

Terms of reference

Mission statement

Our vision is improving experiences of maternity for women and their families, through multi-disciplinary collaboration and co-production that brings women's voices to the centre of planning and strategy.

1. Who we are

National Maternity Voices (NMV) is an independent¹ advisory and action group with Maternity Voices Partnerships (MVP) chairs at the centre. It networks and advises the service user chairs of MVPs in England and promotes understanding of MVPs and best practice in setting up, developing and running an MVP, including networking MVPs regionally, as well as nationally through NMV.

2. How we work

NMV uses a formal Committee structure, with written agendas and formal minutes of discussions and decisions, as well as social media to provide information and advice, mentor and campaign via social media and email. It uses online communication platforms for conversations between meetings. It aims to promote the 5 principles of MVPs as set out in chapter 4 of [the Better Births resource pack for Local Maternity Systems](#) both in the development and work of MVPs and in its own work [see below].

It maintains a website <http://nationalmaternityvoices.org.uk/> which contains toolkits and resources for setting up and sustaining an effective MVP. It provides information and advice about MVPs to commissioners, maternity service providers and others, as well as to service user chairs of MVPs. It welcomes and supports all service user members of MVPs in a collective forum (a closed Facebook group.)

3. Five principles of MVPs (from [the Better Births resource pack for Local Maternity Systems](#))

An MVP creates and maintains a co-production forum for maternity service users, service user advocates, commissioners, service providers and other strategic partners to inform and develop local maternity services. Members and the collective forum operate on the following founding five principles:

- 3.1 Work creatively, respectfully and collaboratively to co-produce solutions together.
- 3.2 Work together as equals, promoting and valuing participation. Listen to, and seek out, the voices of women, families and carers using maternity services, [even when that voice is a whisper](#). Enabling people from diverse communities to have a voice.
- 3.3 Use experience data and insight as evidence.
- 3.4 Understand and work with the interdependency that exists between the experience of staff and positive outcomes for women, families and carers.
- 3.5 Actively and thoughtfully in the pursuit of continuous quality improvement with a particular focus on closing inequality gaps, and a commitment to both the voices of women and families and also research evidence-based information informing quality improvement

4. Aims and objectives

¹ See Guidance on maintaining independence at the end of this document.

National Maternity Voices aims to support service user Chairs of Maternity Voices Partnerships and to promote awareness of good practice in setting up and developing MVPs among commissioners of maternity services in England to ensure that:

- every woman on the maternity pathway has a chance to have her voice heard about the service she is receiving through an MVP
- that every MVP in England is adequately resourced to engage in true coproduction of maternity services.
- Local MVP chairs and service user members feel networked and supported in their role
- MVPs are involved in work in their local communities but also represented at Local Maternity System level

5. Values

5.1 NMV is committed to diversity and equal opportunities and upholds human rights in pregnancy, childbirth, and childhood.

5.2 The Committee members of NMV who run the group on behalf of MVP chairs will bring with them different beliefs, values and experience. All these perspectives should be valued and respected. Each MVP member should have an equal opportunity to contribute to the NMV Committee discussion and decision-making process. Care will be taken to enable full participation, and to seek views from the wider MVP [community?] on the work of NMV, to shape and inform that work. For example, it is important to check that the terminology NMV Committee members use is understood by all and clarified if necessary.

5.3 Committee Members (see below) are acting in a public service capacity and are expected to adhere to the Nolan principles for conduct in public life.²

6. Membership of the NMV committee

6.1 Any service user Chair of an MVP in England is entitled to be a member of NMV, entitled to vote on any matter that the NMV puts to MVPs for decision by vote. The NMV Committee will usually reach decisions by informal consensus among Committee members, taking a vote called by the chair if consensus cannot be reached. The NMV committee will consult regularly with MVPs in their online discussion forum and will take into account the consensus of views expressed when reaching decisions and making and carrying out the Committee's work plan.

6.2 The NMV Committee will actively promote NMV at least four times each year via the national Facebook groups for NMV (public and private) and on Twitter, to ensure that as many MVP service user chairs as possible are aware of the group and its work.

6.3 The NMV Committee may co-opt previous service user chairs who are willing to serve on the Committee provided that they are still active as MVP members, in which case they will be entitled to be as a voting member of NMV for the duration of their NMV Committee role.

6.4 The founding Committee of NMV is listed in Appendix 1. These volunteer founder members are MVP chairs and leaders, including former MVP chairs who remain active MVP members. Together they act as the NMV Committee, liaising with the wider community of MVP service user chairs via the [MSLC and MVP chairs and service user reps closed Facebook group](#). Together they constitute 'the NMV Committee'.

