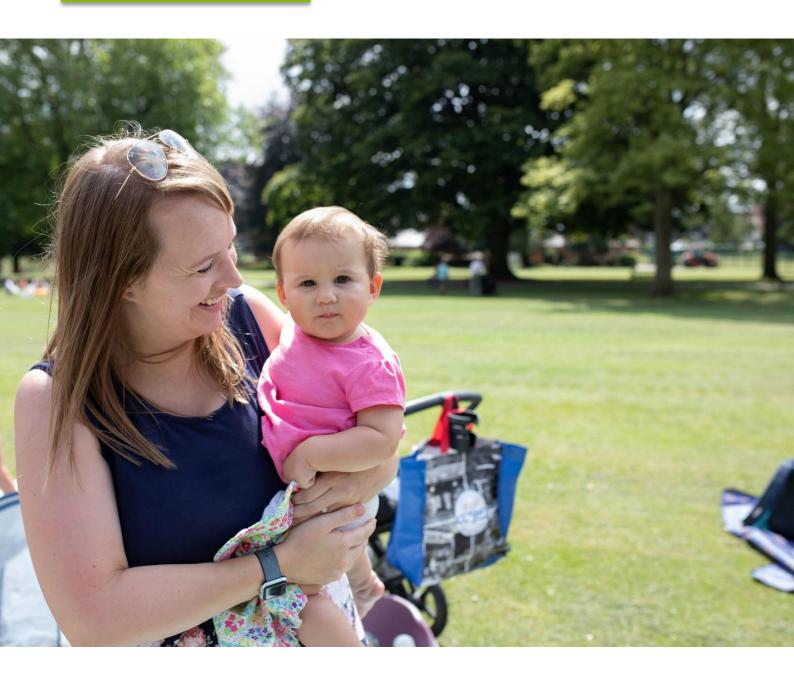
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership

healthwetch North Northamptonshire West Northamptonshire

Northampton General Hospital Maternity Enter and View

May 2023



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Acknowledgements

Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire is grateful for the time, efforts, and cooperation of Northampton General Hospital and the Northamptonshire Maternity Voice Partnership. We appreciate the ability to be allowed into the Maternity Facilities to evaluate and assess the premises, as well as being able to speak with staff and patients to better understand their experiences. Thank you for our volunteers for their hard work and time dedicated to gathering the data and valuable information needed for this enter and view. Special thanks to Matron Emma Perkin, Harriet Turner the Chair of the Northamptonshire Maternity Voices Partnership, and Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire's volunteers Christine Drage and Susan Hills.

Background and Purpose

Healthwatch aims to conduct regular evaluations of selected healthcare services within the community. Conducting these reviews help us to directly support and give valuable feedback to services that have been identified as needing focus. Our investigations result in our service making recommendations for ways that service providers can continue to provide effective and satisfactory care. Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire's aim with this Maternity evaluation was to evaluate the services being provided within Northampton General Hospital, which included visits to Maternity Day Unit, Barratt Birth Centre, Balmoral Ward, Labour Ward, Robert Watson Ward, and the Transitional Care Unit. The recent rating given by the CQC¹ – Care Quality Commission was noted as requiring improvement, and this was kept in mind during our visit to the various services. This project was conducted in conjunction with the Northamptonshire Maternity Voice Partnership, as their chair attended the evaluation with our attending volunteers.

¹<u>https://www.cqc.org.uk/location/RNS01/inspection-summary#npimaternity</u>

Methods

The approach used to assess the services and feedback from the service users for this Maternity services evaluation was a method known as the "15 Steps" Challenge". The "15 Steps" method is an audit tool kit developed by the NHS in 2012 which is used to look at the quality of the services that are provided from the perspective of the service users, in this case those who use maternity services². This framework was designed to help organisations look for new ways to transform the way that the work is being handled, with the "15 Steps" being used to challenge how programmes are being run and allowing for recommendations and improvements to be made. The term "15 Steps" is used to refer to the concept of taking 15 physical steps within a location, and from those 15 steps, the theory is that the individual would then be able to gather a brief yet impactful impression of the location's environment and structure. "The 15 Steps Challenge" targets the methodology in line with NHS strategic drivers and addresses the following criteria within an establishment:

