

# AccessNI Newsletter Issue 33: Spring 2020

Welcome

1

COVID-19  
Update

1

Barred Lists

2

Identity  
Checking

2

Lifeguards /  
Befrienders

3

Updates /  
Finance

3

## Welcome

### **Covid-19 Update – What we have been doing**

Like so many other organisations, AccessNI has been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis which has significantly changed the way we are working at present. The first, and most important message, is to confirm that our service continues to process all levels of disclosure checks within the published performance standards, and we are confident that we'll be able to maintain this level of service.

The most notable changes are:-

- We have a number of staff working away from the office, but still able to undertake essential duties – this allows us to maintain our processing capacity.
- We have a small number of staff coming into the office each day to take forward aspects of our service that can't be done remotely, for example opening post and printing and posting disclosure certificates.
- We have decided to postpone Compliance Visits during the 'lockdown' period and will review this, and alternative ways of doing these, over the coming weeks.
- We have also decided to postpone all planned training events – it is likely to be after the summer before we take these up again.
- Monthly invoices will continue to be issued on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of each month, although those of you who receive an invoice in the post might notice a slight delay due to working arrangements in AccountNI.

We have noted over the past few weeks that demand for disclosure checks has reduced by about 50%. This is to be expected given that many checks at this time of the year are for events planned for the summer months, many of which will not now be going ahead.

In terms of processing Enhanced checks, it is still the case that c.27% of these cases still need to be referred to police forces. We understand that a number of forces have introduced their own arrangements to ensure adequate social distancing. This is likely to impact on turn-around times for cases we refer to police, including PSNI. Forces are understandably fast-tracking Covid-19 related applications at this time, and we would ask for your forbearance while they seek to return all other cases as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

**Tom Clarke**  
General Manager

### **AccessNI Registered / Responsible Body Review**

Due to Covid-19, the annual AccessNI Registered/Responsible Body review will not take place this year. AccessNI will continue to monitor the number of applications processed by organisations and reminders will be issued to advise you of the need to process a minimum of 20 disclosure applications.

AccessNI will review the position with registered organisations in September and will arrange for reminders to be issued to organisations where they are not on target to meet the threshold of 20 disclosure applications.



### **Barred list checks**

To ensure that pre-employment Enhanced checks for essential workers in Covid-19 related positions in NI are not unduly delayed AccessNI has temporarily introduced a fast-track Barred List check pending the result of the enhanced check. This is open to relevant paid and voluntary positions – to date we have processed some 3,600 checks using this approach. AccessNI has noted that to date, this facility has been extensively and successfully used by a relatively limited number of organisations.

This is available to all organisations registered with AccessNI involved with the employment of essential workers to manage Covid-19. We would encourage RBs to consider this as the barred list check results should be back within 24 hours of making an application.

Further details on this scheme in terms of eligibility and how to apply can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

### **Protective Disclosure Unit**

Protective Disclosure Unit in PSNI has introduced a number of measures to enable social distancing within the office environment. This includes the allocation of laptops to enable remote working and introduction of an adjusted shift pattern. PSNI are prioritising applications relating to Health and Social Care positions to support their resourcing challenges during the current Covid19 pandemic.

This may result in a delay to applications which do not relate to Health and Social Care positions.

### **ID Checking during COVID-19**

In light of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the need to reduce non-essential social contact, AccessNI is content for you to introduce, as a temporary measure, the checking of ID documents using video link (e.g. Skype) **or** scanned documents on condition that:

- The signatory has a copy of the ID documentation in front of them before they verify the documentation during a video link (eg Skype) meeting.
- The ID documentation scanned or emailed to the Signatory is of a good, clear quality, and
- The applicant's original documentation is verified and checked by a Manager on their 1<sup>st</sup> day of recruitment to ensure it matches the information on the scanned or emailed documentation used to process the AccessNI application.

The need to retain copies of ID documentation for 90 days remains.

### **Forename / Surnames on Applications**

We have noted a high number of applications submitted to AccessNI where the applicant has only provided one forename. Similar issues arise with regard to Surnames in so far as we receive a number of applications where the applicant has provided their title as Mrs, but no previous / maiden names are provided on the application.

ID checking is an extremely important aspect of the role as a signatory as short comings in this regard might lead to AccessNI missing key criminal history information that would otherwise have been included in the Disclosure Certificate had the applicant's full name history been provided.

Signatories are reminded of the need therefore to be thorough in their approach not only in checking the ID of the applicant but also in ensuring that all the details have been accurately included in the e-application.

The same approach should also be used when completing the fast track Barred List check for Covid-19 related positions.

## Befriender Positions

Further to an article issued in the AccessNI Newsletter Issue 26: Winter 2018 recent guidance in relation to befriender positions would indicate that the role is eligible for an Enhanced disclosure check with **NO** barred list where it is a formal arrangement (either through the Trust or under contract with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party) and takes place in a hospital or residential/nursing care facility on a frequent basis.

However, where a Befriender role requires an element of regulated activity (eg Personal Care such as providing feeding, dressing, toiletry assistance or Assistance with Household Duties such as shopping, paying the persons bills) the applicant would still be eligible for an enhanced disclosure **WITH** a barred list check.

## Review of AccessNI Signatory Accounts

All Lead Signatories should log onto their AccessNI Registered/Responsible Body account to ensure:-

1. all the listed signatories are still required and those who are no longer required should be removed.
2. correct email address, postal address and contact details have been provided for each Signatory.

This will ensure all Signatories, are updated with any changes in AccessNI policies or procedures.

## Finance

To all organisations please remember that Access NI payment terms state that invoices should be paid within 30 calendar days. If you have been effected by COVID-19 and need to discuss payment of your account please contact [accessni-finance@accessni.gov.uk](mailto:accessni-finance@accessni.gov.uk).

AccessNI is in the process of switching from issuing hard copy invoices to electronic copy invoices, please note the Lead Signatory of the organisation should advise the finance team at [accessni-finance@accessni.gov.uk](mailto:accessni-finance@accessni.gov.uk). with details of the relevant contact email address.



## LIFEGUARDS (SWIMMING POOLS OR BEACHES)

Previously AccessNI considered there was eligibility for an enhanced disclosure with the barred list checks on the basis that lifeguards were first responders; i.e., in an emergency they could perform first aid on a swimmer and in that way they were providing healthcare. It's now clear that this isn't right; those performing first aid are only eligible where they are doing so on behalf of an organisation established for that purpose, e.g., St. John's Ambulance.

It has recently been confirmed that lifeguards are in regulated activity with children simply by virtue of the duties they perform in supervising children in a pool or in the sea, even when adults are present. On that basis they are eligible for an enhanced checks with a check of the children's barred lists for any lifeguard.

Please note the period qualification must always be met (once a week/4 times of more/overnight) in relation to any regulated activity.

There is no indication that lifeguards perform any activities which would mean they are carrying out work with adults or regulated activity with adults. This is because the specific nature of the work does not fall within the legislative criteria.

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