



Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire Coroner Service Charter

Standards of performance
and customer care



Application

This charter tells you what standards of performance are to be expected from the Coroner Service, and what to do if something goes wrong. This charter relates to the Coroner Service in Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire Coroner Service Best Practice Standards

We will:

- We will treat the bereaved and members of the public with consideration during the investigation process and inquest hearings. We will make available to the bereaved and the general public up to date and accurate information about the service we provide and how it can be accessed.
- We will investigate all sudden deaths, effectively, efficiently and impartially in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. We will keep accurate up to date and understandable records of investigations and inquests. We will protect the confidentiality of information as far as possible within a system based on public court hearings. We will prepare for and respond effectively to major incidents.
- We will hold inquest hearings at an appropriate venue and the hearing will be held in accordance with the Coroner and Justice Act 2009. We will carry out enquiries in accordance with the Treasure Act 1996.
- We will work in partnership with organisations, agencies and contractors in order to secure provision of the appropriate response to and investigation of sudden deaths.
- We will ensure that we will have enough investigative and administrative staff who are competent, knowledgeable, trained, supported to carry out the job effectively and efficiently.
- We will robustly assure and improve the quality of our work by monitoring, auditing, and reviewing our services, and through learning from the views, comments, compliments and complaints of the bereaved and other stakeholders.

Legal Position

The Hertfordshire Coroner Service operates within a legal framework and complies with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. It is the duty of Coroners to investigate deaths which are reported to them and where it appears that the deceased died a violent or unnatural death, the cause of death is unknown or the deceased died while in custody or state detention.

The Coroner carries out certain related responsibilities and also investigates finds of possible treasure. In Hertfordshire one senior coroner is supported by a number of Assistant Coroners.

Conduct

Hertfordshire Coroners and Coroner Service staff will treat the bereaved and other members of the public courteously and sympathetically at all times, and will have regard, within the constraints of their statutory duties, to the deceased's religious faith and cultural traditions.

Duties will be discharged impartially, with a view to ascertaining the facts surrounding a death for the purpose of the Coroner's statutory responsibilities.

Confidentiality will be preserved as far as possible within a system based on public court hearings. Explanations for the procedures adopted in particular cases will be given on request, where the Coroner is satisfied that the person has a proper interest.

Correspondance

Written enquiries to the Coroner Service will normally receive a reply within ten working days of receipt. If the matter cannot be resolved within that time, an acknowledgement will be issued within five working days with an estimate of when a substantive reply will be sent.

Contact and enquiry points

The Hertfordshire Coroner Service is at:

The Old Courthouse,
St Albans Road East,
Hatfield, AL10 0ES

The office is open Monday to Friday from 8.00am until 4.00pm.

The telephone numbers are as follows:

General Enquiries **01707 292707**

coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Inquests are held at The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield. In appropriate circumstances inquests may take place at an alternative venue. Those who are required to attend an inquest, or wish to do so, and have special needs are asked to contact the Coroner's Office in advance. Details of forthcoming inquests can be found by looking on **www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronerservice**

A map giving directions to the location of The Old Courthouse is available on our website **www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronerservice**

Coroners and Coroner Service Staff will identify themselves by name in their dealings with members of the public. Assistant Coroners act when the Senior Coroner is not available. In doing so, they exercise the full powers of the Coroner.

Inquiries not requiring an inquest

If a death is referred which does not need to be the subject of an inquest, a certificate giving the cause of death will be sent to the Registrar of Deaths within five working days of the completion of the Coroner's enquiries.

Post mortems

When the Coroner decides that a post mortem – (autopsy) is necessary, wherever possible, the immediate next of kin, whose details are known, will be:

- Given an explanation as to why a post mortem is necessary and what will be involved
- Given advance notice of the arrangements, so that they may be represented by a doctor if they so wish. However post mortem examinations must normally be undertaken as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours of the discovery of the death, and therefore giving notice may not always be practicable.

It may be possible to arrange a less invasive autopsy using CT imaging. This service is only available at the cost to the family and may not avoid the need for an invasive autopsy in all cases.

Release of the body

The Coroner will release the body of the deceased for the funeral at the earliest opportunity. Where there is uncertainty as to the cause of death, or where the death is suspicious, it may be necessary to retain the body longer for further investigation. The Coroner will ensure that relatives are advised of potential delays and the reasons for them.

Deaths requiring an inquest

The investigation

Once the Coroner has opened an investigation, statements will be requested from relevant witnesses, this may include members of the family.

Our process can take some time but members of the family will be kept updated as to the progress of our investigation.

Members of the family can be provided with a copy of the post mortem report on written request and other relevant documents

Members of the family will be informed that any retention of body tissue samples will be conducted in accordance with the Human Tissue Act 2004. (Full details are available from the Coroner's Office).

The Inquest

The Coroner will notify those who wish to attend an inquest of:

The date and time of the hearing(s). Please note that the formal opening of the inquest, for taking evidence of identity and the medical cause of death, will generally take place as soon as the Coroner has received the pathologist's initial post mortem findings.

