

Consultation Briefing – December 2011 and January 2012
Flax Bourton Public Mortuary to undertake all Coronial post mortems at
Flax Bourton

Timescale

Formal consultation commences 23rd December 2011. Responses by 31st January 2012.

Response to

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Proposal

The Coroner is proposing to:

- 1) Conduct all Coroner post mortems at Flax Bourton i.e. to cease the current practice of some Coroner post mortems taking place in the Royal United Hospital in Bath (RUH).
- 2) No longer pay for deceased patient storage at the RUH for 'Coroner Form A' cases (i.e. HM Coroner, after investigation, decides the patient died a natural death and informs the Registrars to proceed with death registration).

These proposals are in line with Coroner provision across the rest of the 'Avon' area.

Background

HM Coroner Service

HM Coroner for Avon investigates any sudden or unexplained death in the jurisdiction of Avon. Coroners are required to act in accordance with laid down rules and procedures.

A death is reported to HM Coroner for the following reasons:

- A doctor has not treated the deceased during their illness;
- The doctor attending the deceased did not see them within 14 days before they died or after death;
- The death occurred during an operation or before recovery from the effect of an anaesthetic;
- The death was sudden and unexplained or by suspicious circumstances;
- The death may be due to an industrial injury or disease, or to accident, violence, neglect or abortion, or to any kind of poisoning;
- The death occurred in police custody or in prison.

The HM Coroner for Avon is an independent judicial officer responsible only to the Crown for the proper fulfilment of their judicial duties. Neither the local authority nor anyone else may legitimately dictate to the Coroner how they shall carry out their judicial functions (including whether to hold a post mortem or inquest), or seek to exercise any control over them in that respect.

In order to maintain their independence, the HM Coroner for Avon is the sole decision maker in relation to judicial decisions including commissioning the following services in the course of carrying out their investigations:

- Post mortems
- Histology reports
- Inquests.

The Coroner has the power to send the deceased to any mortuary in any part of the country.

Funding of and support for the Avon Coroner Service

Local authorities are obligated to support the provision of Coroner's Services. They must ensure that the Coroner is free to carry out the coronial business through having:

- Adequate accommodation for the coroner, administrators, courts and mortuary;
- Coroner staff administering the coronial workload. These staff are Bristol City Council employees;
- An adequate budget to undertake the service, which is administered according to the Council's financial regulations.

HM Coroner for Avon, the Coroner court for inquests and administrative support, as well as Flax Bourton Public Mortuary are funded by a partnership of four local authorities:

- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Bristol City Council
- North Somerset Council
- South Gloucestershire Council

Bristol City Council acts as the 'lead' authority. Bristol City Council pays the Coroner and Deputies, employs the staff, and manages the budget, the office, and the court premises, as well as running the Flax Bourton public mortuary.

Flax Bourton Public Mortuary

Flax Bourton Public Mortuary opened in 2009, funded by the 4 local authorities, to undertake routine and forensic post mortems on behalf of the Avon Coroner. It is one centralised and specialist unit providing the highest standard of mortuary facilities.

Deaths are categorised into 'community' deaths (including deaths in custody) and 'hospital' deaths. Coroner 'Form A' cases are when the deceased does not require a post mortem and is available for immediate release to the family, generally in the care of a funeral director, from the hospital. The current charge to the local authorities for a short period of deceased patient storage is unique to RUH in the Avon area. There isn't a 'service' provided, as the deceased are still patients of the hospital.

Table 1: Work undertaken by Flax Bourton mortuary on behalf of the Avon Coroner:

Category of death	Local authority area			
	B&NES	North Somerset	South Gloucestershire	Bristol City
Community	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hospital	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

However, the Coroner currently also carries out Coroner post mortems at the Royal United Hospital in Bath.

Volumes of deaths in Avon Coronal District

The number of deaths reported to HM Coroner for Avon has been between 4,600 and 5,000 per year in the last few years.

Inquests opened as a percentage of deaths are between 15-17% each year.

The percentage of post mortems has slowly decreased from just over 50% a few years ago to the national average of 44% last year.

Local authority budget cuts

There is an overall cut to local authority expenditure across the country of approximately 27% of income from central government revenue grant. Cuts are being made across all four local authorities funding the partnership. The local authority partners are looking to Bristol City Council to also cut the budget of the Avon Coroner Service.

Bristol City Council has a corporate financial target - the projected savings requirement to balance budgets over the next three years – of £42m.

All local authorities have an obligation to identify and highlight potential efficiencies in public services. Bristol City Council has reviewed their services and operations and look to remove duplication wherever possible, with the aim of a reduction of expenditure.

