
Cabinet Member (Policing and Equalities)
Council

31 July 2014
14th October 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Policing and Equalities - Councillor P Townshend

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Coroner's Service Update

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The City Council shares the services of the Coroner with Warwickshire County Council. This report outlines the new arrangements which have been made to facilitate an efficient and resilient Coroner's service for Coventry.

Recommendations:

Cabinet Member (Policing and Equalities) is recommended :

1. to note the transfer of staff from the West Midlands Police to the Council which became effective on 1st July 2014
2. to note the up to date position on the recruitment of new Assistant Coroners to support service delivery in Coventry and the out of hours service rota.

Council is recommended to endorse the appointments of the new Assistant Coroners.

List of Appendices included: None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Coroner's Service Update

1. Context (or background)

In May 2014 Cabinet Member gave approval for changes to the delivery of the Coroner's Service for Coventry in the form of the recruitment of Assistant Coroners solely for the Coventry area and the transfer of the coroners' officers from the West Midlands Police to the Council to support the Coroner, as well as interim arrangements until the transfer was formally completed. Approval was also given to set up an out of hours rota using those Assistant Coroners who were already retained by the Council.

This report gives an update as to the present position on the recruitment process and transfer of staff.

Assistant Coroners

It was anticipated that in the region of four Assistants should be appointed to aid a resilient service .Whilst the recruitment and appointment of assistant Coroners is a matter for the local authority, the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chief Justice must consent to all Coroners' appointments. Officers have therefore engaged with the office of the Chief Coroner at an early stage and obtained approval to the Job Description, Advertisement format and intended sites of the advertisement to be secured. These have also been approved by the Coroner, and adverts are to be placed on the Law Society Gazette website, on the Coroner's Society Website and the Council's website ,WM Jobs on 11th August 2014, with a closing date for applications of 1st September 2014.

Shortlisting is due to take place from 2nd to 10th September 2014 , with interviews on 18th September 2014.. In accordance with the Guidance issued by the Ministry of Justice officers have involved the Senior Coroner throughout the process and consent will need to be obtained from the Chief Coroner after the interviews have taken place, to all appointees selected.

Out of Hours Provision

In addition to support to the Coroner, all new Assistant Coroners for the Coventry Area will be required to take part in an out of hours rota. Some of the existing Assistant Coroners have undertaken some out of hours service cover but not on a formal basis. However, letters will be sent to all current Assistant Coroners, asking for their support for a rota and their responses collated. It is not considered that any new out of hours rota will incur a cost which is greater than the current commitment, but this will be reviewed and a further report brought once the financial implications of the level of support have been considered.

Coroners Officers

In accordance with the direction of the Cabinet Member, negotiations took place with WMP around the potential transfer of the Officers to the employment of Coventry City Council. This transfer took effect formally on 1st July 2014.

Coroners Officers moved to the Council's premises on 2nd June 2014 under a License Agreement, and on the 1st July 2014 a contract was entered into to formalise the arrangements with the Council and the WMP.

The Council has started the process for the recruitment of a Modern Apprentice to provide administrative support going forward as well as a developmental and career opportunity and it is anticipated a placement will be made for the start of the academic year of September 2014/2015, with a NVQ level 2 initially being supported.

The Service is currently supported by two part time Coroner's Officers: an investigatory Officer and a community Officer and one full time Officer.

Joint Arrangements with Warwickshire

The Council is now in a position to review its existing joint arrangements with Warwickshire, as set out in a Memorandum of Understanding and Service Level Agreement. This will be the subject of a future report.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

There are no formal options explored in this report as it actions the various recommendations made by the Cabinet Member on 1st May 2014.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 None

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 The Council's recruitment process for Assistant Coroners should be completed by the end of August and subject to approval by the Chief Coroner, should then be in place and available for out of hours cover with immediate effect.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 **Financial** **implications**

The Council has made arrangements with WMP to secure appropriate levels of funding towards the service.

5.2 **Legal implications**

The Council has complied with the relevant Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations in respect of the transfer of employees from WMP to the Council, and will need to ensure that it follows due process in relation to the variance of the joint arrangements Warwickshire County Council.

6. **Other implications**

None

6.1 **How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The Coroner's Service is a key service area that deals with sensitive and complex situations in assisting the citizens of Coventry with the processes and procedures around the circumstances of death. This particular service contributes to the Council's key objective: Coventry, proud to be a city that works to protect our most vulnerable residents, where we can provide a better service to the residents of Coventry that have suffered a loss.

6.2 **How is risk being managed?**

Without the aforementioned arrangements being implemented it is considered that the service would not have been an effective or resilient service and this could have resulted in increased complaints in an area of utmost sensitivity.

The Council has taken the necessary steps to minimise any risks, including a robust assessment of the financial implications and has made appropriate provision.

6.3 **What is the impact on the organisation?**

The variation in arrangements should ensure that the Council can provide a resilient and good quality Coronial service.

6.4 **Equalities / EIA**

There are no implications under the Equality Act 2010.

6.5 **Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Whilst the recruitment and transfer has involved varying arrangements with Warwickshire County Council, the impact is considered to be minimal in that Warwickshire's existing arrangements with Assistant Coroners can continue. Warwickshire's Coroners Officers have not been affected by the TUPE transfer as they are employed by West Mercia Police.

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