

REQUEST TO DfE FROM THE ECONOMY COMMITTEE

At its meeting on 19 May Members received a briefing from officials on the Parental Bereavement (Leave & Pay) Bill.

Members agreed to request a copy of the statistics/figures referred to by the Department in considering miscarriage within the scope of the Bill.

RESPONSE

In response to the Committee query, please see note below detailing the statistics/figures used by the Department when considering whether a provision for miscarriage leave and pay should be included within the scope of the PBLP Bill.

Departmental consideration

There is a distinction in law¹ between miscarriages and stillbirths: if a baby dies before 24 weeks, it's known as a miscarriage, whilst a stillbirth occurs after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy. The Department of Health, as the policy holder for the definitions of Stillbirth and Miscarriage, would be responsible for redefining or amending the statutory recognised periods for both – the last change, which was from 28 weeks to 24 weeks, was made in 1992.

Currently the definition of a stillbirth is the basis for the entitlement to certain benefits and leave allowances – for example, those who have suffered a stillbirth qualify for maternity leave and pay whilst those that have suffered a miscarriage do not.

Statistics reported on the Department of Health and National Health Service websites indicate that, in the cases where a pregnancy is known about, a miscarriage occurs in as many as 1 in 8 pregnancies². However, anecdotal evidence suggests that this figure could be an underestimate, and New Zealand has reported that 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage there. Based on the most recent NISRA figures for births³, the 1 in 8 figure would mean that there were circa 2,800⁴ miscarriages in NI in 2019. This compares to the figure of 225 child deaths and still births in that year, which underpins the PBLP Bill proposals.

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¹ [Births and Deaths Registration \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1976 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

² <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/miscarriage#:~:text=Miscarriages%20are%20much%20more%20common,aware%20she%20has%20become%20pregnant>.

³ Registrar General Annual Report | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk) - <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/births-deaths-and-marriages/registrars-general-annual-report>

⁴ The figure provided is a calculation based on the number of births in Northern Ireland during 2019 and the expected average number of miscarriages. It is thought that miscarriages will occur in between 1 in 8 pregnancies.