Budget

Sub Unit	Budget £'000	FTE	Notes
Coroner	1,400	*4.6	*not including HM Coroner and Assistant Deputy Coroners
Mortuary	525	7	

£80,000 of the expenditure for the Coroner (post mortem volume dependent) is a payment to the Royal United Hospital in Bath (RUH) to carry out post mortems on behalf of the Avon Coroner. The current charge to the local authorities is £210 per post mortem.

Bringing all the Bath hospital Coroner post mortems in-house to Flax Bourton would realise a cost for transport of the deceased to Flax Bourton (approximately £60.00), but at very little additional service expenditure, the unit would absorb this workload (based on 2011-2012 figures this would not be greater than approximately £18 per body).

The combined savings of proposals 1 and 2 would see local public funds in the region of £40,000 per annum (volume dependent) remaining with the local councils and saved rather than expenditure to the NHS.

Other savings (not subject to this particular consultation) include:

- To review the histology services currently provided by a number of Trusts across the Avon area to look for possible efficiencies and expenditure reductions. Link with the planned Bristol Pathology Service and review respective transport charges. This work to be delivered in approximately 2014/15.
- Review the current structure of the mortuary staffing to achieve optimal capacity of the Flax Bourton Mortuary, which will improve efficiency and reduce employee costs. This work to be delivered in 2012/13.

Benefits of the proposal

Carrying out all post mortems at Flax Bourton will minimise expenditure, as the existing service unit is optimised and realises better value for money across Avon.

Not paying for 'Form A' deceased patients will bring the RUH in line with hospitals in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Consultation

PHASE 1

- i. 24th November 2011 -Bristol City Council: Budget conversation launched.
- ii. 24th November 2011 – details of proposals sent from Strategic Director Corporate Resources, Bristol City Council to Chief Executives of RUH and B&NES.
- iii. 19th December initial response received from B&NES Council CEO Mr Everitt with a request for wider consultation and a helpful list of relevant parties for consultation supplied.
- iv. 7th December. Request from RUH Trust representative Dr Meehan for costs of post mortems at Flax Bourton.

PHASE 2

- i. 23rd December 2011 – this consultation paper circulated.
- ii. Responses by 31st January 2012
- iii. Early February 2012: Four authority finance meeting with Avon Coroner to review feedback from all four authorities and consider responses from other properly interested persons and make a final recommendation.
- iv. 8th February 2012 Final recommendations circulated to all respondees
- v. 13th February 2012 Coroner Decision
- vi. 24th February 2012 Bristol City Council –Full Council documentation will contain decision and savings proposals

Impact assessments –

Equalities – See Appendix B

Environmental – 18 miles between Bath and Flax Bourton, 15 miles between Weston and Flax Bourton, 11 miles between Frenchay and Flax Bourton, 10 miles between Southmead and Flax Bourton.

Locality - RUH would still be in a position (and encouraged) to offer viewings for families prior to transport to Flax Bourton, as happens now with deceased patients from other NHS Trusts. Equally Flax Bourton Public Mortuary has the facility to offer viewings once the deceased is in their care; there have not been any reported issues with this arrangement from the Coroners Officers from other areas for the last two and a half years operations. It is impracticable to have a specialist facility in each location; the public are aware and informed of this situation for a number of services.

Resilience – RUH is currently one of the Resilience Partner Mortuaries used in the event that operations are disrupted at Flax Bourton Public Mortuary (i.e.

for building work, equipment / building failure, etc.). Following the history of successful partnership working in this area, and the recognised need (by HM Coroner, Local Authorities, and the NHS) to provide a suitable and appropriate service to the residents of the Avon jurisdiction, it is hoped that this arrangement can continue.

Flax Bourton Public Mortuary clearly requires resilience capacity going forward and, as such, is currently negotiating further resilience agreements with other Local Authorities and NHS Trusts to mitigate any potential impact on resilience following this review.

Security of case notes – there will be a requirement to transport hospital case notes with each deceased patient originating from RUH. Such case notes must be securely transported and traceable, whilst maintaining patient confidentiality. See Appendix C to achieve this.

Continuity of care – A copy of the post mortem report is always sent to the GP and hospital clinician of all deceased patients who undergo post mortem at Flax Bourton, whether Avon or non-Avon. In addition, the hospital clinicians involved in the patient's care are always very welcome to discuss the case by telephone, or attend the examination if they so wish, as is the case with clinicians from other, local NHS Trusts – no issues have been reported with this system so far.

