



Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018

## **Birth Companions and The Royal College of Midwives respond to the Health & Social Care Select Committee report on Prison Health**

A report on health and care in prison has been published today by the Health and Social Care Committee.

Responding to the report Birth Companions and The Royal College of Midwives, said:

‘We welcome the focus that the Prison Health report brings to significant failures in the Government’s duty of care towards prisoners across England, and the need for a whole system, public health response. That said, we are disappointed not to see greater attention paid to the significant needs of pregnant women and new mothers in custody, as these women and their babies are among those put at most risk by such failures. ‘

### **Equivalence of care**

‘We are particularly glad to see such a strong emphasis on the need to define and ultimately deliver true equivalence of care in order to address health inequalities. Crucially, this goes beyond the notion of parity between prison healthcare and that available in the community as, given the many complex factors affecting the health and wellbeing of those in prison, and the specific challenges arising from the prison environment, true equivalence can only be achieved through targeted, needs-specific models of care.

‘For example, most pregnant women and new mothers in prison have experienced complex and multiple disadvantages, often amidst trauma and abuse. Equivalence of care for these women is not about establishing a right to the same number of antenatal appointments as they would receive outside of prison. Rather, they might need more, and different appointments, with specially trained midwives and health and social care professionals working in a trauma-informed way. ‘

### **A specific framework**

'In our joint submission to the Health & Social Care Committee, we emphasised the need for a specific and detailed policy framework for perinatal women in prison. We are disappointed not to see a more direct acknowledgement of this in the final report, but we will continue to work with all those involved to ensure the Government fulfils its duty of care to these women, and indeed to their babies. '

### **Local strategic partnerships**

'The report rightly acknowledges that improvements in this duty of care rely to a significant degree on the strengthening of local strategic partnerships, as well as a national response. We see this as vital, but such partnerships must actively involve the voluntary and community sector, and people with lived experience, as well as statutory agencies, if they are to stand a chance of getting to the heart of the specific and complex factors at play. '

The Health and Social Care Committee report on health and care in prison can be read at <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-and-social-care-committee/news/prison-health-report-published-17-19/> )

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