

**Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources**

Report to:	<b>Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>27 July 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Coroners Service Transformation Project</b>

**Summary:**

Over a period of 10 months, with the support of a dedicated Senior Project Officer the Coroners Service has transformed its working practices making them more consistent across the county, utilising information technology, whilst importantly maintaining the excellent service delivered for bereaved families. A key part of this project was to identify suitable permanent accommodation for a Coroners Court in Lincoln, which has been achieved.

**Actions Required:**

The Committee is invited to review the content of the report and comment on the transformation achieved and those areas highlighted for ongoing improvement.

## **1. Background**

1.1 In 2016-17 saw the merger of the Lincolnshire Central and Lincolnshire South Coronial areas. However, it became apparent that the service had not fully combined its processes, it had also remained fairly stagnant in its use of technology. It was suffering with poor engagement with some key stakeholders which was driving in-efficiencies and cost in the service. Service to families was maintained however this came at a cost of high levels of stress on the officers. National key performance indicators reported to the Chief Coroner were below average.

1.2 The Business Objectives of the transformation project were:

- To create a higher performing service with more efficient processes to reduce costs where possible.

- To make business decision as to whether the proposed merger with North and North East Lincs is achievable on acceptable terms. *(This is covered by a separate report)*

1.3 The Project Objectives outlined to achieve these were:

- **Fit for purpose property solution**

*What was achieved?*

- A property solution has been identified and a Property Project Manager has been assigned to move forward the business requirements which are required to make the identified property fit for purpose.
- This includes a court room to accommodate jury inquests which has not previously been possible to achieve, it will reduce or remove the requirement to lease rooms for holding inquests.
- Interim technology has been provided to allow for virtual attendance at inquests. This element will continue to be improved as part of the property solution and the introduction of hybrid meeting rooms.

- **Define and implement county-wide processes**

*What was achieved?*

- The single service approach to processes and set activities will be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> August, inclusive of an agreed approach relating to activities varying from scene attendance to file creation.
- On-going work is underway to complete a revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Lincolnshire Police to capture an approved agreement which will provide a more collaborative approach to service delivery and how to best manage any issues which may need to be addressed.

- **Effective use of Case Management system**

*What was achieved?*

- Streamlined processes have been identified and implemented encompassing the existing Case Management system (WPC) to drive these improvements.
- A referral portal has been implemented for GPs and Hospitals to make referrals directly into the system and allows those referring to see progress of their cases which removes the requirement for support staff to provide updates.
- On-going improvements have been agreed with the Police to eventually implement a link to their mobile system which will allow their referrals to flow directly into the WPC system. Once completed this will see the majority of referrals entered directly

to the system saving the business support staff the time of keying referrals in, ensuring the correct information is provided and reducing risk of errors.

- The outstanding referrals which are received from the ambulance service (EMAS) will be approached in line with a regional approach.
  - A technological solution is also being developed to push inquest information from the Case Management system into the Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) web for both death inquests and treasure inquests; this is likely to be completed in the autumn 2021.
  - Redaction has been completed manually on hard copy case files using marker pens. The appropriate software has now been purchased for business support to complete this electronically which again saves admin time and removes the risk of names remaining visible.
- **Value for money support contracts**

*What was achieved?*

- The contract for Post-Mortems is currently being re procured, a dynamic purchasing system approach will be introduced to improve flexibility and resilience.
  - The re procurement of the body removal and transfer contract will commence in late summer, it is hoped significant savings can be made during this exercise.
- **Deliver service requirements within budget**

*What was achieved?*

- The project was carried out at no additional cost.
  - Once fully implemented non cashable savings will be identified and should offset some of the service pressures previously felt.
- **Review Customer feedback and benchmarking**

*What was achieved?*

- It was agreed that customer feedback and benchmarking would be assessed by comparing the number of complaints and compliments from pre and post improvements. This is due to the sensitive nature of the service.

## **2. Conclusion**

The project has now formally closed, but it has now started a process of continual improvement across the service that will be taken forward by the management team of the service and the Senior Coroner.

It has modernised the service utilising technology to the full, thus freeing up officer time to fully support those families who have suffered the sudden loss of a loved one.

Although the property project is still underway when it comes to fruition it will mark an important step change in providing suitable respectful surroundings for families to learn about the circumstances of their loved ones death.

### **3. Consultation**

#### **a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

There have been no substantial changes to public service deliverables. Most of the improvements have been to the back office.

### **4. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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