

Candidate Information Pack

ASSISTANT CORONER

Avon

Relevant Authority: Bristol City Council

December 2020

ASSISTANT CORONER FOR AVON

INFORMATION PACK

1. Advert	page 3
2. Coroner Service Information	page 4
3. Job Summary	page 4
4. Summary of Terms and Conditions	page 7
5. Recruitment and Selection Process	page 8
6. Recruitment Timetable	page 9

This recruitment pack has been drafted in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

1. ADVERT

Assistant Coroner for Avon

Salary – fee paid, £472 per day. [In line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]

Closing date: 1st Feb 2021

Bristol City Council is seeking to appoint a new Assistant Coroner to support the Senior Coroner and Area Coroner across the full range of coroner duties in order to deliver a high-quality coroner service to the people of Avon.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact this year. The postponement of inquests and the need to adapt courts and working environments to adhere to social distancing measures has resulted in a backlog of cases resulting in an ongoing effect of the pandemic.

This role will play a significant part in addressing the backlog and continuing to maintain excellent delivery and standards. The role will be integral in efforts to return to business as usual performance and recovery.

About the post:

Bristol City Council is looking for an exceptional candidate with excellent proven organisational, management and efficiency skills, and experience of exercising sound judgement and communicating effectively. You will work closely with the Senior Coroner and Area Coroner to ensure value for money, performance and financial efficiencies.

You will be required to demonstrate knowledge and experience of coroner law and of basic medicine, have proven skills in conducting investigations and an understanding of court procedure. You will also need to demonstrate the excellent communication and interpersonal skills necessary to deal with sensitive situations.

The successful candidate will be required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of a coroner as defined in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and associated rules and regulations and as further described in various guidance issued by the Chief Coroner.

Although these are fee paid positions they are likely to involve a regular commitment, which is to be agreed between the assistant coroner, senior coroner and the local authority. You will be expected on occasion to be available to assist on an out of hour rota system.

It is a Coroner's personal responsibility (and not that of his/her clerk/secretary) to ensure that they sit when possible. The Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor would expect an assistant coroner to offer a minimum of 15 sitting days each financial year. However, it is recognised that there is a variance of workload in each area.

Who can apply:

The successful candidate will be a barrister or a solicitor or Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives and satisfy the judicial appointment eligibility condition which means they will have five years of experience *whilst* holding that qualification. They will be under the age of 70 and be subject to the appointment and eligibility conditions set out in the [Coroners and Justice Act 2009 \(s.23 and Schedule 3\)](#)

Statutory terms of the appointment:

Once a Coroner is appointed they are then a Judicial Office holder until they reach the age of 70 years (compulsory retirement age) unless they choose to resign or are removed by the Lord Chief Justice or Lord Chancellor prior to their 70th birthday.

How to apply:

The candidate pack is available here: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/web/jobs>

If you wish to have an informal discussion or arrange a visit, please contact Lucy Baker on 01275 461920.

To apply for this position, you are required to submit a CV, and a full supporting statement of up to two sides of A4/10,000 characters through the Bristol City Council careers site portal. It is important that your supporting statement fully addresses the assessment criteria detailed in **bold** within the job summary, role responsibilities and assessment criteria section of this document.

Notification

The vacancy for this post has been notified to the Chief Coroner and Lord Chancellor (as required by statute).

2. CORONER SERVICE INFORMATION

Area information

The coroner's Area of Avon was set up under The Avon (Coroners) Order 1996 which covers the counties of Bristol (as the lead authority), South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, and North Somerset. All four unitary authorities contribute to the budget and therefore support the office of coroner locally.

The Area of Avon is very diverse, covering a large geographical area. Avon is a rural and urban mix spread across 520 square miles with an estimated population in 2019 of over 1.15m people. Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire all border Avon. It has an extensive coastline with rural and industrial areas. It has an international airport. There are four prisons (Leyhill, Eastwood Park, Bristol and Ashfield).

There is a large motorway network. Avon has a number of regional hospitals and mental health units including Southmead Hospital, Bristol Royal Infirmary, Royal United Hospital, Weston General Hospital and Callington Road. Together all of these result in the Avon area having a significant number of complex and high profile inquest cases.

The number of deaths registered in 2019 was 4,045 referred to the senior coroner. Post mortem examinations are conducted at Flax Bourton Public and Forensic Mortuary by hospital pathologists. Paediatric post mortems are conducted at the Bristol Children's Hospital, and occasionally sent to other specialist centres. In 2019 1,345 post-mortem examinations were held which was 33% of the deaths registered.

