

Maternity improvements welcomed by Mark

Mark Lancaster has welcomed massive improvements to city maternity services.

The Milton Keynes Hospital maternity unit's 'midwife-to-birth ratio' is now one midwife per 31 births. Mr Lancaster dubbed this an 'impressive' decrease from 37 last year and between 39 and 40 the year before.

The figures came to light at a meeting between the Milton Keynes North MP and hospital chief executive Dr Walter Greaves. Dr Greaves also revealed that the turnover rate of midwives this year is 3.8 per cent – a massive fall from the 7.8 per cent of 09/10 and 11.6 per cent of 08/09.

The problems at the unit have been well documented over the last few years, when strict conditions were put in place by the Care Quality Commission.

Inadequate midwifery staffing levels were cited by the coroner as factors in the deaths of two babies in 2007 and 2009, a Healthcare Commission intervention in 2008 identified the staffing levels as a key area of concern. A follow up report by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) found that significant concerns remained around staffing levels.

But in October the maternity unit showed sufficient improvement to have some of its CQC registration 'conditions' lifted.

It follows the Government's reiteration last week that it will continue to train midwives at the current speed, in line with the national birth-rate.

There were fears from the Royal College of Midwives that the Coalition would not honour the pledge to train 3,000 new midwives, however it has since promised to train enough to meet the demands of an increasing population.

Mr Lancaster, who made health his priority before the general election, said: "It is such a relief to the people of Milton Keynes that the maternity unit has got on the right track. I am impressed by the hospital and most importantly the hardworking staff. But, given the problems we have had in Milton Keynes, I will continue to push for the national shortage of midwives to be tackled. There is nothing more important than the safety of mothers and their babies."