- Welcoming
- Safe
- Caring and involving
- Well organised and calm

However, "15 Steps" is not always literally 15 physical steps, and is more representative of the act of immersing oneself in the centre of a location, whether it be a hospital unit or a clinic. The first step is to identify those who are conducting the "15 Steps" and which partners are collaborating to make this happen. The next step was to use the tool kit to support the walk around and investigation, and by doing so an effective and comprehensive understanding of how the locations, in this instance the maternity wards were operating. By walking around, observing the surroundings of the maternity wards, speaking and asking questions to both staff and patients, Healthwatch was able to get a thorough understanding of how the service was functioning. This allowed our organisation to highlight the positives and the elements of the service that are effective, as well as looking to reflect on what can be improved. These findings were documented and summarised by our volunteers, which were then expanded on and reported on within this report. After the report is finalised, a copy of the report is sent to the Clinical Lead of Maternity services, who will be given the opportunity to respond and is asked to formulate an action plan for the points which we created recommendations for.

² https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/15-steps-inpatient.pdf

Summary

On the 25th April 2023, two volunteers from Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire (HWNW) visited Northampton General Hospital (NGH) Maternity Department to carry out a '15 Steps for Maternity' audit. This audit looks at the quality of services provided from the perspective of people who use maternity services. The volunteers were joined by the Chair of Northamptonshire Maternity Voice Partnership and shown around the clinics by the Quality Improvement Lead Midwife, who is the Matron for Antenatal and New-born Screening, Bereavement Services, Audit and Clinical Effectiveness. NGH recently had a Clinical Quality Commission inspection of maternity services as part of a national inspection: the preliminary report produced after their inspection in February 2023 gave a finding of 'Requires Improvement' for the service. NGH subsequently invited HWNW to visit and provide a '15 steps for Maternity' assessment, aiming at gathering new insight into ways in which the service can improve.

On the day of the visit the Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire volunteers went to the Maternity Day Unit, the Barratt Birth Centre, the Balmoral Ward, the Labour Ward, the Robert Watson ward, and Transitional Care. They did not visit the Snowdrop Room as it was occupied, where families who have had a bereavement or loss are cared for. The information gained from the visit was used to make some recommendations, and areas in which the service was providing quality care were acknowledged.

Findings from the Maternity Wards

Maternity Day Unit (MDU)

Background on Unit:

This unit cares for women who encounter complications during their pregnancy. The Maternity Day Unit (MDU) enables most women with pregnancy complications to avoid admission to hospital until delivery. The services offered include group pre-operative clinics, high risk pregnancy clinics, blood pressure monitoring, and foetal medicine clinics. There is an immunisation service and specialist midwifery screening services that offer women and families support with their progress and antenatal screening pathway. The patients within the unit tend to all have pre-booked appointments. The mothers are provided with a choice for elective Caesarean sections and are counselled beforehand if they choose that option for their delivery. When asked, the assessors were assured that all women were given information about reduced foetal movements in their own language.

In the Maternity Day unit, there were rooms housing the ultrasound equipment and facilities for private consultations, examinations, and monitoring. Two foetal scans are taken as standard throughout pregnancy and more when deemed necessary for high-risk pregnancies. During the visit, pre-operative clinics were held, and monitoring was carried out for antenatal tests. These rooms appeared very clean, uncluttered and user-friendly, however, the assessors noted that there was not much decor on the walls – either informational materials or pictures, causing the environment to feel as though it lacked a welcoming feel. The waiting area was viewed briefly and there was some information visible which had been laminated and posted on the walls. It looked like a typical waiting room with chairs as seen in most public sector areas – not inviting or encouraging for patients to enter. We do feel that more could be done to improve the space.

