

Chief Executive's blog – January 2021

On 4th January 2021 the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Act 2020 was brought into law.

The Parole Board has welcomed the implementation of the Act which puts on a statutory footing guidance that was first issued by the Board in 2017. It is important for victim and public confidence to be clear that the Board will always consider failure to disclose information about victims.

The Board has immense sympathy for families that find themselves in this tragic situation and recognises the distress that a parole review of the offender is likely to cause. The Parole Board guidance which has been reissued and advises panel members to carefully consider any failure or refusal by an offender to disclose the whereabouts of a victim's remains when assessing suitability for release.

The Act will have an impact on our decisions, making it a legal duty for the Parole Board to take into account an offender's failure to disclose the location of their victim's remains when considering them for release. Having a statutory obligation is stronger than internal guidance which cannot be binding on members. If a panel fails to take the failure to disclose information into account, and set out their assessment of the reasons in their decision, the Secretary of State for Justice would have a strong case for seeking a reconsideration of the Board's decision.

Whilst the Act is not a bar on release, and does not, and could not legally amount to "no-body no parole" it does have real meaning. Practically, in my experience, any deliberate failure to disclose what has happened to a victim will almost always lead to a prisoner spending longer in prison. A prisoner who fails to disclose information, or assist the authorities, is at the very least showing a lack of victim empathy, and may also demonstrate an attempt to exert power over their victims. Such behaviour is unlikely to assist a prisoner in demonstrating a reduction in risk. It is also much harder for a prisoner to demonstrate change in behaviour, reform and a reduction in risk of harm if they have not admitted their offence or co-operated with authorities.

The 2020 Act represents a further step in improving the parole system's responsiveness to victims. Since 2018 I have welcomed the steps that have been taken to improve the transparency of the parole system and victims access to information. Whilst understandably, victims will voice disquiet and concern when a prisoner who has caused real harm is considered for parole, I am always impressed by the dignity they show. I am convinced that providing clearer and timely information to victims, including better explanation of the sentence itself, will reduce the concerns that they have. More than 4,000 summaries of our decisions have been issued.

The Board has also implemented a transparent reconsideration mechanism that has provided an important and speedy avenue to ensure decisions are rational

and fair, in the light of the evidence presented. I am convinced that with the right safeguards further increasing transparency would be a positive step.

[New NHS maternity leadership training to address Ockenden Review recommendations](#)

- Patient Safety Minister Nadine Dorries announces a £500,000 fund for innovative NHS maternity leadership training
- Senior maternity and neonatal leaders from around 126 NHS trusts and 44 local maternity units will benefit
- The training will aim to apply lessons learned both from the pandemic and maternity safety inquiries, including the Ockenden Review – and help overcome disconnect between ‘ward and board’

Hundreds of NHS maternity and neonatal leaders in England will benefit from a new £500,000 maternity leadership programme to train staff across 126 Trusts and 44 local maternity systems.

The programme will be rolled out later this year and will equip maternity leaders with the skills and knowledge to improve workplace culture and facilitate greater collaborative working between nurses, doctors, midwives and obstetricians.

The issue of leadership was identified as a key factor in [Donna Ockenden's independent review](#) into cases of neglect and preventable baby deaths at Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust.

The review highlighted the issue of disconnect between ‘ward and board’ in maternity services and the importance of multi-disciplinary training, escalating concerns to senior leaders, and applying lessons learned from serious incidents.

Patient Safety Minister Nadine Dorries said:

The shocking and tragic findings of the Ockenden Review highlighted the importance of strengthening maternity leadership and oversight as well as fostering more collaborative approaches within maternity and neonatal services.

I'm pleased to announce a new training programme for NHS maternity leaders, which will empower nurses, midwives and obstetricians to get the best out of their teams, and deliver safe, world-class care

to mothers and their babies.

Midwifery leadership has already been strengthened with the appointment last year of 7 regional chief midwives who will work with local maternity services to provide safer and more personal care for women, babies and their families.

This is in addition to frontline maternity safety champions in every trust, including one obstetrician, midwife and neonatologist, who work closely with a board maternity safety champion to promote seamless communication across disciplines.

