

Press release: New powers to investigate stillbirths

- Government acts to help bereaved parents find answers following stillbirth
- New plans for coroners to investigate stillbirths
- Part of wider plans to help prevent future stillbirths and improve maternal care

The government today (26 March 2019) launched a consultation on proposals to give coroners the power to investigate all full-term stillbirths – which would help provide parents with vital information on what went wrong and why, while ensuring any mistakes are identified to prevent future deaths.

At present, coroners can only hold inquests for babies who have shown signs of life after being born. They cannot investigate where the pregnancy appeared healthy but the baby was stillborn. In these circumstances the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch must investigate the death.

While many parents are satisfied with existing processes, some have raised concerns about the inconsistency of investigations and have called for a more transparent and independent system.

Ministers are therefore asking for views on whether coroners should be able to investigate stillbirths. As judicial office holders, coroners would not only be able to provide parents with much needed answers but also make recommendations to prevent future avoidable deaths.

In addition, the proposed system will ensure that both bereaved parents and medical staff are involved at all stages of the process.

Justice Minister Edward Argar said:

A stillbirth is a tragedy which has a profound effect upon bereaved families. We must ensure that every case is thoroughly and independently investigated.

These proposals would ensure that bereaved parents have their voices heard in the investigation, and allow lessons to be learnt which would help to prevent future stillbirths.

Health Minister Jackie Doyle-Price said:

We want to do everything we can to make pregnancy safer, by continually learning to improve the care on offer so fewer people to have to experience the terrible tragedy of losing a child and

those who do get the answers and support they deserve.

Rates of stillbirths in England are the lowest on record, but we're committed to delivering on our ambition in the NHS Long Term Plan to accelerate action to halve this number by 2025.

This is a complex issue and it's important we get it right by listening carefully to those who are affected by these issues, so I urge everybody to have their say on this consultation. By sharing your experiences you can ensure any decision we make puts women, loved ones and their babies first.

Kate Mulley, Director of Research, Education and Policy at Sands said:

At Sands bereaved parents often tell us how vitally important it is to understand why their baby died and that the best legacy for their baby is to ensure that lessons are learned to prevent future deaths.

We believe their views must be taken into account when determining any changes in the role of coroners. This consultation by the Ministry of Justice raises important questions and we would encourage anyone affected to make their views known."

The joint consultation from the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Health and Social Care seeks a wide range of views, from bereaved parents, the organisations that support them or that provide advice to pregnant women, researchers, health professionals and healthcare providers, as well as those working for coronial services.

Under the proposed system:

- Coroners will have powers to investigate all full-term stillbirths occurring from 37 weeks pregnancy
- The coroner will consider whether any lessons can be learned which could prevent future stillbirths
- Coroners will not have to gain consent or permission from any third party in exercising this power
- Coronal investigations will not replace current investigations undertaken by the hospital or NHS agencies

Whilst the UK's rates of stillbirth are the lowest on record and we have seen year-on-year falls in the proportions of pregnancies that end in a stillbirth, the government is clear that more must be done.

These measures are an important step towards delivering the government's commitment to reduce the rate of stillbirths and make the NHS the safest

place in the world to give birth.

Notes to editors:

- Coroners' duties are supported by a number of powers and safeguards set out in statute, which support an unbiased and transparent process.
- This builds on the government's relaunched Maternity Safety Strategy (November 2017) to support the government's ambition to halve the rate of stillbirths by 2025. The then Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt MP committed to consider whether and how coroners could carry out investigations into babies who are stillborn at term.
- The Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Bill requires the Secretary of State to submit a report to Parliament on whether it will and if so how, the law ought to be changed to enable or require coroners to investigate still-births.
- Coronial investigations would not replace the role others have in reviewing stillbirths such as those undertaken by local NHS services using the Perinatal Mortality Review Tool and those provided by the Health Service Investigation Branch (HSIB). Currently all term stillbirths where the baby dies during labour or birth are investigated by the HSIB.
- As with current coronial inquests such reviews may form part of the coroner's investigation into a stillbirth.
- Coronial stillbirth investigations would reflect the rules and principles that currently underpin the coronial process, including those relating to the conduct of an inquest and the coroner's powers to access evidence and manage the disclosure of documents, to order relevant medical examinations of the stillborn baby and the placenta, to retain legal custody over the stillborn baby and the placenta until they are no longer required for the purposes of the investigation, and to compel witnesses to give evidence.
- Under current law, the role of the coroner is to determine how, when and where someone died if the death was violent or unnatural, if its cause is unknown, or where the deceased died whilst in custody or under state detention. The coroner's duty is in relation to adults, children and babies who were born alive, but not stillbirths.
- If there is any doubt whether a baby was born alive, a coroner can undertake enquiries as to whether there is a duty to investigate, but they will not investigate further if they conclude that it was a stillbirth.
- The [consultation](#) will run for 12 weeks, closing on 18 June 2019.
- The proposals would apply in England and Wales.

