
- Strengthen collaboration between service users, professionals and community organisations.
- Explore barriers to accessing support during pregnancy and the postnatal period.
- Identify opportunities for improvement across local maternity and neonatal services.

Attendance and Participation

● Service Users ● Professionals



The event was attended by 21 service users from Newham, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets, alongside 21 professionals, partners and stall holders representing maternity, neonatal and community support services across East London.

Organisations in attendance included Barts Health NHS Trust, ELFT, Tommy's, Bliss, Aching Arms, Miracle Moon, Daphne & Friends, CuddleCot, Parents in Mind, and local Family Hub and Infant Feeding teams from Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

Accessibility and participation were supported through childcare, refreshments, direct feedback opportunities, and interactive group discussions.

Key Themes Across Discussions



Communication

Families highlighted the need for clearer, more compassionate communication throughout pregnancy, labour and postnatal care. Many wanted more realistic information, better explanations during emergencies and easier access to support information.



Postnatal Support

Many mothers felt support reduced after leaving hospital, with some describing feelings of isolation during early parenthood. Families wanted more follow-up support, wellbeing checks and practical guidance after discharge.



Mental Health Support

Mental health was discussed across all groups, with participants calling for more proactive, ongoing and accessible emotional support. Families highlighted the importance of compassionate, non-judgemental care and better awareness of available services.



Compassionate Care

Parents valued feeling listened to, reassured and taken seriously by healthcare professionals. Continuity of care, empathy and personalised support were repeatedly highlighted as important to building trust.



Peer & Community Support

Peer support groups and community spaces were described as valuable sources of reassurance and connection. Families highlighted the importance of breastfeeding support, baby groups and lived-experience-led support networks.



Borough and Service-Specific Focus Group Findings



Newham Focus Group Findings

The Newham discussion provided insight into how mothers experience maternal mental health support across antenatal and postnatal care.

Mental Health Signposting After Birth

Some participants described positive experiences of clear signposting from midwives, including explanations about who to contact, what symptoms to look out for and how to access support.

Others described gaps in support, including uncertainty around trauma therapy, discharge without information and situations where mental health questions were not asked at all.

Mental Health Conversations with Midwives

Some mothers said they felt supported early in pregnancy and valued approachable staff, antenatal classes, and hospital tours.

Others described appointments as rushed and felt they did not have enough time to explain anxiety or emotional difficulties in depth.

Experiences of Support

Participants spoke positively about reassurance from midwives, specialist referrals and non-judgemental support.

At the same time, mothers said workload pressures could affect the quality of care and that more time was needed for meaningful emotional wellbeing discussions.

Confidence and Trust in Staff

Friendly, personalised and consistent care helped build confidence.

Participants valued reassurance and preparation, although some mixed experiences were raised around communication differences between staff groups and the use of telephone appointments.

Postnatal Follow-Up

Some mothers felt adequately supported through regular check-ins and direct mental health conversations.

Others described rushed appointments, limited availability and feeling isolated after premature birth.

Tower Hamlets Focus Group Findings

Community Support and Breastfeeding Experiences

Participants spoke positively about breastfeeding support from infant feeding teams and children's centres.

However, some mothers felt antenatal appointment scheduling could be more consistent and easier to manage.

Royal London Hospital Experiences

Participants discussed how first-time mothers, EAL mothers, disabled mothers, younger mothers or mothers attending alone may experience additional anxiety when accessing services.

Triage was described by some as overwhelming, with concerns raised around overcrowding and a lack of clear guidance on arrival.

Participants emphasised the importance of:

- Clear explanations throughout labour.
- Simple and direct communication.
- Reassurance during stressful situations.
- More personalised support.

The maternity helpline was highlighted positively due to the clarity and reassurance provided.

Postnatal Ward Experiences

Participants wanted more thorough discharge checks and more information about postnatal recovery.

Feeding support was identified as particularly important, with lactation consultants receiving positive feedback. Mothers also wanted more practical post-delivery support after leaving hospital.

