

# CORONERS MORTUARY SERVICE - UPDATED SERVICE AGREEMENT

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Jonathan Bianco
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Finance, Property and Business Services
<b>Officer Contact</b>	John Purcell, Finance and Business Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	None

## HEADLINE INFORMATION

<b>Summary</b>	This report seeks approval to enter into a new partnership Agreement with Ealing Council for the provision of statutory mortuary services for the Coroner's office to use when carrying out post mortems. The service will continue be located at Uxbridge Mortuary.
<b>Contribution to our plans and strategies</b>	Council Plan- 1. Value for Money. 2. Partnership Working
<b>Financial Cost</b>	The acceptance of the proposed new agreement will result in an annual contribution of £164k to the running costs of the service, which is in line with the current charge.
<b>Relevant Policy Overview Committee</b>	Residents and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	All

## RECOMMENDATION

### The Cabinet:

**1. Agree that the London Borough of Hillingdon and Ealing Council enter into a 15 year agreement whereby the London Borough of Hillingdon provides a statutory Coroner's Mortuary Service to Ealing Council in return for financial recompense.**

**2. Agree that the Director of Finance and Business Services is authorised to take all necessary steps to execute the Agreement under the seal of the Council.**

## INFORMATION

### Reasons for recommendation

The Council has provided public mortuary services to carry out post mortems on behalf of HM Coroner in partnership with the London Borough of Ealing since April 2005 when a Partnership

and Service Level Agreement was forged between the two borough Councils. The agreement expired in March 2008. Since that time service has continued to be provided on a quarterly quotation basis on the former agreement terms whilst further work was carried out in regards to benchmarking and costing.

It is necessary to set in place more permanent and longer-term service arrangements. If the recommendation is approved, the continued shared service will ensure that the cost of running a statutory mortuary service is shared between both Councils, resulting in a cost benefit to both Councils.

### **Alternative options considered / risk management**

Not to proceed with the proposed long-term partnership arrangement with Ealing Council would revert to a situation of the Council operating this service on a stand alone basis, and result in a budget pressure of £164k.

### **Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)**

None

### **Supporting Information**

1. Uxbridge Mortuary is part of the West London Coroner's District. Local authorities are statutorily required to provide funding/facilities for the Coroner's service in line with the Coroners Act of 1988 ensuring that the Coroner has access to a mortuary to investigate violent deaths or deaths in custody where the cause of death unknown or in doubt. The Coroner may require a post mortem to be conducted and in some circumstances an inquest to be held. At present, the Council is part of a consortium of 6 authorities who fund the West London Coroner's Service.
2. The Mortuary was originally built in 1953 and upgraded in 2005 to modern day standards. It currently undertakes approximately 900-1000 post mortems per year on behalf of the two boroughs and employs 3 full-time Mortuary Technicians. The building also provides office accommodation for 5 Coroners officers who are based there.
3. Under the previous arrangement, Ealing Council provided an average of £164k to the Council for the mortuary service. Officers from both Councils have been discussing the feasibility of entering into a new long-term partnership arrangement to provide mortuary and post mortem services at the Uxbridge Mortuary. Ealing Council has no public mortuary and relies on the service being provided by way of a partnership arrangement.
4. Under the new arrangement, the Council will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the mortuary, remuneration of staff, supplies, equipment and fittings and management of the service. The agreement contains details of how the service will be managed and monitored. The total cost of the mortuary service, including all running costs, revenue and capital costs will be calculated on a shared costs basis apportioned by the relevant borough population. Payment by Ealing Council shall be in quarterly instalments.
5. The Bereavement Services Manager will provide advice and information to both Councils on the operations and management of the Mortuary, and will attend meetings when requested, in relation to the service. A service review mechanism is built into the agreement with the reciprocal right to terminate on 12 months notice.

## **Financial Implications**

Under the agreement, Ealing Council will provide funding to the Council each year to carry out their mortuary service duties based on shared costs. This arrangement reflects economies of scale through greater utilisation of the current facility and will provide ongoing revenue benefits and value for money for both Councils. Over the course of 15 years, it is anticipated that the Council will receive at least £2.5 million (based on an average contribution of £164k per annum to cover the costs of providing mortuary services above and beyond the statutory minimum required to meet the Council's own needs.

In the event that either party wishes to terminate this agreement provision is made for a 12 month termination notice period if necessary. Therefore if the London Borough of Hillingdon for example wish to dispose of the site in the future, it is possible and we could either provide the service from a new location within the borough or serve notice to London Borough of Ealing.

## **EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

### **What will be the effect of the recommendation?**

A shared service will ensure that costs remain stable, thereby ensuring that residents are not financially stressed during the painful grieving process. It will ensure that the Council is in a position to provide suitable facilities to residents for post mortems and storage of deceased persons.

### **Consultation Carried Out or Required**

H.M. Coroner for the West London District fully supports the shared service arrangement.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and is satisfied that on acceptance of the proposed agreement, an average of £164k per annum will be received from Ealing Council, as a contribution to the running costs for the statutory mortuary service. Accepting this agreement will result in cost benefits to both Ealing and Hillingdon, as the cost of running a mortuary service will be shared between both Councils.

### **Legal**

Pursuant to the Public Health Act 1936, the council is statutorily required to provide a mortuary for the reception of dead bodies before interment and for the carrying out of post mortems.

Two local authorities may enter into an agreement under section 1 of the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 for the supply or provision by one to the other of goods or materials, or any administrative, professional or technical services.

As this is a Part B Service under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 it is not subject to the full EU Public Procurement Regulations. The Council's Contract Procedure Rules do however apply. In this case, Cabinet is authorised to decide on the acceptance of the agreement. As the contract value exceeds £100,000 the contract will have to be executed by the Common Seal of the Council.

## **Corporate Landlord**

The existing arrangement with Ealing Council results in a Council asset being more fully utilised than would otherwise be the case. Building related overheads are shared with the service paid for by Ealing Council, resulting in lower property costs for Hillingdon. The Interim Corporate Landlord supports the recommendation.

## **Relevant Service Groups**

No other service areas relevant.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None