[News story: Companies House named](#)

Employer of the Year at Wales HR Awards

Launched in 2017, the awards ceremony is the flagship event of the Wales HR Network, a leading professional thought sharing and networking group created and run by Cardiff-based commercial law firm Darwin Gray and Acorn, Wales' leading recruitment specialist.

Hosted by the BBC's Sian Lloyd, the awards recognise the best HR professionals at all levels, from apprentices to directors, and organisations as a whole across various industry sectors in Wales – showcasing the commitment, hard work and achievements of individuals and teams within the HR profession over the last 12 months.

Director of People Transformation at Companies House, Angela Lewis said:

We're absolutely thrilled that all the hard work we've done with our brilliant colleagues to make Companies House an exceptional place to work has been recognised. We'll continue to find creative ways to ensure everyone can flourish and keep working as one to achieve great results.

Our HR team and Chief Executive Louise Smyth receiving the Employer of the Year award.

Darwin Gray's Head of Employment Law and HR Fflur Jones said:

Employer of the Year is always a tough category for the judges and this year was no exception! With some high-quality contenders, Companies House was a well-deserved winner, showing demonstrable improvements for their employees and workplace culture.

Director of Operations for South Wales at Acorn Recruitment Maria Larcombe added:

Companies House has achieved some fantastic things through their employees and are a deserving winner of Employer of the Year. Its Flourish programme has championed diversity and inclusion to achieve 'a real sense of community' throughout the organisation. It's been absolutely fantastic to see so many excellent HR professionals come together to showcase the talent within HR in Wales.

See the full list of [2019 Wales HR Awards winners](#).

Press release: Three award wins for Highways England projects

Innovative projects including a virtual reality training programme to improve roadworker safety, a time-saving system to install drainage more quickly and work to repair Spaghetti Junction have picked up prestigious awards.

Picking up the Best Innovation Award 2019 title was Kier, in partnership with Highways England, for the pioneering Aqua-Slot drain developed for the M6 motorway upgrade between junctions 13 and 15.

The judges were impressed by the development of the pre-cast drainage system to reduce installation times, costs and network disruption. They commented:

This required early contractor involvement at various levels within the supply chain to make sure procurement, manufacturing and construction of the units were phased efficiently and safely. The reduced timescales and installation rates benefited the end-user and was only possible by this collaborative and innovative approach.

While the Best Innovation Highly Commended accolade went to the virtual reality training scheme used for those working on the M6 junctions 2 to 4 upgrade.

Working on behalf of Highways England, Balfour Beatty Vinci are using virtual reality simulators to educate the workforce on the perils of working on a construction site.

The fully-immersive simulation is designed to prevent on-site accidents by making projects safer through improved training. Users are given different perspectives of potentially dangerous situations to develop a better understanding of safe working zones.

Judges were impressed with the development of the virtual reality software which “allows workers the opportunity to see the hazards in a safe environment therefore encouraging safe and controlled practices on site”.

It was described as “a great demonstration of innovation in the construction industry”.

A virtual reality training session in action

Winning the Best Small Project Highly Commended award was the Kier team working on the re-waterproofing and concrete repairs at the A38(M) Gravelly Hill Viaduct for Highways England.

This is challenging maintenance on Spaghetti Junction, at a very busy part of the road network. Judges felt the project team put the 'customer first' during the work.

They said the scheme used some 'really innovative methods but also with excellent stakeholder engagement. These proactive communications included regular newsletters but also working closely with Highways England to disseminate information of closures through TV, radio and Twitter.'

Highways England smart motorways sponsor and WM CIHT committee member Paul Unwin said:

This year's awards showcased another diverse range of submissions and winners.

It demonstrates the exciting range of developments that are being generated in the region and how the West Midlands is leading the way in innovations.

The CIHT awards celebrate the highways and transportation industry, rewarding the achievements of those working in the sector and promoting their professionalism as best practice to a wider industry audience.

This year's annual West Midlands awards took place at the Burlington Hotel in Birmingham

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Three award wins for Highways England projects](#)

The Highways England projects were all winners at the West Midlands Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) awards.

Press release: Secretary of State approves first City Deal for Northern Ireland

Rt Hon Karen Bradley alongside partners has today signed the Heads of Terms for the Belfast City Deal