The new leadership programme will provide training and ongoing support for 700 people including NHS trust board safety champions, heads of midwifery, clinical directors of neonatal and clinical directors of midwifery, leaders of local maternity systems and regional chief midwives.

The programme training sessions will help maternity leaders to develop a number of skills, including:

- effective engagement with service users and families
- providing a deep understanding at trust board level of the support required for safe and personalised maternity and neonatal services
- enabling effective clinical leadership at all levels across the system, supporting and enabling leaders to identify and address potential improvements
- how to support local systems to not only react but also anticipate risk and support the improvements required
- knowledge and understanding of the critical components of a learning system:
 - leading the learning system
 - psychological safety
 - accountability and negotiation
 - continuous learning
 - reliability
 - transparency
 - quality improvement methodology and measurement
- developing the capability for safety and quality improvement across organisations and the local system drawing on tools, methodologies and case studies
- effective utilisation of learning from episodes of error, excellence and near misses

Alongside the programme, a new core curriculum for professionals working in maternity and neonatal services is being developed by the Maternity Transformation Programme in partnership with professional organisations, clinicians and service users to address variations in skills and safety training across England.

A single core curriculum will help the workforce to bring a consistent set of updated safety skills as they move between services and trusts.

Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, Chief Midwifery Officer for England, also [wrote to NHS trusts yesterday](#) detailing a new network of advocates who will ensure the voices of mothers and families are heard.

The independent Ockenden review published at the end of last year was established to ensure families get the answers they deserve, and lessons are learnt from every tragic case, so no family has to suffer the same pain in future.

NHS England and NHS Improvement will ensure the trust and wider maternity service learn from these cases of harm and give patients the reassurance that they will receive safe, high-quality care at all times.

[Creating a new opportunity for customers to have their say](#)

Honest and insightful feedback is key to creating a positive customer journey. That's why we are establishing a new customer panel; to receive regular, impartial opinions from our customers – past, present and future. The new panel will enhance our understanding of our customers' experience and identify where improvements can be made, as we drive forward our central commitment to deliver an outstanding customer experience that enables customers to invest in their futures.

We are always working to improve the student finance experience and have a number of significant changes planned for this year, including the introduction of our new Customer Engagement Management system. Our Corporate Plan, published at the end of last year, sets out how we will deliver our goals and strategy over the next three years.
www.gov.uk/government/news/a-blog-on-slcs-corporate-plan-by-ceo-paula-sussex

Our ambition is that the panel will challenge our understanding of the complete customer journey, taking into account all the touchpoints that those who use our services experience throughout the student finance process, from pre-application to end of loan.

While we already work extensively with customers to research their needs, the introduction of this panel will allow us to facilitate open discussions with a small group that represents a cross section of the user journey. This group will provide invaluable insight into our processes and, most importantly, how these can be improved to enable us to provide the best possible service for students and those who are repaying their student loans.

We are currently recruiting and looking for panel members with a willingness to share their stories of the student finance journey and participate in discussions and workshops that explore customer experience issues. The more

diverse the customer panel is, the better understanding we will have to inform our future service development. Alongside customers of Student Finance England (SFE), Student Finance Wales (SFW), Student Finance Northern Ireland (SFNI) and the Student Awards Agency Scotland; we are also looking for members who are future student finance customers, and for members who are in repayment. We welcome applications from individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, religion and / or belief to represent a cross section of our customers.

In return, panel members will receive training and support will be provided from the outset to give them the background information and skills required to be an effective panel member. Skills will be developed on an on-going basis and members will be paid for their time. Members will be appointed for one year with the option to continue for a further year and the panel will meet at least four times per year.

If you are interested in helping us improve the experience of our customers, then apply to join our Student Finance Customer Panel online. Applications close on 24 January 2021.

Application for future students –

www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=92908

Application for current students

–www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=93134

Application for graduates and those in repayment –

www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=93135

David Wallace is Deputy CEO & Chief Customer Officer at SLC.

SLC recruits members for new Student Finance Customer Panel

The new panel will enhance SLC's understanding of the customer journey – it will inform, shape and challenge SLC's customer experience strategy as the organisation strives to deliver on its ambition of providing an outstanding customer experience.