6.5 The NMV Committee ('the Committee') will work together to promote the aims of NMV. NMV Committee members will normally serve for no less than two years and no more than six years consecutively. Committee Members may include previous or current service user chairs of individual MVPs. It may also be appropriate to nominate associate / additional Committee Members, who receive papers and join subcommittees as appropriate,

² Committee on standards in public life. *Guidance: The 7 principles of public life*. (May 1995)<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

but will only participate in meetings where there are issues of special interest to them. The Committee may also have a stakeholder panel of representatives from interested parties and organisations in maternity who they may ask for advice from time to time (but any advice received will not be binding on the Committee.)

6.6 The NMV Committee may, from time to time, be approached about national projects wanting service user representation. These requests may not always be fulfilled by committee members and may be offered to MVP service user chairs and members who are not on the committee. It is expected that the NMV committee would be updated on any such projects by that service user representative.

6.7 A current list of named core members of the Committee, and the person acting as secretary to the Committee, will be maintained at <http://nationalmaternityvoices.org.uk/our-team/>

6.8 So that the Committee does not become too large to work together effectively, the maximum number of Committee members will be 15. The opportunity to join the Committee will be advertised via the [MSLC and MVP chairs and service user reps closed Facebook group](#) at least once each year and these terms of reference will be available to MVP service user chairs via the [MSLC and MVP chairs and service user reps closed Facebook group](#) or by email on request. If more than 15 members wish to serve as Committee members then membership of the Committee will be determined by the Chair, with regard to the geographical location and mix of experience and skills needed on the Committee, pending organisation of Committee elections for all 15 Committee places, including the Chair and Vice chair roles – which will take place (if reasonably practicable) within 4 months of the Chair becoming aware of the need for an election procedure. The elected Committee will then put in place a process for regular Committee elections, in accordance with good practice for unincorporated membership organisations.

7. Chair

7.1 The Chair and a Vice-chair of the Committee will be elected by the MVP/ chairs in England. The start and expected finish date shall be minuted. The Chair should be independent of those directly responsible for commissioning or providing services and normally be an MVP service user chair or former chair and a member of NMV. The Chair's term will be 4 years from election. As an interim measure, before elections are held, a founding Committee shall act in the interests of NMV.

7.2 In the rare absence of both the Chair and Vice-chair, members shall elect one person to take the chair for the duration of any meeting.

8. Committee proceedings

8.1 NMV Committee meetings will be held as the Committee deems necessary, but a minimum of six times a year. Committee meetings will take place virtually (via Skype or another conference call platform). All core members have voting rights. Associate members do not have voting rights.

8.2 A quorum shall be one third of the full core NMV Committee membership (including deputies). When a meeting is not quorate, a quorum to ratify any actions agreed may be obtained by agreement of sufficient committee members in writing (this may be via the virtual platform used by the committee.)

8.3 The Chair may invite individuals on an ad hoc basis to a meeting for particular items on the agenda.

8.4 The NMV Committee may set up multi-disciplinary sub-groups that include NMV members and/or MVP members (service users or other MVP members, by invitation) to meet in between NMV meetings either on a regular or an ad hoc basis to work on specific topics and report back to the NMV. These sub groups may co-opt members as appropriate.

8.5 Proposed amendments to the terms of reference shall be circulated to all members in writing at least two weeks before the meeting at which such amendments are to be considered.

8.6 Agenda and papers will normally be circulated at least 3 days before each meeting. Any members may ask for items to be included on the agenda.

8.7 The minutes of meetings will be produced, for approval by the Chair prior to circulation, and circulated within three weeks of the meeting to the Committee. They may also be publicised to the MVP chairs via social media (Facebook and on the NMV website).

8.8 Where a member is unable to attend a meeting he/she will inform the Committee secretary of this before the meeting

8.9 Where a member fails to attend three meetings within a one-year period their membership should be reviewed and, if necessary, a replacement sought.

9. Funding

The NMV committee will maintain a two-signatory community bank account with HSBC for any funds that are paid to it for the effective running of the Committee. The current approved two-signatories are Laura James and Maria Claire Booker. The Committee will appoint a treasurer to oversee the management of those funds. These funds will be held and used as determined by the Committee to promote (and in accordance with) the Mission, Aims and Objectives of NMV and may be used for e.g. the maintenance and updating of the website, travel expenses, admin support, advising and mentoring MVPs and their chairs. There will be a breakdown of expenditure included in the annual report

10. Annual Report

NMV will produce an annual report that includes:

- the work of the NMV Committee over the past year including progress on any targets
- a statement of funds received, held and spent, and a breakdown of any expenditure
- work-plan for the coming year

The annual report will be circulated to relevant statutory and non-statutory groups with an interest in maternity services and will be available on the NMV website

11. Resolution of disputes

In case of any dispute among the NMV Committee, or among NMV members (the MVP service user chairs), all members will have regard to the Aims and Objectives of this group, and act in good faith to support those objectives.

