

# Chester hospital chief not expecting any news over baby deaths inquiry before spring

Police-led inquiry into neonatal unit is still ongoing

**The women and children's building at the Countess of Chester Hospital.**

The chief executive of the [Countess of Chester Hospital](#) understands there won't be any news on an ongoing police investigation into increased mortality rates among higher risk babies until at least the spring.

In May 2017, [Cheshire Constabulary](#) announced a probe at the neonatal unit in relation to a 'greater number of baby deaths and collapses than normally expected during the period of June 2015 and June 2016'.

This followed an independent review by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and The Royal College of Nursing which found 'significant gaps in both medical and nursing rotas'.

Staffing levels were sufficient for a level 1 Special Care Baby Unit but not for its status as a level 2 Local Neonatal Unit providing longer term high dependency and some intensive care, said the review.

The unit has been downgraded to a level 1 unit while the investigation continues.

Chief executive [Tony Chambers](#) said: "The latest that we have heard is that they are not expected to hear anything before the spring and that's as much as the police have really said."

He added: "This has been a difficult time. The status of the unit has changed and that's challenging for the staff, to feel they are under a microscope is challenging."

Explaining why police were brought in, he continued: "We have had various inquiries including the Royal College of Paediatrics review and there were just a few niggles that our clinicians said, look, we think we have got 90% of the answers but there are still bits that we need to in a sense be clear that we have not missed anything.

"All we know for certain is that for that period of time, against a very, very low mortality rate in West Cheshire, there had been a spike that we couldn't explain."

Mr Chambers said parents who had lost loved ones were being supported by the police and the hospital.

"As much as they want it," he added. "Because some are saying 'we were grieving and we were getting beyond this'. It's been really, really tough."

The chief executive candidly acknowledged communications with parents could have been better in the early days but overall feels the situation has been managed 'really well'.