

COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM 7(iii)(c)
12 OCTOBER 2011	PUBLIC REPORT

RETIREMENT OF HM CORONER FOR PETERBOROUGH, MR GORDON RYALL, AND RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR HIS REPLACEMENT

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S
FROM : Solicitor to the Council
That Council: Delegates the appointment of HM Coroner for Peterborough to an appointment panel, following the recruitment process set out in this report.

1. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

The Coroner for Peterborough, Mr Gordon Ryall, has expressed a wish to retire with effect from 31 March 2012, after more than 40 years of service, firstly as Deputy Coroner from June 1971 and as Coroner for the Peterborough area from April 1975. Peterborough City Council is obliged to appoint a Coroner to replace Mr Ryall.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A Coroner is an independent judicial office holder, with jurisdiction in a specified geographical area. Coroners are appointed and paid for by the local authority. The Solicitor to the Council is the proper officer for the Coroner's service. Coroners inquire into violent or unnatural deaths, sudden deaths of unknown causes and deaths which have occurred in prison. It is the Coroner's duty to establish who the deceased was and how, when and where the deceased came by his or her death.
- 2.2 For the period since 2005, Peterborough has had between 950 and 1100 deaths (between 8% and 13% of total deaths) reported to the Coroner each year, with approximately 35% of those resulting in a post mortem. Both figures are slightly below the national averages of 13% and 44% respectively. These statistics result in the Coroner for the Peterborough area being a part-time appointment. To be eligible for a full-time Coroner an area must have in the region of 3000 deaths per year reported to the Coroner. The local authority has no discretion to appoint a full-time Coroner in these circumstances.
- 2.3 The process for recruiting a Coroner is complex and there is a requirement for the technical questions to be unique to each recruitment as candidates may have applied for other recently advertised posts. Expert technical advice is necessary to ensure the appointee is technically competent. It is poor practice to use a current Coroner in this role, as applications from his assistants and deputies are likely. Following consultation with the Ministry of Justice and Coroners' Society of England and Wales, officers have appointed Michael J.C. Burgess OBE, Coroner of the Queen's Household and former Coroner for Surrey until 31 March 2011, to provide expert and technical advice during the entire recruitment process.
- 2.4 The intended process to recruit HM Coroner for Peterborough is:
- Shortlisting process from application forms;
 - Interview day – this will consist of:

- 45 minute preparation on an unseen topic;
 - 15 minute presentation;
 - 45 minute technical interview; and
 - 30-40 minute non-technical interview.
- 2.5 Although Peterborough City Council appoints the Coroner, the successful applicant will not be a Council Officer, but will be an independent judicial office holder and therefore the Employment Committee does not have the authority to make the appointment.
- 2.6 Full Council has the authority to make the appointment and it is therefore recommended that Council delegates the appointment of HM Coroner to an appointment panel and following advice, the appointment panel is likely to include:
- Helen Edwards, Solicitor to the Council;
Mike Kealey, Acting Head of HR;
Mr Michael J.C Burgess, OBE, Technical Adviser; and
Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive.
- 2.7 Before making a final decision the appointment panel will consult Cllr Matthew Lee, Deputy Leader and portfolio holder for Coroner Services, but Cllr Lee will not be involved in the interviews.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal

The local authority is legally obliged to appoint a Coroner. Mr Ryall has given notice of intention to retire with effect from 31 March 2012.

Financial

There are no specific financial implications to recruiting a new Coroner save for the costs of the recruitment process themselves, which, aside from officer time, will be limited to the costs of the technical adviser, interview expenses, and refreshments during the interview day, and are not expected to exceed £5000.

4. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)