Waltham Forest Focus Group Findings

Participants discussed the emotional impact of information gaps, communication style and postnatal follow-up.

Birth Information and Choice

Mothers said they often did not feel fully informed about induction, labour processes or birth options.

Several participants described relying on their own research or advice from friends rather than professional guidance.

Participants suggested that:

- More realistic preparation for labour would be helpful.
- Short videos and lived experience stories could improve understanding.
- Real-time explanations during labour are essential.

Postnatal Mental Health Follow-Up

Postnatal mental health checks were often described as rushed or overly focused on the baby rather than the mother.

Some women felt emotional wellbeing conversations became tick-box exercises and wanted more proactive follow-up calls weeks after birth.

Participants also highlighted limited awareness of support organisations and community services.



Neonatal Focus Group Findings

The neonatal focus group explored families' experiences of communication, emotional support and care during and after neonatal admission.

Communication and Preparation

Participants highlighted the importance of clear communication and better preparation before neonatal admission. While some parents felt reassured by staff who carefully explained equipment, procedures and what to expect, others described feeling frightened and unprepared when entering the neonatal environment.

Families agreed that clearer antenatal neonatal awareness and compassionate explanations could help reduce fear and anxiety.

Feeling Supported

Participants stressed the importance of feeling listened to and supported, and creating a partnership with healthcare professionals while navigating neonatal care. Specialist breastfeeding support was particularly valued, alongside calls for better collaboration between neonatal and postnatal services, dedicated neonatal support roles, and increased neonatal awareness amongst midwives.

Support Within the Neonatal Unit

Families said clearer information and structured onboarding within the neonatal unit would help parents feel more informed and supported. Participants wanted better information about daily routines, facilities, support services and staff roles, alongside more peer-support opportunities such as coffee mornings and parent groups.

Community Support After Discharge

Many parents described feeling isolated after leaving hospital and said mainstream parent-and-baby groups often did not fully understand neonatal experiences. Participants highlighted the need for more community-based support tailored specifically to neonatal families after discharge.



Feedback Form Evaluation

The majority of respondents rated the event as Excellent or Good.

Nearly all attendees said they had learned something new through the discussions and presentations.

What Participants Found Most Useful

Participants most frequently highlighted:

- Focus group discussions.
- The MNVP update.
- The Q&A panel with Barts Health NHS Trust.
- Opportunities to share lived experience.
- Collaboration between professionals and service users.

Participant Suggestions

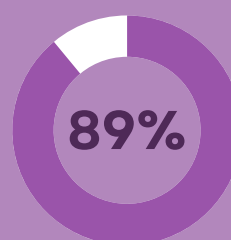
Participants suggested:

- Using microphones for future events.
- Providing more time for focus groups.
- Increasing interactivity and flexibility.
- Offering online feedback options.
- Improving signposting to mental health support.

Participants also expressed appreciation for the childcare, refreshments and vouchers provided.

