

Title of meeting:	Resources Portfolio Decision meeting
Subject:	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroners Update
Date of meeting:	21 January 2016
Report by:	Superintendent Registrar
Wards affected:	N/A

1. Requested by:

1.1 Cabinet Member for Resources: Councillor Lee Mason

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet Member for Resources:

- on the service improvements undertaken to address the recommendations agreed in the Cabinet report of 6 November 2014.
- on further developments planned for the coroners service enabled by the relocation to the civic offices .

3. Information Requested

An update on the recommendations listed in the November 2014 cabinet report is as follows:

3.1 Transfer of Coroners service to PCC

3.1.1 The service successfully transferred from a jointly managed service of Hampshire Constabulary and Hampshire County Council to PCC management on the 1 April 2015.

3.1.2 The Coroners staff were successfully TUPE'd from their respective organisations to PCC employment. The next stage will be to harmonise all staff under PCC terms and conditions and this will inform a future review of the service.

3.2 Relocation of the Coroners Service

3.2.1 The Coroners Service is to relocate from the Guildhall to a suite on the Brunel Wing Civic Offices on 1 February 2016. This relocation will provide a number of benefits for the public and improvement to service delivery such as:

- An improved environment for the bereaved attending inquests (as the public currently wait in the public café area of the Guildhall which is not suitable for this purpose).
- In the current location there is concern regarding security of public access and also the storage of confidential material .These security issues will be addressed in the transfer of the service to the Civic Offices
- Currently there is limited space and amenities for the media whilst reporting on inquests and the new accommodation will provide improved facilities

3.2.2 Overall the new accommodation will provide a more welcoming and professional impression - a modern environment for a more responsive and user-friendly service to the public at a deeply traumatic and emotional time in their lives.

3.3 Introduction of New technology

3.3.1 A further benefit of the relocation will be the introduction of new technology installed in the Coroners Court with the joint aim of improving the service and reducing costs.

3.3.2 The new technology provides a secure video link which will enable professional witnesses to give medical evidence via the link rather than attend the meeting. Witnesses often travel great distances with evidence that may take a matter of minutes to deliver. Hence it is anticipated there will be budgetary savings on transport and related costs of attendance.

3.3.3 Secondly, the link will allow members of the public who live long distances away and were previously excluded from attending court, to observe the Inquest procedure via the secure link and be involved in the process. The Coroner already has an Inquest booked for the new Court, a relative who lives in Australia, who will be involved via the secure link.

3.3.4 In addition to the secure video link, new recording equipment will be installed in the Coroners court in the coming months. This will reduce the time spent preparing transcripts of Inquest proceedings, providing a more efficient service and reducing the time spent on administration.

3.4 Benchmarking and standards

3.4.1 The Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroner's area covers the areas of Portsmouth, Gosport, Fareham, Havant and East Hampshire Councils. The total population served exceeds 650,000.

3.4.2 The number of deaths reported to the Coroner is significant with over 3000 annually and despite the smallness of the area, its demographic makeup results in the Coroners workload exceeding many entire counties such as Berkshire or Worcestershire.

3.4.3 Under HCC service, resource issues were not always adequately addressed and it was a struggle to maintain levels of service whilst workload was increasing. The turnaround targets for Inquest cases improved in 2014 from its position in the bottom quartile, but it was in 2015 a significant improvement in overall timeliness was achieved.

The turnaround targets for non-Inquest cases are now exceeded virtually 100% of the time and the target for completion of Inquest cases within a year is being met 95% of the time. This has been achieved against a background of 3216 deaths being reported during 2015 - the highest total ever for the area.

3.4.4 An important factor in this significant improvement has been the positive impact on the Coroner's staff of support from PCC. Everyone is working together to improve the quality of customer service and the target is for Portsmouth and the South East to be in the top quartile of the national statistical league on a consistent basis.

3.4.5 Although this success is notable, there remain challenges for the future. The new requirement for the Coroner to hold an Inquest in every case where someone dies whilst subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding Order (DOLS) has already significantly added to the workload .It is likely to do so even more in the future with the increasing use of DOLS Orders in nursing and care homes.

3.4.6 Work still needs to be done to tackle the 5% of Inquest cases where the timeliness target is not met. Whilst inevitably certain cases will always take a long time to conclude, delays caused by late submission of evidence by pathologists and others needs to be addressed. This problem is not unique to Portsmouth, it affects coroners everywhere. To try to address this, work has commenced on Service Level Agreements for professionals providing services to the Coroner.

3.5 Joint supervision

3.5.1 It was noted in the previous Cabinet report that the relationship between the Registration service and the Coroners had been difficult in the past and there were a number of inter-dependencies between the services to be improved.

3.5.2 As the Coroner does not line manage staff, the Superintendent Registrar was introduced into the structure to support to the service and help them in their operational management. There have been a number of benefits from this additional support ranging from, improvements in communication between the services, standardising HR process, embedding corporate process and improving customer opening hours over holiday periods.

3.5.3 The development of the interdependency between the registrars service and the Coroners service will be further explored in the future re-organisation.

3.6 Ongoing Challenges for the service

Contract management

3.6.1 As mentioned in the previous report the post mortem examinations service at the QA is a significant overhead in the coroner's budget. The service will be involved in a new contract management framework to develop robust and efficient governance and finance arrangements and provide value for money in this area of work.

3.6.1.1 Alternative options will also be explored for the future delivery of this element of the service to both improve the service to customers and to identify longer term savings.

Further development and improvement in new technology

3.6.2 The Coroners currently use IRIS as their IT interface which holds all coroners data. This is currently hosted by HCC and accessed remotely from the PCC network via Hantsnet Citrix.

3.6.2.1 HCC will continue to host the system in the short term but will be in a procurement exercise for a new cloud-based system, at which point they will need to extract the Portsmouth data. Therefore, PCC will need to make appropriate re-provision for the data to meet the business requirements and ensure a 100% accuracy of data transferred from HCC to PCC.

3.6.2.2 PCC are expected to provide a suitable system for the Coroner to utilise and options are currently being explored internally by the IS service.

3.7 Restructure of the Service

3.7.1 The initial actions outlined in the Cabinet report of the of 6 November have been achieved and the service will continue to review service provision and service structure to better manage costs , improve service delivery and ensure that Portsmouth City Council and the public, are receiving the best value.

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Signed by:

Director of Culture & City Development

Appendices: None

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Management and location of Coroners Service to within Portsmouth city council	PCC website : Cabinet report 6 th November 2014