The immunisations offered to mothers and babies were explained. The screening programme has the potential to identify high-risk conditions for the mother or the baby and to give protection together, with appropriate management during pregnancy and beyond. The lead immunisation nurse commented that there had been considerable uptake for the protection offered. Examples of immunisations offered include pertussis, seasonal flu, and tuberculosis (BCG). This room was used to counsel parents, to provide bad news when necessary, and for debriefing after a loss in the pregnancy. There was a locked refrigerator behind the quiet room door full of stored vaccines. When asked why it was in that room the answer was that there was not a more suitable storage space for it, which alludes to the fact that the space within the facility is limited.

A team of specialist midwives provide immediate and long-term sensitive care and support for families experiencing pregnancy loss from 12 weeks onwards up until 28 days of life. The team have a working relationship with Sands. Sands exists to reduce the number of babies dying and to support anyone affected by the death of a baby, before, during or shortly after birth, whenever this happened and for as long as they need support. Sands supports and promotes research to better understand the causes of baby deaths, they work to improve maternity safety and save babies' lives³.

It was revealed that there are plans to build a new Bereavement Suite near the Day Unit that will accommodate the maternity bereavement team. Fundraising is currently in progress for the project, and £40K of £150K needed has been raised.

Within the unit, there is an outdoor area consisting of planted gardens and seating that the staff can access during their shifts. This is a nice fresh air space, which appeared to be much needed for breaks and for time out from the busy working environment. There was no one using it at the time of viewing.

Balmoral Ward & Barratt Birth Centre

The Balmoral Ward consists of a four bedded bay catering for straightforward births either by induction or Caesarean section and four single rooms for postnatal care. The Barratt Birth Centre is located within the Balmoral Ward. The Centre is led by midwives and aims to provide a 'home from home' environment for giving birth. At the present time, the unit does not have a home birth team, as there are not enough midwives, giving insight into the staffing crisis that is ever present within the hospital system⁴. However, the NGH maternity team makes every effort to support a woman's choice to give birth at home, through their home birth service.

³ <u>https://www.sands.org.uk/</u>

⁴ https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/nhs-staffing-shortages

Within the Barratt Birth Centre (BBC), there were three ensuite rooms which each included a shower, toilet, basin, a double bed, a kitchen area and a birthing pool.

The fourth room was used as an assessment area for patients. There were pictures on the walls and all four rooms had birthing balls.

The overall impression we received was that there was an emphasis on providing a relaxed minimal intervention approach to those who entered the centre. One user described the experience as giving birth in a hotel room rather than a hospital – not quite a home birth but a relaxing atmosphere. The unit caters for low-risk births: for those who may have preferred a home birth, but which was not possible for various reasons, or for those who would like the benefit of pain relief from the birthing pools. If a situation arose where additional help was needed, then the mother was transferred to a consultant-led labour ward. The unit did not give the impression of being busy and the atmosphere was generally calm. There is a 'Welcome to the Baby Centre' board within the unit, this is beneficial to provide information, however, we felt more could be done.

Labour Wards

The consultant-led unit has areas for birthing, labour, triage, monitoring, and induction. The Labour ward was found to be clean and airy, and the rooms all had a bed, chair, sink, ball, and gas-and-air available. Rooms nine and ten were birthing rooms, room eight has a birthing pool and all rooms are ensuites, these rooms could be used for any mothers who need to isolate. Within the ward there was an observational room for those who had had a C-section, or for any high-risk service users who needed surveillance and interventions. The Maternity Observation ward is an area alongside the labour ward where women are admitted for induction or high-risk antenatal care. The Triage Bay was used for women who need assessment or who had reduced foetal movement. There are two theatres within the labour wards, but we did not visit these.

Robert Watson

The Robert Watson ward is used for post-natal mothers and babies or those with long-term ante-natal issues. The ward had three four-bedded bays, two single rooms, and a two-bedded bay. The Transitional Care area consisted of one bay with four beds, and two single rooms, and this area was dedicated to keeping mums and babies together if extra neo-natal care is required. Within the ward there was a clinical room for procedures. The ward allowed any partners and family including children to stay and visit during the day.

It was noted that the corridors were used to store equipment on one side to allow for access, but we found that this gave a cluttered effect within the ward. A catering trolley appeared to need a clean, as it had some spilt liquid on it. There was a notice board with staff uniform information, however this was the only explanation of uniforms we saw in the whole unit. The notice board also contained the names of the staff and detailed the ward's cleanliness information.

