

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 27TH OCTOBER 2009

CORONERS' SERVICES FOR TELFORD & WREKIN

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CORPORATE DIRECTOR: RESOURCES

1.0 PURPOSE

For Members to consider proposals for a shared coronial service within Shropshire with effect from 1st November 2009.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Council formally accept the resignation of the current Coroner.**
- 2.2 That the Council formally appoints John Ellery as the Coroner for Telford & Wrekin.**
- 2.3 That members authorise the Head of Legal Services, on behalf of the authority, to enter into an agreement for a shared Coroners service with Shropshire Council.**

3.0 SUMMARY

This report seeks members' approval for a proposed shared Coroners service with Shropshire Council for Telford & Wrekin and Mid and North Shropshire to protect the local provision of the service in the light of impending legislative changes and the proposed retirement of the current Coroner for Telford & Wrekin.

4.0 BACKGROUND

Members considered a report about the future of Coroners' services for Telford & Wrekin on the 7th July 2009. It was agreed that the Head of Legal Services should discuss developing a shared service for the whole of Shropshire as a means of securing the best local service in the light of proposals for the reform of the Coroners' service contained in the Coroners and Justices Bill and the desire of the current Coroner to retire before the end of this calendar year.

In the light of that decision a proposed shared service has been developed that has the agreement of the Coroners for Mid and North Shropshire (who will become the Coroner for Telford & Wrekin aswell), the Coroner for South Shropshire, Shropshire Council and officers from Telford & Wrekin Council.

It is proposed that the service will be administered by Shropshire Council. A key element of the proposed arrangement is that the Coroner will continue to provide the service for residents of Telford & Wrekin within the Telford & Wrekin area.

5.0 OTHER INFORMATION

5.1 Equality & Diversity

An environmental impact assessment is being undertaken and it is recognised in the shared services agreement that identified impacts will be addressed.

5.2 Environmental Impact

None.

5.3 Legal Comment

The advice that we have received from the Ministry of Justice is that we cannot integrate the service at this stage and accordingly the proposed shared service is arranged to separate the 2 jurisdictions but to take advantage of the efficiencies of joint administration.

There are provisions in the shared service agreement that provide for further reviews in the future when the provisions of the Coroners and Justices Bill are enacted and when the Coroner for South Shropshire retires.

The Equality Impact Assessment is being undertaken but is yet to be completed. As a result there is a risk of challenge but that risk is low and there are provisions in the agreement to provide for service changes that might arise from it.

5.4 Links with Corporate Priorities

Priority 4 – Creating a safe, strong and cohesive community; and

Priority 7 – Creating an efficient effective customer focussed Council that delivers value for money for the community.

5.5 Financial Implications

The costs of the service are outside the Council's control as many of the costs are the result of professional decisions of the Coroner, including for example the costs of post mortem, support for bereaved families and the cost of large inquests.

The current budget allocations for the Coroners service is £199,790 and we are currently projecting an over spend of £82,737 at the year end. The cost of the new service is currently being worked up as part of the negotiations however it is anticipated that savings will be generated through the new arrangements these will contribute towards the councils Value for Money efficiency target. Officers estimate that the shared administration will result in reduced costs of at least £10,000 and perhaps more in subsequent years.

5.6 Ward Implications

This report has implications for all Wards.

5.7 Background Papers

The Coroners and Justices Bill and the relevant file maintained by Legal Services.

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