Duty of Care: As part of the consultation process, respondents, by appointment, are offered the opportunity to view facilities and review first hand the experience for families from beginning to end of the Coronial process in Avon. A chance to meet the team and people involved, and to see that there is good work across agencies to provide the best of services and support to those bereaved. HM Coroner is also currently setting up a voluntary service called Coroners Court Support Service to aid the journey for persons who come into contact with the service across Avon.

Appendix A

Details of Flax Bourton Public Mortuary

Flax Bourton Public Mortuary opened in April 2009 as a purpose built ex-Avon wide facility. The unit currently undertakes routine and forensic post mortems of the deceased referred to the Avon Coroner for all local authorities with the exception of hospital deaths from the Royal United Hospital. Clinical, consented PMs are also undertaken on behalf of several local NHS Trusts.

Flax Bourton Public Mortuary has:

- 135 body storage spaces, including secure forensic, bariatric, and freezer spaces;
- 7 post mortem tables;
- A full forensic / infectious isolation suite with digital fluoroscopy;
- A training facility with video-link PM viewing system;
- A dedicated viewing / formal ID suite;
- A full Human Tissue Authority (HTA) licence;
- An up to date Quality Management System that, along with comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures, follows the principles of ISO9001: 2008.

The unit also undertakes additional, specialist post mortems (i.e. chemical contaminated, forensic, infectious, DVI [Disaster Victim Identification]) for other Coronial jurisdictions outside of Avon.

The staff team at the mortuary consists of:

- Visiting specialist doctors (Consultant Histopathologists)
- Bristol City Council employed Anatomical Pathology Technologists

Appendix B

Bristol City Council Equality Impact Assessment Form

CS 35 Mortuary Business case for all post mortems for Avon at Flax Bourton

Directorate and Service: Corporate services

Lead officer Yvonne Dawes

Additional people completing the form Anne James (Principal Equalities officer)

Start date for EqIA: 10 Nov 2011 Step 1 – Use the following checklist to consider whether the proposal requires an EqIA		
<p>1. What is the purpose of the proposal?</p> <p>All Avon Coroner post mortems to be carried out at the centralised unit at Flax Bourton Public Mortuary.</p> <p>Currently all Coroner post mortems apart from RUH, Bath hospital post mortems are carried out across Avon at Flax Bourton.</p> <p>This proposal will ensure consistency in approach, reduce expenditure leaving the organisation and assist in providing best value for money for the purpose built unit to service the whole of the Avon area.</p>		
High	Medium	Low
<p>2. Could this be relevant to our public sector equality duty to:</p> <p>a) Promote equality of opportunity</p> <p>b) Eliminate discrimination</p> <p>c) Promote good relations between different equalities communities?</p>		<p>L</p> <p>L</p> <p>L</p>
<p>RUH would be encouraged, as other hospitals in Avon, to allow families to view deceased patients prior to transfer to Flax Bourton. The viewing facilities at Flax Bourton are of a high quality if families wished to view whilst in the care of the Coroner at this site.</p>		
<p>3. Could the proposal have a positive effect on equalities communities?</p> <p>There should be little change. It works well across three other areas in Avon and for the community deaths in the Bath area. The site is accessible 24/7. Most communities are aware that services per location is not viable, but that every effort is made to ensure the whole end to end Coronal experience for users is as satisfactory as possible.</p>		

Appendix C

Security of Case Notes

To achieve this, Hospital Envopak Medical Records Carriers (<http://www.itw-envopak.com/Envopak/Hospital-Envopaks/9177-/Medical-Records-Carrier>) will be procured to securely contain the notes during transit (these must be tagged shut once full). A small form will be stapled to the front of each set of case notes (see example below), which will be signed by each person involved in the process accepting custody of the notes (as with a Police evidence continuity label). This will ensure that an audit trail of the notes' movements can be maintained.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Handed to T.Davis FD	RUH Mortuary	01/01/12	11:45	A.N. APT	
Accepted by T.Davis FD	RUH Mortuary	01/01/12	11:46	A.N. Undertaker	
Handed to APT	Flax Bourton	01/01/12	12:48	A.N. Undertaker	
Accepted by APT	Flax Bourton	01/01/12	12:49	A.N. APT	
Handed to T.Davis FD	Flax Bourton	04/01/12	13:14	A.N. APT	
Accepted by T.Davis FD	Flax Bourton	04/01/12	13:15	A.N. Undertaker	
Handed to APT	RUH Mortuary	04/01/12	14:17	A.N. Undertaker	
Accepted by APT	RUH Mortuary	04/01/12	14:18	A.N. APT	