

# Candidate Information Pack

## **ASSISTANT CORONER**

Birmingham and Solihull Districts

Relevant Authority:

Birmingham City Council

January 2021

**ASSISTANT CORONER FOR BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL  
INFORMATION PACK**

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

## 1. ADVERT

### **Assistant Coroner for Birmingham and Solihull**

**Salary range – fee paid £472 per day. [in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]**

**Closing date:** 16 April 2021

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

#### **About the post:**

Birmingham City Council is looking for exceptional candidates with excellent proven organisational, management and efficiency skills, as well as experience of exercising sound judgement and communicating effectively. You will work closely with the Senior Coroner and Area Coroners 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.

These are fee paid positions although 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 hours 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 – save in exceptional circumstances - a minimum of 20 sitting days each financial year and including one continuous calendar week (in line with the Chief Coroner's Model Coroner Area ' , 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, July 2020). 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 5 years of experience *whilst* holding that qualification. They will be under the age of 70 and be subject to the appointment and eligibility conditions within 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:**

If you wish to have an informal discussion and/or arrange a visit (provided it is permissible under social distancing measures relevant at the time), please in the first instance contact Lynne Boyle on 0121 303 4274 or [lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk).

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** within the job summary, role responsibilities and assessment criteria section of this document.

Applicants are required to email their CV and a supporting statement to:  
[lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk).

Closing date: 16 April 2021

## **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 Birmingham and Solihull Coroner Service comprises the City of Birmingham and the Borough of Solihull and includes an area of 170 square miles with a current population of around 1.3 million.

The area has a young and culturally diverse population. The jurisdiction incorporates a category B adult male prison, a secure forensic mental health unit, several large mental health inpatient units, an airport, a lot of industry, 4 acute hospitals including the University Hospital of Birmingham which is a regional trauma and transplant centre and several rehabilitation, community and specialist hospitals.

The area contains sections of the M6 and M5 motorways as well as several major A-roads, main rail lines to/from London and tram services, Birmingham Airport and various large sporting facilities which will be part of the Commonwealth games in 2022.

Post mortem examinations are conducted at Birmingham Central Mortuary by hospital pathologists and at the regional Forensic Mortuary at the Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry by Home Office pathologists. Perinatal and paediatric post mortems are conducted at Birmingham Women's Hospital and occasionally sent to other specialist centres. Non-invasive computed tomography post mortems (CTPMs) are also undertaken via Igene in appropriate cases.

In 2020 the number of deaths referred to the Senior Coroner was 5748. 1666 post-mortems were conducted (30%) and 733 inquests were held. Annually the area has an above average number of jury inquests.

### **Medical Examiner**

In 2019 the national and regional medical examiner structure was established. All acute trusts in the coroner area have medical examiners reviewing hospital deaths. There has been close liaison with the Senior Coroner, the Regional Medical Examiner and NHS 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. Deaths in the community are to be included at a later date.

### **Daily Operations and accommodation**

The Birmingham and Solihull Coroner Service is currently located in dedicated accommodation, including offices, mortuary and one court at Newton Street, central Birmingham. Prior to the Covid19 pandemic the main court would sit daily and had a second central satellite court sitting Tuesdays and Thursdays, 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 is ordinarily 12 weeks.

Currently due to the Covid19 pandemic all coroners and staff are performing back office duties remotely from home. On court days (typically Monday, Tuesday and Thursday) coroners and a small number of support staff are required to be physically present in court to conduct inquests remotely via Microsoft Teams.

The Birmingham and Solihull Coroner Service has faced extensive additional demands relating to the type and volume of work it undertakes and due to the significant pressure on the court facilities and the extensive refurbishment required to the current building, the former Youth Court located nearby on Steelhouse Lane has been purchased and is to be refurbished to create a new Coroner's Court comprising offices, three bespoke court rooms including a large jury court, and better facilities, due to open Autumn 2021.

