

# KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

## DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY

**Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services**

## DECISION NO:

21/00096

## For publication

## Key decision\*

Yes –

## Subject:

**Contract extensions for coroners' post mortem examinations**

## Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services I agree to award a 12-month extension to the PM contracts with Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust for the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022.

## Reason(s) for decision:

The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 places a duty on Coroners to investigate deaths that are referred to them if they have reason to think that:

- The death was violent or unnatural;
- The cause of death is unknown; or
- The deceased died while in prison, police custody or another form of state detention e.g., where a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard Order (DoLS) is in place

In some cases, the Coroner will order a PM to establish the cause of death, and in such cases, the deceased is taken to one of five NHS mortuaries across Kent and Medway located at Margate, Ashford, Tunbridge Wells, Dartford, and Gillingham. On behalf of the Kent Senior Coroners, KCC ensures access to body storage and PM facilities across the four Kent coroner areas. The contract with Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust expired on the 30 September 2021 and in the normal course of events KCC would seek to renew the contract for another four years. However, in light of the decision by KCC to build a Digital Autopsy and Body Storage facility at Aylesford, the contracts simply need to be extended until such time as the new facility opens, currently estimated for August/September 2022. This extension will ensure this critical service continues uninterrupted and will allow for a phased transition from invasive PMs to non-invasive Digital Autopsy (DA) for the majority of deceased.

## Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposal is being considered at the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee at their meeting on 17 November 2021.

## Any alternatives considered:

**Do nothing** – this is not an option. Unless a contract is put in place the system of coronial death investigation and certification in the North West Kent area will collapse with the inevitable consequences for bereaved families.

**Go out to tender** – this is not an option. The Kent NHS Trusts do not have capacity to take on any extra work without significant capital investment and given that KCC is moving over to Digital Autopsy which will significantly reduce PM activity, such capital investment makes no sense at all.

**Use a framework or other viable contract mechanism** – there are no known frameworks or other viable mechanisms in existence elsewhere in England and Wales.

**Renew contract through single source procurement** – preferred option – this is the most viable option given the very specialist nature of the work and the absence of any alternative providers with sufficient capacity in Kent or nearby adjoining areas.

**Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:**

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signed

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date

Name: