

DECISION TITLE: Coroners Service – Secondment of Officer
CABINET MEMBER EXERCISING DELEGATED POWERS: Cllr Gavin Elsey - Cabinet Member for Street Scene, Waste Management and Communications
January 2015
Deadline date: April 2015

Cabinet portfolio holder:	Cllr Gavin Elsey - Cabinet Member for Street Scene, Waste Management and Communications
Responsible Director:	Kim Sawyer – Director for Governance
Is this a Key Decision?	NO
Is this decision eligible for call-in?	YES
Does this Public report have any annex that contains exempt information?	NO
Is this a project and if so has it been registered on Verto?	NO

RECOMMENDATIONS
The Cabinet Member is recommended to agree:
1) the secondment of a Cambridgeshire County Council Coroner’s Officer to the Coroner’s Service of Peterborough.

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 To agree the secondment of an experienced coroner’s officer from Cambridgeshire County Council to assist in reducing the backlog of reported deaths to the Peterborough Coroner, ahead of a potential merger of the city and county coronial areas and support.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 2.1 This report is for the Cllr Gavin Elsey, Cabinet Member for Street Scene, Waste Management and Communications to consider exercising delegated authority under paragraph 3.4.3 of Part 3 of the constitution in accordance with the terms of their portfolio at paragraph (g).

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO
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4. DETAILS OF DECISION REQUIRED

- 4.1 The Coronial Service has experienced a backlog of reported death cases and changes introduced by the Coroners Justice Act such as the imposition of six month timescales and additional resources are required to reduce this backlog in line with the Chief Coroner's instructions and the timescales imposed by the Coroners Justice Act 2009. Following a recent report by the Council to the Chief Coroner of outstanding matters over the past 12 months, the Chief Coroner responded that this backlog should be reduced by May 2015.
- 4.2 In April 2014, the Council appointed an experienced temporary officer to provide support to the coronial service and this has helped in the service seeing a reduction of 40% in the backlog. This temporary role has ended, and the Council now wishes to second an experienced officer to continue providing stability for coronial service.
- 4.3 There are ongoing discussions regarding the potential for a merging of Cambridgeshire's two coronial areas and potentially the support services with Peterborough's coronial area. As this is likely, it is appropriate to facilitate the alignment of shared working practices and arrangements whilst also addressing the backlog. The authority for this is contained in a separate report.
- 4.4 It is also proposed that the Council recruit a further additional temporary coroner's officer in addition to the secondment to end the backlog and improve the service to the public.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The Chief Coroner and Ministry of Justice have shown an expectation that the backlog currently experienced by Peterborough should be cleared ahead of the merger. In order to do this, the Council must put experienced resources in place to ensure a most timely and efficient reduction takes place.
- 5.2 The Coroner for Peterborough is currently supported by a small team of officers who are managed by an officer who also has responsibility for information governance, data protection, freedom of information requests and electoral fraud. Cambridgeshire County Council has both a dedicated and experienced manager plus an experienced officer available for this secondment which will increase the capacity and resilience at Peterborough.
- 5.3 The sharing of best practices and processes will ultimately lead to a more efficient service which will be able to deliver a better service to the city and bereaved families.
- 5.4 Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides for a local authority to enter into an agreement with another local authority for placing staff at the disposal of that authority where the officer has been consulted. In this instance, the officer has been consulted and has agreed.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation has been undertaken with both the Coroner for Peterborough and Cambridgeshire County Council.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 To agree the placing of an officer from Cambridgeshire County Council at the disposal of Peterborough City Council's coronial service.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS & ANY RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The Council must address the backlog of reported deaths and the use of an experienced officer to make an immediate impact is preferable to recruiting an officer whose benefit may be realised months later.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The alternative option would be to recruit two inexperienced officers on six month contracts whose impact may not be felt until after May 2015 due to training.

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Resource and Performance Implications

It is expected that there will be a cost of £15,500 for this secondment but this will address the backlog and improve performance, and can be funded within existing budget totals.

9.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The Chief Coroner has issued guidance to local authorities regarding the powers under the Coroner's and Justice Act 2009 to merge coroner areas. The Guidance states that it is the Chief Coroner's view that the number of coronial areas should be reduced.

In line with this view, the Council is considering a proposal from Cambridgeshire County Council to apply to the Chief Coroner for approval of a merger of two its coronial areas with Peterborough.

The Chief Coroner has instructed the Council to reduce its backlog of coronial service work ahead of this merger.

The recommendation for the secondment is as a result of the Council's need to reduce this backlog in order to apply for a merger under the 2009 Act, and to minimise the risk of challenge in relation to transparency and the use of financial resources.

9.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications.

9.4 Public Health Implications

Compliance with the Coroners Act, and the introduction of the Medical Examiner service in due course, will support the prevention of cases like those highlighted by the 'Shipman Inquiry'.

10. DECLARATIONS / CONFLICTS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS GRANTED

Declarations by any cabinet member consulted by the decision maker and any dispensation granted by the Audit Committee or Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive). Note, the Audit Committee grants dispensations where the member concerned has a pecuniary interest, whereas the Chief executive may grant a dispensation for these purposes to any cabinet member consulted on these proposals whether by an officer or another individual cabinet member where there is a common law conflict of interest that may not amount to a pecuniary interest under the Regulations.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985) and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Chief Coroner's Guidance no.14: Mergers of Coroner Areas.

<http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/guidance-14-mergers-of-coroner-areas.pdf>