Extra pressures on the Coroner Service have resulted from the Covid19 pandemic, this is due to not only an increase in cases referred to the Coroner, but also the fact that the lockdown measures introduced in March 2020 halted all inquests. From July 2020 non-jury inquests resumed with the coroner sitting physically in court and any participants appearing remotely over Microsoft Teams. The City Council and Senior Coroner are in the process of securing larger temporary facilities to enable jury inquests to run from March 2021 (whilst adhering to government guidance around social distancing) prior to moving to the new court accommodation around Autumn 2021.

The area is one of the largest and more complex coronial jurisdictions. The appointment of a number of new Assistant Coroners will play a significant part in addressing the pressures created by the Covid19 pandemic and continuing to maintain excellent delivery and standards. The role will be integral in efforts to return to business as usual performance and recovery.

## **Staff**

The coroner team is made up of the Senior Coroner, two Area Coroners and four Assistant Coroners. The new appointments would be in addition to this team.

The coroners are supported by one Senior Coroner's Investigator, six Coroner's Investigators, eight Coroner's Officers, and four administrative staff including a Coroner's Paralegal, all employed by Birmingham City Council.

The administrative support staff are responsible for answering incoming calls from the public on weekdays 9am – 4pm.

## **Management**

Accommodation, contracts, tendering, finance and support staff are managed by the Mortuary and Coroner Service Manager, who is employed by Birmingham City Council in the Neighbourhoods Directorate. The Mortuary and Coroner Service Manager and Director for Regulation and Enforcement liaise closely with the Senior Coroner on the delivery of the service to ensure those affected by the work of the coroner team receive a high-quality service.

## **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 Coroners in providing a high quality coroner service to the people of Birmingham and Solihull that puts the bereaved at the heart of the process. This includes preparing for any significant emergencies which may occur and where appropriate 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.**

#### **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:**

- 4. An ability to prioritise work effectively to minimise delays.**
- 5. Able to work at speed and under pressure.**
- 6. Demonstrates resilience responding calmly and flexibly to changing circumstances.**

#### **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:**

- 7. Must have knowledge of the extent to which cultural and religious requirements can be met within the constraints of coroner law and practice.**
- 8. An ability to drive the service and be receptive to new ideas, reforms and diverse needs.**
- 9. 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:**

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

- 13. Able to deal with emotionally charged situations that require sensitive handling and confident/positive judgement.**
- 14. Experience of conducting investigative enquiries including demonstrating clarity of thought in identifying issues relevant to the investigation.**
- 15. 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:**

- 16. 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.**
- 17. Thorough, up to date knowledge of legislation, case law and guidance relating to coroner's duties.**

18. Knowledge of structures and procedures of the police, in particular those relating to the investigation of sudden or suspicious deaths.
19. 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:**

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

**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.

#### **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 Senior Coroner and the relevant local authority*.

##### **Fee**

The post is fee paid and the current fee is in the range £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 these are fee paid positions 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.

### **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 pre-appointment medical screening.

## **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 are required to complete the enclosed declaration form when they make their application. In it, applications are required to declare any criminal convictions and to declare if they are (or have been) the subject of any complaint or disciplinary proceedings by any professional body to which they belong (including the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office). Applicants are also asked to declare on that form anything about themselves including in their past that might be an embarrassment to the relevant Local Authority, the Chief Coroner or the Lord Chancellor particularly bearing in mind the basis set of guiding principles in the Guide to Judicial Conduct.

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

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

## **Interview**

Given the Covid19 pandemic, a decision will be made closer to the interview date on whether to conduct face-to-face interviews or remote interviews via Microsoft Teams.

An element of the interview process will involve either a short presentation or a mock inquest situation. The details will be communicated to short-listed candidates prior to the interview.

## **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 email their CV and supporting statement to: [lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.boyle@birmingham.gov.uk).

**Closing date:** 16 April 2021

**Interview invitations will be sent out:** 3 May 2021

If you do not hear by 17 May 2021 please assume you have not been shortlisted.

**Interview date:** 19 and 21 May 2021

The interview panel is likely to comprise a combination of:

- Louise Hunt – Senior Coroner

- Emma Brown – Area Coroner
- James Bennett – Area Coroner
- Senior person from Regulation and Enforcement, Neighbourhoods Directorate

**We are aiming for the successful candidate to take up post as soon as possible.**