

PRESS RELEASE

Publication of independent investigation into the death of Baby Brooke Leigh Powell HMP Styal on 18 June 2020

The Prison and Probation Ombudsman has published its report into the death of baby Brooke, who tragically died during the process of birth on 18 June 2020 at HMP Styal. Baby Brooke's death was classified as a still birth.

Louise Powell was 30-32 weeks¹ pregnant when she went into labour on 18 June 2020. Louise did not know she was pregnant at the time and the matter was subsequently investigated by the police as a suspected sexual assault.

From 5 pm on 18 June 2020 she experienced waves of contractions, collapsed and begged staff for help. Those calls for help were not properly listened to by staff resulting in Louise giving birth in a prison toilet.

The PPO stated that *"it is not acceptable that a prisoner should be in unexplained acute pain for several hours without proper assessment or consideration of pain relief. Had proper triage taken place, Ms Powell might have given birth in hospital with proper clinical support and medication instead of in a prison toilet with untrained staff."*

The PPO describes the failure for Louise to have any medical treatment whatsoever as a *"serious error of judgment"*.

The PPO found that several officers thought that Louise was pregnant when they saw her but that there was no guidance to staff on what to do in the event of an unexpected birth.

Baby Brooke was a "normally grown" baby² who tragically died during the process of birth and was recorded to be still born. The clinical evidence indicates that had Louise been properly assessed Baby Brooke may have survived.

The nurse has been referred to the Nursing and Midwifery council.

Louise Powell said:

I want justice for Brooke and for her story to be told. I feel I was let down and Brooke was let down by the people that were supposed to look after us. It was a situation that could have been avoided. I hope this never happens to another woman in prison and that babies are protected.

Jane Ryan, solicitor for Louise Powell said:

There were multiple missed opportunities to help Louise. There was no system in place to recognise unexpected birth at the time. Staff and prisoners repeatedly stated she looked pregnant and queried whether she was in labour. It is inhumane to leave a

¹ Quote from medical records

² Quote from medical records

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woman howling in pain unaided and forced to give birth in a toilet. Our independent expert midwife concurs with the consultant obstetrician that had Louise been properly assessed the outcome may have been different and Brooke may have survived.

There are no guarantees in prison that women will be taken to hospital in time and that means that dangerous births like this will happen again. It is my view that prisons are not safe for pregnant women.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

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