

Donna Ockenden appointed to chair Sussex maternity review

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Bereaved families to get answers they deserve.

- Donna Ockenden confirmed as Chair of independent review into Sussex maternity
- Announcement follows meeting with Sussex families, who worked directly with the Secretary of State to discuss Chair and scope of review
- Review is part of a wider government drive to improve maternity safety

Harmed and bereaved families in Sussex will get the answers they deserve after the Health Secretary today confirmed Donna Ockenden will chair the review into maternity and neonatal services

The announcement follows months of engagement between the Secretary of State and Sussex families, who have campaigned for an independent review into care at the trust.

Ockenden is one of the country's foremost experts on maternity safety, having led the landmark review into Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust and currently chairing reviews at both Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. Her appointment reflects the confidence that Sussex families themselves have placed in her ability to get to the truth.

Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, said:

Donna Ockenden has earned the trust of families across the country through her tireless work to uncover the truth and drive lasting change in maternity care. I know she will bring that same dedication to Sussex.

To the families in Sussex, your determination to seek answers not just for yourselves, but for every family who comes after you is so important. This review has my full personal commitment, and I will ensure we get the answers and deliver the change you deserve.

Donna Ockenden said:

It is an honour to have been asked to chair this review and I am absolutely aware of the responsibility I have to the families and babies across Sussex.

My priority will be to listen carefully to harmed and bereaved families and to engage comprehensively across communities and with staff 'on the ground' here in Sussex.

We will proactively reach out to ensure that the voices of seldom heard families are heard through this Review.

It is vital that the scope of the review now reflects the experiences of families and enables a thorough and meaningful examination of care, so that improvements can be made as the Review progresses.

The Truth for Our Babies group said:

This has been a long, exhausting and deeply emotional fight for all of us. As a group, we have been calling for this review for two years, all while living with devastating loss and harm caused to us and our babies.

Today's announcement represents a significant and welcome step forward. We are grateful that Wes Streeting has listened to campaigning families and recognised the need to appoint Donna Ockenden to lead the review. While the full scope of the review is yet to be agreed, Mr Streeting was receptive to the arguments we made as to why a full, inclusive review is needed to ensure that no family is left behind.

A review that does not include all harmed and bereaved families cannot deliver the truth or accountability that is so desperately needed. Lessons will be missed, and opportunities to prevent future harm could be lost.

This review gives us hope that we will finally get answers we have been seeking, not just for our own families, but for every family that has been affected. It is about accountability, but it's also about working to ensure that no other family has to endure what we have been through.

We would also like to urge those who haven't already done so, to join the Truth for Our Babies Facebook group and become a part of our supportive network. Your voice matters. Your family matters. What happened to you matters. Your experience could help build a clear and undeniable picture of the level of harm that has occurred across University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust.

The independent review follows concerns raised by harmed and bereaved families about the safety of care provided at the trust. The Secretary of State met with a core group of families and MPs in March this year and committed to appointing an independent chair and agreeing a scope for the review at pace.

The appointment of the chair of the Sussex independent review follows a suite of measures this government has taken to improve maternity care. Since July 2024, it has:

- Recruited an extra 2,000 midwives
- Invested more than £149 million in 122 infrastructure projects across 49 NHS trusts to improve the safety of neonatal care facilities.
- Implemented a new programme to reduce the two leading causes of avoidable brain injury during labour.
- Piloted Martha's Rule in maternity and neonatal units in 14 trusts across six regions to give patients and families the right to request a second opinion.
- Launched a package of initiatives and interventions to reduce stillbirths, neonatal brain injury, neonatal death and preterm birth.
- Introduced a Perinatal Culture and Leadership Programme to develop a culture of safety, learning and support for leads from all maternity and neonatal units.
- Created targeted schemes to promote midwife retention and the Graduate Guarantee, so that every qualified nurse and midwife in England can apply to join the health workforce.
- Expanded maternal mental health services to help women and extended the Baby Loss Certificate scheme to include all historic losses.
- Rolled out guidance across the NHS to tackle the leading causes of maternal death including

thrombosis, mental health, epilepsy and haemorrhage.

- Launched an anti-discrimination programme and a system to better identify safety concerns.
- Published an inequalities dashboard through NHS England to support the identification of areas where specific populations face the greatest disparities, enabling tailored interventions and more equitable support.

The Secretary of State has also:

- Ordered a national maternity investigation, chaired by Baroness Amos, to develop one set of national recommendations to drive improvements in maternity and neonatal care across England and reduce inequalities in the delivery of these services.
- Appointed Donna Ockenden to chair an independent review of maternity and neonatal services at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, announced in March 2026.
- Committed to chairing a National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce to ensure the investigations' recommendations translate into action.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/donna-ockenden-appointed-to-chair-sussex-maternity-review>