There was a family room where breast milk could be stored, and formula milk was also available. Within this family room, there was sterilising equipment available for patients to access. The midwives' office was busy and contained notice boards and information which appeared quite cluttered and messy. We found that the space in the Robert Watson was quite small, and we felt that there was a lack of privacy in the bays, due to the beds being so close together. Although the area was clean, we felt it appeared to be well-used and aged.



What People Told Us

We spoke with staff and patients within the Maternity Unit at NGH to ensure that we gathered a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and feedback both working in and being patients within the Unit, this is what we found.

Service User Feedback

Service User 1: "I came in at 2 or 3 in the morning. I had to have an emergency C-section. Staff had been helpful with breast-feeding support, and they keep offering tea and biscuits. I tried induction – the mid-wife observation ward was not a pleasant experience because continuity of care was not so good. I came in on a Thursday and today is Tuesday. The Bank Staff are on at weekends and did not know the routines or procedures, for example turning lights off. I needed to remind staff for pain relief."

Service User 2: "My induction was booked earlier. I was nicely treated at reception. I have been treated with respect. Good. I know what will happen next."

Service User 3: "Everyone is nice, friendly, and welcoming. Experience was stressful. Been on different wards. Told what was happening. Partner said that they used medical lingo – would prefer plain language."



Staff Comments

Staff 1: "The support, for the team, is good. Senior staff are approachable. Friendly workforce. I could not do the job without the team. Been told not to expect a break. If no break, I have to arrange informal cover or I don't eat. On the labour ward, there is a constant workload. Communication with the service users needs to be better – for example, if there are delays going onto the labour ward service users need to be told. Appraisals happen and a monthly meeting with managers is held but I would like something a bit more caring, a bit more personal as well."

Staff 2: "Communication is an issue with the flow of service users. I like the job, and how it empowers women. The Ward sister is visible and has a wealth of experience. I would like an iPad so I could pick a language for those whose first language is not English - to explain messages and especially for explaining breastfeeding, how to register a birth etc. Some staff are awesome here. Have regular appraisals and can bring things up. I want a 10-minute break and I've only had I drink today. We do get a lunch break. 12-hour shifts are okay especially if there was to be a break on either side of a lunch break."



Key Findings

Positives

- Overall the staff are friendly and helpful, and give the impression that they are dedicated to their jobs and care for the patients.
- Staff commented that they did feel supported by their senior team and leaders within the units
- The environment within the ward is clean and safe, with staff maintaining the expected sanitary requirements.
- The birthing rooms within the unit were overall well equipped with the necessary equipment and those that were ensuites were spacious and private.

Challenges

- Staff feel as though they do not get sufficient breaks during their long 12hour shifts and are left without enough time for basic needs such as food and drink.
- The Maternity Unit is lacking the number of staff needed to smoothly run the various clinics.
- The environment within the unit is needing additional elements of décor, informative materials and improvement of facilities.
- There is a need for the service to improve on its approach regarding inclusivity and equality measures, as it was noticed that those who do not speak English as their first language struggle due to a lack of informational materials available in other languages.
- The notice boards could be organised and utilised more effectively, and there was a gap in the number of informative notices identified across the unit, especially regarding information targeted to diversity and minority groups.

Recommendations

Staff Shortage

We understand about the difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, however we feel that the impacts of the lack of staff are affecting the quality of care in the unit and increasing the stress of current staff. However, we think a fresh look at the way that the shift patterns are structured may make the job more attractive to those who have their own family responsibilities, those returning to work after sickness absence, and those who are wanting an improved work-life balance. We feel that an increased consideration around the welfare of the staff may be of benefit.

Staff Happiness

We noted that staff feel that they do not receive enough breaks during their shift. We recommend that it be investigated whether volunteers could be used to help provide staff with cold drinks and snacks mid-way through a shift, and/or during the times that staff are unable to leave the wards, for whatever reason.