Since 2011 the Coroner service for Avon has undergone significant change improvements including improved efficiency of key process including:

- Setting up the Avon Coroner web site as a key tool for HM Coroner to communicate externally with the public and interested parties, including court listings <https://www.avon-coroner.com>
- Moving to CIVICA electronic administration system in February 2018 including the case management of all inquest cases
- Improving financial efficiency in a variety of ways including through contracts, staff restructuring and implementing a data retention policy and consequent reduction of stored paper files and collaboration with neighbouring Coroner jurisdictions
- Reducing the need for post mortems in all cases (e.g. mesothelioma, head injuries and falls) and the
- Fast tracking of straightforward inquest cases

The appointment of an Assistant Coroner is a continuation of the planned improvements to provide resilience to the Coroner team.

Medical Examiner

In 2019 the national and regional medical examiner structure was established. The medical examiner system came into force in Avon in 2020 with two schemes reviewing hospital deaths. One scheme is for the Bristol and Weston hospitals and the other is for the Royal United Hospital in Bath. There has been close liaison with the Senior coroner for Avon with the Bristol and Weston trusts in setting up the ME scheme and processes.

It is anticipated that the medical examiner system will assist in ensuring more appropriate referrals of deaths to coroners. As per the national rollout, the two medical examiner systems in the Avon area will initially only cover hospital deaths, with deaths in the community to be included at a later date.

Daily Operations and accommodation

The Avon Coroner's service including office is located in dedicated accommodation at a self-contained pleasant semi-rural site at Flax Bourton in North Somerset. There are two courts at Flax Bourton one which is a medium sized court room which can also accommodate a jury (pre-Covid); the other (known as court two) is smaller. It is planned for an additional venue to be used for inquests.

The coroner's court, which is next to the coroner's offices, is available Monday to Friday allowing inquests to be opened quickly with dates set for inquest hearings, usually within the required six months. The average time from opening to hearing in 2019 was 18 weeks (the average for England and Wales over the same period was 27 weeks).

The coroner team is currently made up of a senior coroner, an area coroner and three assistant coroners. This assistant coroner role would be an addition to this team. There is also a team of seven coroner's officers, one of these officers is also the senior coroner's officer for Avon and Somerset.

The coroner's officer team is also supported by a team of administrative staff employed by Bristol City Council, the team is led by a coroner service manager who manages the accommodation, contracts, tendering, finance, and support staff. The administrative support staff are responsible for answering incoming calls from the public on weekdays from 07:00 to 16:00.

Management

Accommodation, contracts, tendering, finance and support staff are managed by the Mortuary and Coroner Support Manager who is employed by Bristol City Council in the Legal Department. Strategic support is provided by the Head of Statutory Registration, and the Senior Coroner has access to the Director of Legal Services as required.

The Mortuary and Coroner Support Manager and the council's Head of Statutory Registration both liaise closely with the Senior Coroner [and when needed the Avon and Somerset police responsible for coroner's officers] on the delivery of the service to ensure those affected by the work of the coroner team receive a high-quality service. Avon and Somerset Police and Bristol City Council have a good working relationship with HM Coroner for Avon. The local authority and HM Coroner meet regularly, and when needed concerns are raised on both sides and there is collaborative working to deliver improvements including financial savings.

3. JOB SUMMARY

The Role of the coroner:

- Coroners are independent judicial office holders. When made aware that a body or bodies of deceased persons lie within the coroner area, the coroner is responsible for conducting investigations and holding inquests when required (with or without a jury) into deaths to determine **who** the deceased was, **when** and **where** the deceased came by his or her death and **how** that death occurred. A referral is made to the coroner when there is reason to suspect that:
 - i. The deceased died a violent or unnatural death;
 - ii. The cause of death is unknown; or
 - iii. The deceased died while in custody or otherwise in state detention.
- Conducting investigations of this kind will include where appropriate directing pathologists and others to determine these answers. Coroners also have a duty to produce Prevention of Future Death reports should an investigation give rise to concerns about future deaths occurring from the circumstances that caused the death. Coroners also deal with claims for treasure when required in accordance with statutory regulations and guidance.

The overview of the role of an assistant coroner:

- To support the Senior Coroner and Area Coroner in providing a high quality coroner service that puts the bereaved at the heart of the process. This includes preparing for any significant emergencies which may occur and to be available to assist with 24 hour availability on a rota basis.