Terms of Reference to be reviewed on an annual basis.

Date of last review 27/02/18

Guidance on maintaining independence

NMV will be independent and accessible to all sections of the community.³ It must be seen by MVP service user chairs (and MVP service user members, who are the wider community represented by NMV members and the NMV Committee) as relevant and reflecting the experiences they have as MVP members. To maintain this independence requires NMV to listen to the voices in their communities carefully and impartially.

Independence of purpose, of voice and of action

NMV must be able to speak up independently, without fear or favour. The chair, other elected officers, and all members of the Committee have a responsibility to maintain this independence. Sometimes this may feel difficult. NMV must work on both popular and minority causes, with mainstream groups and with marginalised and vulnerable groups in order to serve the whole community.

To maintain independence, NMV must make sure that members and the Committee, and stakeholders, are clear about the committee's independent position, which must not be compromised for any reason. Independence can be undermined by external pressures and conflicting expectations, or if NMV becomes out of touch with the real concerns of women and families, the members, or fails to take account of high quality evidence.

The principle of presenting lived experiences in an evidence based way is vital. If proposals and presentations are not grounded in service users' experiences and formal evidence, NMV will lack credibility.

If the NMV chair, or a subgroup of NMV decides to take on extra commissioned work it must be clear, within the contract, how NMV's independence will be preserved. For example, that NMV owns the information collected, has the right to publish any information collected and publish a final report in full.

In order to maintain independence and respect, NMV:

- shall work to the highest levels of transparency and accountability in all activities. Good governance is fundamental.
- must declare and manage conflicts of interest – it can be the public's perception of a conflict that undermines trust and independence. NMV must be careful about any political affiliations and seek to maintain political impartiality.
- must be seen as independent and accessible to all, representing all parts of the community.
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- must not compromise their independence through commercial or provider interests. This does not mean avoiding involvement of independent practitioners. Strong and trusted relationships with a range of stakeholders is vital to having local insight and influence. But any conflicts of interests must be stated and managed to maintain NMV's independence and credibility.

Managing conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest involves a conflict between a public duty and a private interest, in which the person's personal interest, e.g. a commercial interest or opportunity for self-promotion, could improperly influence the performance of their public duties and responsibilities. The NMV should manage any conflicts of interest and seek guidance if necessary. Healthwatch England has produced guidance on *Conflicts of Interest* and there is guidance available for charities.⁴

³ This has been adapted from Healthwatch England guidance.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-a-conflict-of-interest-in-your-charity>

Appendix 1:

A list of the core members of the National Maternity Voices founding committee, as of February 2018.

Maria Booker Chair of Epsom and St Helier MVP and service user rep, Programmes Director, Birthrights
Cathy Brewster Stockport MVP Service User Rep, Greater Manchester Homebirth Support Group Chair
Emma Crookes, chair, Barnsley MVP, Lay Member of the RCOG's National Maternity and Perinatal Audit's Women and Families Involvement Group.
Rachel Gardner Lead of Sheffield MVP, Director of Sheffield service user charity – Forging Families. Antenatal educator. Research consultant for Sheffield Hallam University
Sandra Guise Chair, West Cumbria Maternity Voices (MVP); Acting Chair, Carlisle and Eden Maternity Voices (MVP); Co- Chair Northern England Clinical Network Maternity Engagement Group
Soshanna Hayhoe, MVP member
Laura James former chair Bromley Maternity Voices (MVP), co-chair of London MVP strategy group, NCT antenatal practitioner, NCT VOICES facilitator (MVP training)
Lisa Ramsey Chair-Reading Maternity Voices (MVP), Better Births National Stakeholder Council, Birth & Postnatal Doula with Doula UK, Lamaze Birth Educator
Catherine Williams Reading Maternity Voices (MVP) service user member, NCT antenatal practitioner, AIMS, NICE Fellow

Associate members

Helen Gray former Chair St George's Maternity Forum MVP. La Leche League Leader, LLL Clapham.
Rachel James, Chair Rosie Maternity Voices (Cambridge), PBM facilitator, VBAC peer supporter, local NCT contact for VBAC and caesarean birth.
Ruth Weston former MSLC chair Bradford and Airedale, AIMS activist.
Rachel Plachcinski Service User Rep, Maternity Mouthpiece (North Kirklees MVP), NCT Antenatal Practitioner, NCT Research Engagement Officer, NCT VOICES Coordinator (MVP training)