For staff morale, we recommend that the senior staff could build in more visits to the wards so that they are seen as present, as this does have an impact on clinic staff to feel valued. These visits can be used to appreciate the pressures which the staff are under on a regular basis. This can help senior staff to remind themselves of the valuable work carried out by those on the front line.

Funding

We understand that a lot of the issues with the appearance and space with in the ward come down to funding issues. However, we feel that if the budget could be reformatted and more funds were made available that they should be allocated to the following...

- More observation and monitoring equipment, as this would enable staff to carry out more frequent and safer procedures.
- Décor improvement materials, such as fresh paint on some of the walls that look aged and worn, and décor such as paintings and plants to make the spaces feel more welcoming.
- IT materials such as tablets that staff could utilise to assist with the delivery of information, education, and guidance to service users. These types of

technology would make it easy and efficient to translate any relevant information into the patient's first language.

The feasibility of putting a request to the NGH/KGH NHS Charity for funding for this should be investigated, and décor items could be brought in through donations from the public. We see this approach of amending the spaces to feel more welcoming in the children's wards and we feel the same approach can be used in the maternity wards.

Environment

We noted that the notice boards and general strategic placement of informational materials can be improved. We recommend that the wards nominate a staff member to be responsible for each notice board, and this can help ensure that information is updated, displayed and current. We feel there should be more emphasis on general information such as: safety, diversity, disability, special needs, identifying staff, women's rights, and domestic abuse.

As noted above we understand that there is a lack of funding that is a barrier to improving the visual environment of the wards, however, when possible, we recommend a refresh of the décor and that the damage to walls and floors (from moving equipment, trolleys etc.) be repaired. We understand that the points of cleanliness and broken furniture and equipment were noted within the recent CQC visit, and we did not note any broken equipment such as chairs and furniture. We felt that the units were airy and clean, apart from a small spillage on a drinks cart, we found that the units had improved on this point from their recent inspection. We recommend that the standards that we observe continue.

Commissioner and Provider Responses

We welcome the feedback that Healthwatch have provided and thank you for taking the time to visit our maternity unit.

We are proud of our maternity services at NGH and it is very important that we listen to and act upon service users feedback so we can continue to improve our services for the families we care for.

We want to reassure our service users that staff recruitment and retention is a high priority.

We now have a well-established international recruitment program for midwives and dedicated midwife roles to support both our international and newly qualified midwives.

Our maternity service strives to provide compassionate and personalized care for the families we care for whilst also providing care and support for staff.

We are aware that some of our rooms particularly on labour ward are in need of updating and this is something we are working towards.

Since the visit we have reconfigured our services and are pleased to report that the number of births on the Birth Centre (BBC) have increased and we will continue to ensure that the BBC remains available to our service users.

With regards to our home birth service, our senior team meet regularly and are committed to reinstating this team. This is not something that will be sorted immediately due to our staffing restraints and we appreciate your patience while we are working on solutions. We are currently working through possible solutions to ensure that we can offer our families homebirths as a safe birth option.

We make every effort to ensure that choice of birthplace is supported and that all service users are fully aware of the restraints of this service at this particular time.

We are committed to making progress with regards to issues raised within the report. We will be developing an action plan to support monitoring of actions identified in the report which we will share with the MNVP quarterly. Thank you again for taking the time to visit NGH.

15 Steps Summary

Welcoming and Informative

On our entering the Maternity Department we were greeted by the reception staff who were friendly and knew about our visit. All staff we met were very friendly and approached us in a nice manner.

The notice boards in some areas looked as if they could be made a little tidier and in areas where it was said the health care assistants were responsible, the information was better presented and up to date. Several of the notice boards with general ward information were not complete. This might be because overall the Maternity unit was not at full staffing.

In the HWNW visit of 2019, it was recommended that information should be available in other languages. There was only one notice board which had a leaflet in 3 non-English languages. Staff reported that they could use interpreters on the phone, but it is disappointing that further progress has not been made. There could have been more information available for diverse groups such as Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ, those with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with physical disabilities and others. We found that both staff and service users expressed concern over the lack of inclusive information available to those whose first language was not English, this is addressed within our recommendations a something that needs improvement.