For details of the location and facilities of the court where the inquest will be held please visit our website at

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronerservice

Witnesses and Jurors

The Coroner Service will:

- Explain to those called as a witness or jurors how to claim for travel and subsistence expenses and for financial loss allowances within the permitted limits.
- For a full schedule of fees please visit our website at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronerservice
- Ascertain any preference for swearing evidence (e.g. in accordance with specified religious beliefs or on affirmation).
- Ascertain any special requirements for people who have special needs.

Timing

The Coroner will endeavour to hold inquests as soon as possible. Most inquests in Hertfordshire take place within six months of the death. All inquest files are reviewed by the coroner on a regular basis to ensure that the investigation is progressing appropriately.

However, there may be factors outside the Coroner's control, which can cause delay. Where the inquest is likely to be delayed the Coroner will notify interested persons on a regular basis of the reason and the up to date position, unless the inquest has been formally adjourned to a specific date.

Details of forthcoming inquests can be found on www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronerservice

Disclosure of information

The Coroner will, on request and at his/her discretion, provide to interested persons copies of the post mortem and other relevant evidence in advance of the inquest.

Jurors

For jurors, the Coroner will:

- Send a leaflet explaining the duties of a juror at an inquest, and provide other relevant information, ten working days beforehand.
- Provide an indication in advance of how long the jury service will last.

After the inquest

On the conclusion of the inquest, the next of kin will be given information about how a death certificate may be obtained.

If the coroners duty under Regulation 28 (Prevention of Future Deaths) has been engaged, Interested parties are entitled to a copy of the report and a reply on request.

The Coroner may provide any document to any person who in the opinion of the Coroner is a proper person to have possession of it. There will be a charge for providing the documents.

The proceedings at an inquest are digitally recorded. The Coroner will supply to a properly interested person, on written request and for the prescribed fee, copies of the CD on which the proceedings have been recorded.

Payments can be made by credit or debit card by telephoning the Coroner Service support team on **01707 292707**.

The Coroner Service will process witness and juror expenses claims promptly and within ten working days of receipt of properly completed applications.

Applications for permission to remove a body out of England

The Coroner will make every effort to complete his/her enquiries and decide such applications within four working days of receipt of notice.

Support organisations

The Coroner Service has information and contact details for many support and counselling organisations. The Coroner's Officer in the case or the court officer at inquest will assist in accessing this information. Coroner's Court Support Service volunteers will attend most inquests and provide support for anyone present. Cruse Bereavement Care have the use of a room at The Old Courthouse.

Treasure inquests

Coroners have responsibility for enquiries into treasure finds. All enquiries into treasure are to be directed to the coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Feedback

Coroners will not normally enter into correspondence about the cases they have completed, but comments and suggestions on improving the Coroner Service are always welcomed.

To leave feedback about the service you have received please complete the following online survey:

<https://surveys.hertfordshire.gov.uk/s/CoronerService2019/>

To leave feedback about the service you received after attending an inquest, please complete the following online survey:

<https://surveys.hertfordshire.gov.uk/s/CoronersCourtSurvey2019/>

Alternatively you can contact the Coroner Service by emailing us at

coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

or by post to

The Hertfordshire Coroner Service,
The Old Courthouse,
St Albans Road East,
Hatfield, AL10 0ES.

Complaints

The aim of the Coroner Service is to provide a service of excellence so that everyone should be dealt with speedily and courteously.

Complaints about a Coroner's decision or the outcome of an inquest can only be dealt with through the High Court. The Coroner's Office will be able to explain the procedures on request, but cannot give legal advice.

All complaints about the conduct of individual Coroners should be raised in the first instance with the Coroner concerned by writing to The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield AL10 0ES.

The Coroner will reply within ten working days.

All complaints about the administration of the Hertfordshire Coroner Service or the conduct of Coroner's Officers should be raised in the first instance with the Head of Coroner Service by emailing us at coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Or by writing to The Coroner Service, The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield AL10 0ES. A reply will be sent within ten working days.

Further information in regards to feedback and complaints can also be found in the Guide to Coroner Services a copy of which can be obtained from either Hertfordshire Coroner Service or viewed online.

Performance

The performance of the Hertfordshire Coroner Service will be monitored regularly against the Best Practice Standards detailed in this document.

Details can be obtained from the Head of Coroner Service at

Hertfordshire County Council - Coroner Service
The Old Courthouse,
St Albans Road East,
Hatfield AL10 0ES.

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coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

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Hertfordshire - County of Opportunity

Our services include:

Care for older people

Libraries

Support for schools, pupils and parents

Fire and Rescue

Fostering and adoption

Support for people with disabilities

Admission to schools

Road maintenance and safety

Protection for adults and children at risk

Trading standards and consumer protection

Household waste and recycling centres

Support for carers

To find out about your local county council, visit:

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk

<https://twitter.com/search/hertfordshire+county+council>

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/hertscountycouncil/>

You can access the internet for free at any Hertfordshire library.

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coronerservice@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Hertfordshire County Council - Coroner Service

The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East,

Hatfield AL10 0ES



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