

Coroner Service Mortuary Facilities Contract

To: Communities. Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 19 October 2023

From: Executive Director Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/083

Outcome: The commencement of the procurement process for mortuary provision for the Coroner's Service in the south of the jurisdiction.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Approve the commencement of the procurement process for mortuary provision in the south of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough coronial jurisdiction; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to award and execute the contract for mortuary facilities.

Officer contact:

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1. Background

- 1.1 For the HM Coroner to be able to fulfil their statutory duties associated with determining the identity of the deceased together with how, when and where they became deceased, it is necessary to have arrangements in place for the provision of mortuary services, including body storage and post-mortem facilities. It is the responsibility of the Council to provide the coroner with such services.
- 1.2 In 2022, 3186 deaths were reported to the coroner, of which 1493 required a post-mortem. Based on figures from previous years, it is anticipated that there will be a 10% increase in deaths reported to the service this year, along with a proportionate rise in post-mortem examinations.
- 1.3 Cambridge University Hospital (Addenbrookes Hospital) and the North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust (NWAFT) at Peterborough City Hospital currently both provide the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough coronial jurisdiction with full mortuary services, including body storage and post-mortem facilities. All the post-mortems are currently carried out for the service in one or other of these hospitals. There have been two contracts in place as no one service provider in the area has the capacity to meet the needs of the Coroners service.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The contract held by Cambridge University Hospital for mortuary services expires on 31 March 2024. Consequently, there is a need to commence a procurement exercise to ensure the tender process is complete in time to ensure a smooth transition to new contractual arrangements from 1 April 2024. By completing a full procurement exercise, there is the opportunity to improve contract terms with the successful service provider, including limiting potential cost increases during the term of the contract. It would not be in the Council's interest to extend the current contract under the current terms.
- 2.2 In line with other contractual arrangements for the service, the intention is to go out to tender with a three-year contract offer, the value of which is expected to be in the region of £2m. Contract values are more difficult to predict at present due to the prevailing economic climate, and the estimated figure is based on the current contract value.
- 2.3 The initial term of the contract will be three years and there will be an option to extend it by a period of two years.
- 2.4 There is limited availability on the market to deliver mortuary and pathology provision. The option of in-house provision has previously been explored but was deemed to be unsuitable from both a financial and practical perspective.
- 2.5 The procurement process is seeking mortuary provision only for the south of the County, with the separate contract with NWAFT due to expire on 31 March 2026.

2.6 Body Storage

2.6.1 The successful tenderer will store bodies under the jurisdiction of the coroner in refrigerated facilities while investigations are ongoing into the cause of death, and until the coroner releases the bodies to the funeral director or other individual appointed by the deceased person's next-of-kin.

2.7 Post-mortem facilities

2.7.1 The successful service provider will provide the facilities and equipment required to conduct post-mortems. The premises are required to be licensed by the Human Tissue Authority and accredited by the Clinical Pathology Accreditation.

2.8 Staffing

2.8.1 Staff will be provided by the service provider to complete post-mortem examinations and to care for the bodies. Pathologists will be approved by HM Coroner to conduct all Coroner post-mortems.

2.9 Post-Mortem Examination

2.9.1 Examinations will be conducted as soon as possible, and always within three working days of permission to proceed having been received from the Coroner or the Coroners service.

3. Alignment with ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

Mortuary provision in the south of the County ensures travel is reduced, positively impacting on carbon reduction, and contributing to the Council's carbon reduction target.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

Outcomes of pathology examinations feed into the wider coronial investigation, and lessons learnt can help inform future safety of Cambridgeshire's roads, footways, and cycle ways.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

Outcomes of pathology examinations feed into the wider coronial investigation, of which findings can help inform improvements required in working practices of partner agencies and can consequently prevent future deaths and improve the lives of others.

Procurement of mortuary facilities across the County helps support local care trusts by ensuring no one provider is oversubscribed, providing a timely examination, contributing to efficiency of coronial investigations.

- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

The service plays a role in supporting bereaved family members and friends, helping them through a challenging time during a coronial investigation. Adequate mortuary facilities across the County ensures individual cases can be dealt with in a timely manner.

- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The resource and financial implications are a revenue commitment, as the Council will be paying for the duration of the contract.

There are no provisions to provide this service internally; previous reviews have determined that this would not be a viable option.

The service is unable to perform its judicial statutory duty without having this contract in place.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The contract procurement will be conducted in accordance with the Council's procurement rules, and with the support of the Procurement team.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide the necessary resources to deliver the Coroners Service.

There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The Mortuary service supports the role of the coroner, who has an important Public Health role in terms of monitoring deaths, identifying any untoward issues, trends, and avoidable deaths.

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes.

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats, and land management.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability, and management:

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Status: Negative

There may be a negative impact from this service, but this will be evaluated and minimised via the procurement and contract management processes

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Tabitha Appleyard

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Yes

Name of Officer: Sue Grace

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes

Name of Officer: Sarah Silk

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Sarah Silk

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes

Name of Officer: Jyoti Atri

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer? Yes

Emily Bolton

5. Source Documents

5.1 None.