Overall, it would have been good to see a positive general message across the wards that the staff were there to provide help and support to the service users and their families and were working to get the best outcome possible.

Friendly and personal.

There was no doubt that the staff were dedicated individuals who cared about the people they looked after. They work under extreme pressure and do their very best. There is a national crisis within the NHS regarding the lack of staff available to be able to run services efficiently and to deliver care without stress on staff members, these effects were seen in the feedback from the staff. The service users and families in the labour wards at the time of the visit were diverse and all those interviewed praised the staff for the service and care with which they had been treated.

Safe and clean.

The Maternity Unit is always evolving as experience and research dictate the improvements and changes made. The unit itself is in an old established building which has had many changes over the years. There is no doubt that more space is needed to accommodate the growing population and diverse needs of the service users. The décor in places, in particular the labour wards, looked tired. Entrances to bays showed signs of damage and flooring was damaged in some areas. There was a lack of natural light in some corridors and some rooms did not have windows or skylights. The inclusion of general nurses and others to the team to support the midwives in daily care has been welcomed as this helps safe practice. Staff had visible ID badges. There appears to be adequate hand cleansing, dispensers for masks and suitable disposal bins in all areas. We saw staff using the hand cleansing dispensers, indicating that staff are taking the necessary measures to maintain the necessary levels of environmental safety.

There was evidence of appropriate drug storage – trolleys were locked and chained to the walls. The unit could benefit from additional medical supply storage, however, they make do with the space they are provided with.

Many of the areas within the Maternity Unit are nurse-led and it was made clear that reduced staff is an issue. This results in staff not getting adequate breaks, and consequentially creates an environment where workers feel the effects of additional stress and exhaustion. Although a nice outdoor area was available for use by the staff, it was noted at the time of the visit there was no one using it. One of the reasons for this may be due to the staff reporting they are not always getting adequate breaks. Lack of rest breaks can lead to fatigue that may result in omissions and lead to mistakes occurring. Safeguarding of the mothers and babies can also be more limited when there are reduced numbers of staff. This observation and feedback received are backed by the recent CQC inspection from February 2023, where the Maternity Unit was marked as requiring improvement- one of the reasons as to why, was due to the service not having enough staff to care for the women within the unit and this was marked as a safety risk.

Organised and calm.

The Maternity Day Unit was calm and appeared well run with co-ordination between departments that use the appointment-based clinics. The Labour wards were busier due to the volume of service users and variable individual and immediate needs. The Barratt Birth Centre was an area where low-risk births could take place with minimal intervention and appeared to be a welcome alternative to a home birth where this was not possible. The antenatal and monitoring bays were calmer. The consultant lead labour ward (Sturtridge) seemed less organised and calm. The nursing station was very busy and the notices looked chaotic. This was no doubt due to the lack of space and the nature and variables of the birthing needs of the service users.

About North and West Northamptonshire Healthwatch

Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. This involves us visiting local services and talking to people about their views and experiences. We share our reports with the NHS and social care, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (the inspector and regulator for health and social care), with recommendations for improvement, where required.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- We have the power to monitor (known as "Enter and View") health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.
- We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision-makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement.
- We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, and to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.
- We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using many different ways to discover views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.

Where we feel that the views and voices of Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire and the people whom we strive to speak on behalf of are not being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.

Find out more at www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk







About Connected Together

Connected Together Community Interest Company (CIC) is the legal entity and governing body for Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire.

The remit of the Connected Together CIC includes:

- Contract compliance
- Legal requirements
- Financial and risk management
- Sustainability and growth
- Agreeing strategy and operations
- Agreeing policies and procedures



Connected Together CIC is a social enterprise and a partnership between the University of Northampton and Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire. It aims to be first for community engagement across the county of Northamptonshire and beyond.

By using our expertise and experience, we can help you in delivering community engagement programmes including workshops, research, surveys, training and more. Contact us to find out how we can help your community.

We welcome ideas and suggestions for projects that benefit Northamptonshire and its community.

Find out more at <u>www.connectedtogether.co.uk</u>





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