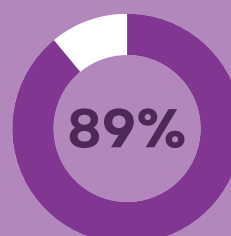
Event Insights

Overall Event Feedback



Rated the event as good or excellent

Event Learning



Gained new information from the event

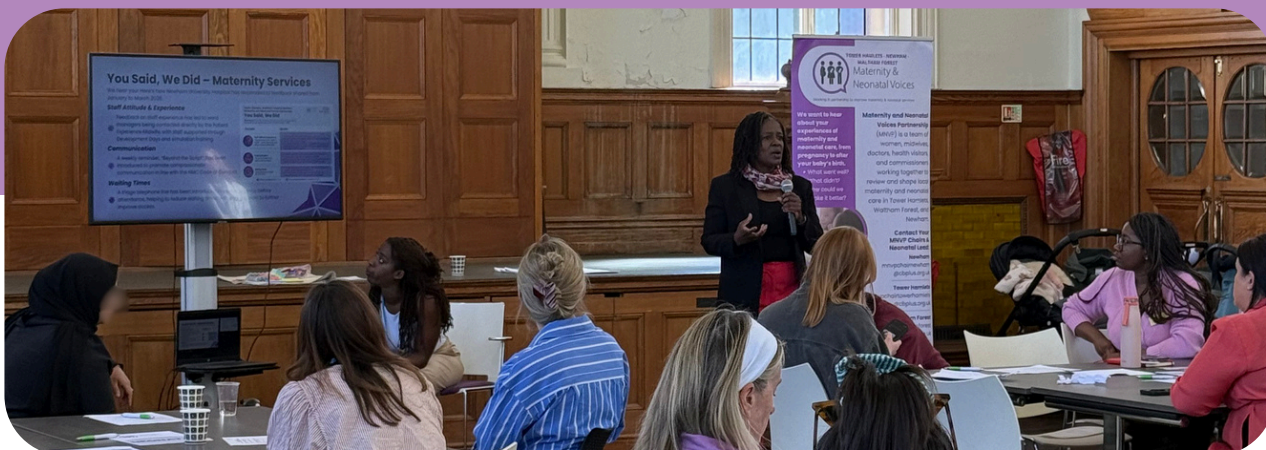
Most Useful Part of the Event



Focus group discussions most valuable

Next Steps

Based on the themes identified throughout the event, the following areas were highlighted for consideration:



Communication and Information

- Improve clear and consistent communication across maternity and neonatal services.
- Develop more accessible information, including lived-experience-led resources.
- Strengthen signposting to community, wellbeing and mental health support.

Postnatal & Mental Health Support

- Increase proactive postnatal follow-up and emotional wellbeing checks.
- Improve continuity between hospital and community-based support services.
- Ensure mental health conversations are embedded throughout maternity care.

Neonatal Family Support

- Improve preparation and onboarding for neonatal families.
- Explore more neonatal peer-support opportunities and community groups.
- Strengthen collaboration between maternity, postnatal and neonatal teams.

Co-Production & Community Engagement

- Continue involving families in shaping maternity and neonatal services.
- Expand opportunities for lived-experience sharing and peer support.
- Increase awareness of local organisations and community support pathways.

Reflections

The event highlighted the value of bringing families and professionals together to share experiences, strengthen support and help shape future maternity and neonatal services.

Welcoming Environment

Participants described the event as welcoming, inclusive and thoughtfully organised.

Safe Space to Share

Parents valued the opportunity to share experiences and hear from others with similar journeys.

Practical Support Matters

Childcare and refreshments were appreciated and helped families feel able to attend and participate.

Open Conversations

The event sparked important discussions around mental health, communication and postnatal care.

More Time for Discussion

Many attendees wanted longer conversations, more reflection time and additional focus group discussion.

Stronger Support Connections

Participants highlighted the importance of clearer signposting and direct connections to services, professionals and community support.

Meet the Team

Working across Newham, Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets and neonatal services to ensure families' voices help shape local maternity and neonatal care. For Tower Hamlets enquiries, contact mnvpchairtowerhamlets@cbplus.org.uk.



Rina Begum

Newham Maternity Lead

Rina is dedicated to improving maternity care through community engagement and lived experience, helping families share feedback and shape local services.

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Helena Morais

Waltham Forest Maternity Lead

Helena is passionate about improving maternity experiences through advocacy, lived experience and honest conversations, ensuring families feel heard and supported.

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North East London Neonatal Lead

Inspired by her own neonatal journey, Edvige supports families through advocacy and partnership working to help improve neonatal care and support services.

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Contact Us

Thank you to everyone who attended and shared their experiences at the Maternal Mental Health Listening Event. Your voices and feedback will help shape future maternity and neonatal services across our boroughs.

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<https://bit.ly/mnvp>