Assistant coroner Role Responsibilities and Assessment criteria

Assimilating and clarifying information

As an assistant coroner you will be expected to be able to quickly assimilate information to identify essential issues, seeking clarification where necessary so a clear understanding of this information is gained. This will include possessing the ability to explain legal and medical terms to people from non-legal or non-medical backgrounds.

Assessment criteria:

- 1. Excellent analytical skills and a consistency of decision-making and administrative direction.**
- 2. Experience of legal work in the coroner jurisdiction (e.g. representing clients at inquest).**
- 3. The ability to explain complex terms to those from non-legal or non-medical backgrounds.**
- 4. Experience of running inquests since the introduction of The Coroner and Justice Act 2009.**

Previous Coroner Experience:

If you have worked or currently work as a coroner it is important that you detail your coroner experience. Please can you confirm in your application the following:

- (a) how many days worked as coroner;
- (b) the nature of the work;
- (c) the division of time between office and court;

- (d) the extent of experience in completing Forms 100A and 100B;
- (e) the number and type of inquests conducted;
- (f) the number of long inquests and their subject matter; and
- (g) the number of Jury inquests conducted.
- (h) experience of digital case management system.

Managing work effectively

A large amount of coronial work takes place outside of the court setting and therefore assistant coroners are expected to work effectively both in the office and whilst conducting court hearings. They are required to run hearings efficiently to facilitate a fair conclusion, minimise delays and effectively deal with case management. Assistant coroners must respond calmly and flexibly to changing circumstances and prioritise work effectively to make the most of available resources whilst taking in to account any budgetary considerations as appropriate. Assistant coroners are committed to ensuring that any expenditure is reasonable and controlled and works to monitor this regularly with the senior coroner.

Assessment criteria:

- 5. An ability to prioritise work effectively to minimise delays.**
- 6. Able to work at speed and under pressure.**
- 7. Demonstrates resilience responding calmly and flexibly to changing circumstances.**
- 8. Resident within one hour commuting distance of the Flax Bourton courts.**

Working with others

An ability to work constructively with others whilst demonstrating an awareness of diversity and showing empathy and sensitivity in building relationships is required in this post. Assistant coroners must work constructively with members of the coronial team and interact well with bereaved families and external stakeholders (e.g. relatives, police officers, medical personnel, mortuary staff, Registrars, witnesses and the media). Where necessary they assist the senior coroner to engage with the local community, for example giving talks and seeking feedback and views.

Assessment criteria:

- 9. Must have knowledge of the extent to which cultural and religious requirements can be met within the constraints of coroner law and practice.**
- 10. An ability to drive the service and be receptive to new ideas, reforms and diverse needs.**
- 11. Treats people with respect, sensitivity and in a fair manner without discrimination; ensuring the requirements of those with differing needs are properly met.**

Communicating effectively

Assistant coroners must be excellent communicators. They must be sensitive and, as far as possible, responsive to the needs and requirements of those who engage with the coroner service and also possess the awareness to manage their expectations of the process. Assistant coroners must be IT literate and provide clear directions to staff on coroner investigations whilst creating a safe, harmonious and effective working environment through co-operative working.

Assessment Criteria:

- 12. Excellent verbal and written communication skills.**
- 13. Establishes authority and inspires respect and confidence.**

14. Remains calm and authoritative even when challenged.

Exercising judgement

Assistant coroners must demonstrate integrity and apply independence of mind to make incisive, fair and legally sound decisions.

Assessment criteria:

- 15. Able to deal with emotionally charged situations that require sensitive handling and confident/positive judgement.**
- 16. Experience of conducting investigative enquiries including demonstrating clarity of thought in identifying issues relevant to the investigation.**
- 17. Reaches clear, reasoned decisions objectively, based on relevant law and findings of fact.**

Possessing and Building Knowledge

It is the responsibility of the assistant coroner to keep an up to date working knowledge of coroner law, practice and guidance. Coroners must also undertake compulsory Judicial College and Chief Coroner training as appropriate. Assistant coroners should take part in any local training as appropriate. Assistant coroners are expected to take part in the on-going yearly assistant coroner appraisal scheme to build upon their knowledge and skills.