SLC's panel will consist of 16 members with representation from customers of Student Finance England (SFE), Student Finance Wales (SFW), Student Finance Northern Ireland (SFNI) and the Student Awards Agency Scotland, in addition to prospective students and those currently in repayment. Members will be appointed for one year with the option to continue for a further year and the panel will meet at least four times per year.

David Wallace, Deputy CEO & Chief Customer Officer at SLC, said: “We are committed to delivering the experience that our customers expect and the Student Finance Customer Panel has been created to focus exclusively on where we can make improvements in the customer journey.

“SLC already works extensively with customers to research user needs and to test the best ways of meeting these needs. This new panel will operate alongside that work to ensure that our customers are at the heart of all our engagement activity.

“We are particularly keen to recruit a broad and diverse range of future, current and former students and welcome applications from individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, religion and / or belief to represent a cross section of our customers.

“The opinions of the new panel will ensure we consider our interaction with customers from every perspective and at every stage of the journey. Their contribution will be invaluable in helping us to deliver an outstanding experience for all customers.”

Anyone interested in joining the Student Finance Customer Panel can apply online. Panel members will be paid for their time, dependent on participation in panel meetings, plus expenses in line with SLC’s travel and expenses policy.

Application for future students –

www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=92908

Application for current students

–www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=93134

Application for graduates and those in repayment –

www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/jobs.cgi?vxsys=4&vxvac=93135

[Improving fish populations in the East Midlands](#)

The fish have been used to stock the River Derwent in Derbyshire and the River Soar in Leicestershire.

2,000 juvenile barbel and 1,000 chub have been released into several locations of the River Derwent, between Draycott and Duffield, and between Cotes and Kegworth on the River Soar, to provide a welcome boost to the fish populations and angler experience in the area.

The fish stocking is part of a second year of a barbel and chub recruitment project in response to numerous reports in recent years of declining catches of juvenile species on the River Derwent and River Soar.

With angling allowed as exercise in the current lockdown restrictions, as long as anglers adhere to the rules on staying local and limit this to once a day, with no overnight fishing, and keep to social distancing, now is an excellent time to enjoy the sport.

Responsible fishing provides a good opportunity to connect with nature and feel the range of benefits doing so can bring. However, it is important to remember that a valid rod fishing licence is required and anglers must adhere to fishing byelaws and fishery rules.

Gary Briggs, Fisheries Technical Officer for the Environment Agency, said:

The East Midlands Fisheries team has been carrying out the second year of a project to improve fish populations in the region, in order to enhance angler experience.

In response to angler reports of declining catches of juvenile barbel and chub in recent years, we've implemented this project to assist the recovery of coarse fish populations.

To help with the effective management of future river fish populations, we have marked 2,000 barbel and 1,000 chub reared at the Environment Agency's National Coarse Fish Farm at Calverton with blue dye near their ventral fins before stocking them in the rivers.

With the help of local angling clubs, we can then monitor the fish catch data in an attempt to understand more about the recruitment and distribution of these coarse species in our local rivers.

Anyone who catches one of the marked fish is asked to inform the Environment Agency fisheries team so they can monitor the data. Please send details, including the date and time of the catch, location, length of fish, and ideally a photo showing the blue dye mark on the fish, to:

[FisheriesEMD@environment-agency.gov.uk] FisheriesEMD@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Buying a rod fishing licence is quick and easy. Licences cost just £30 for a year (concessions available) and are available from www.gov.uk/get-a-fishing-licence; by phoning 0344 800 5386; or at your local Post Office.

Notes to editors

- All income from rod fishing licence sales is used to fund our work to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries. This includes improving

habitats for fish, reinvesting money back to facilities and clubs for anglers, tackling illegal fishing and working with partners to encourage more people to give fishing a go.

- The Environment Agency's National Coarse Fish Farm at Calverton remains our principal supply of coarse fish for restocking. In 2019, the farm produced 520,475 fish of 9 species, including barbel, chub, dace and grayling and 7,600,000 advanced reared larvae for restocking into rivers following pollution incidents or to help restore fish stocks in rivers recovering from poor environmental quality as well as supporting developing fisheries.