Assessment criteria:

- 18. All applicants must be a barrister or solicitor or Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives and satisfy the judicial-appointment eligibility condition which includes a requirement for the candidate to hold a relevant qualification, to have also gained experience in the law for a total period of at least 5 years *whilst holding that qualification* and be under the age of 70: paragraph 3 of Schedule 3.**
- 19. Thorough, up to date knowledge of legislation, case law and guidance relating to coroner's duties.**
- 20. Knowledge of structures and procedures of the police, in particular those relating to the investigation of sudden or suspicious deaths.**
- 21. Knowledge of the organisational structures of local government including an understanding of the challenges facing local government, both at present and in the future.**

Desirable criteria:

- 22. Full current driving licence (unless disability precludes this) and use of a vehicle for work purposes.**

4. SUMMARY OF TERMS & CONDITIONS

The conditions of service applicable to the post are those set out in Schedule 3, Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The Assistant Coroner holds office on whatever terms are *from time to time agreed between the coroner and the relevant local authority*.

Fee

The post is fee paid and the current fee is **£472** per day. **[in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]**

Pension Scheme

An Assistant Coroner may join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LPGS).

Hours of work

As this is a fee paid position the Assistant Coroner will work on days and times as agreed with the senior coroner.

You may be asked to participate in an out of hour's service, by agreement with the senior coroner. Assistant coroners should live within a reasonable commuting distance from the court or office they will be expected to attend.

Holiday entitlement

None (fee paid appointment).

Payment of expenses

Expenses will be paid in line with the Council's expenses policy. Reasonable expenses for attendance at Judicial Training (including travel expenses, accommodation where necessary and a normal sitting fee payable for each day of training) will be paid by the Local Authority.

Indemnity

The Council will indemnify the Assistant Coroner for costs or damages in relation to legal proceedings in accordance with Regulation 17 of The Coroners Allowances, Fees and Expenses Regulations 2013.

Notice period

The Assistant Coroner may resign from office by giving notice in writing to the relevant authority, however the resignation does not take effect unless and until it is accepted by the authority.

Politically restricted post

This post is politically restricted under the terms of Schedule 3, paragraph 4 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

The Guide to Judicial Conduct

The Assistant Coroner will comply with the standards as set out in the Guide to Judicial Conduct and other associated guidance.

5. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

Applications

To apply for this position, you are required to submit a CV, and a full supporting statement of up to two sides of A4 (no smaller than font 11). It is important that your supporting statement fully addresses the assessment criteria detailed in **bold** in the job summary section above.

In particular please demonstrate how you meet the following criteria:

- 1. Assimilating and clarifying information**
- 2. Managing work efficiently**
- 3. Working with others**
- 4. Communicating effectively**
- 5. Exercising judgement**
- 6. Possessing and Building Knowledge**

If you do not complete a full supporting statement, your application will be rejected. Please ensure you include your work, home and mobile contact numbers, home address and e-mail addresses where applicable. Please note that correspondence will be via e-mail unless otherwise stated. All correspondence and details provided will remain confidential.

Employment references

References will be requested at point of offer of appointment.

Please include the name, address and contact details for two references. Candidates should also state their relationship to the referee and at least one should be your current/most recent employer/head of chambers/relevant authority. References will be taken up for short-listed candidates.

Evidence of qualifications

Candidates will be required to bring evidence of their qualifications to the interview.

Employment checks

The successful candidate will be required to undergo the Council's medical screening questionnaire.

Eligibility to work in the UK

Candidates must be eligible to work in the UK. The successful candidate will be required to provide original evidence of their eligibility to work in the UK.

Disciplinary proceedings and criminal convictions check

Due to the nature of the post, it is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and therefore any conviction, whether spent or unspent, must be declared. All applicants will be required to complete a declaration form when they attend for interview.

The successful candidate will be required to undergo a DBS check.

Applicants must specify in their application if they are the subject of any complaint or disciplinary proceedings by any professional body to which they belong (including personal conduct referred to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office), and clearly state the salary or fee payable. Applicants

will also be asked to declare anything about themselves including in their past that might be an embarrassment to the Local Authority, the Chief Coroner or the Lord Chancellor particularly bearing in mind the basic set of guiding principles in the Guide to Judicial Conduct:

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/guide-to-judicial-conduct>

Interview

You will be required to undertake a short presentation as part of the interview process

Chief Coroner's role in the process

All appointments are subject to the consent of the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor.

Once appointed a Coroner becomes and remains an independent judicial officer holder.

6. RECRUITMENT TIMETABLE

Suitably qualified applicants are requested to submit their CV and their application to: [Click here](#)

- Closing date: 1st February 2021
- Interview invitations will be sent out: w/c 8th February 2021
- Interview date: 16 February 2021
- If you do not hear by 1st March 2021 please assume you have not been shortlisted.

The interview panel will be:

- Maria Voisin, Senior Coroner for Avon
- Yvonne Dawes, Head of Statutory Registration

We are aiming for the successful candidate to take up post by the beginning of May 2021.