

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Michael Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

DECISION NO:

22/00102

For publication Yes

Key decision: YES

Subject Matter / Title of Decision: Coroner Post Mortem Contract Extensions

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, I agree the six-month extension for the provision of mortuary and Post-Mortem (PM) services in the Mid Kent & Medway, North West Kent, and East Kent coroner areas and confirm current arrangements from earlier decisions 21/00079 and 21/00096.

Reason(s) for decision:

Senior Coroners are responsible for providing the coronial service for the KCC and Medway administrative areas. By virtue of The Coroners and Justice Act 2009, KCC is responsible for meeting the costs of the coroner service although Medway Council meets its share of the costs through a cost apportionment and pro rata allocation. In particular, KCC supports the Senior Coroners by putting in place contracts for the major areas of activity which includes the provision of body storage and PM facilities.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposal is being discussed at the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 22 November.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Do nothing – this is the current situation as the service is operating outside of a contract. Whilst the three NHS Trusts continue to provide PM facilities for the Council outside of a contracted arrangement, without a contract in place, the Council is at risk of receiving an inconsistent provision and quality of service and having a lack of control over costs, all of which could cause reputational damage to KCC.

Go out to tender – this is not an option. Kent and Medway 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 eventually significantly reduce PM activity, there is no business case for such capital investment. Whilst it is possible that NHS providers outside of Kent may have some capacity, past experience has shown that this approach does not provide a service of suitable quality and cost.

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

Renew the contracts for a longer period until the Digital Autopsy (DA) facility opens – extending the contracts for 12-18 months will not provide KCC with the flexibility to negotiate new contracts for mortuary services that support the DA facility. In six months, KCC will have a clearer understanding of the progress of the DA and would benefit from renegotiating the terms of the mortuary contracts in light of this.

Renew contracts for six months through single source procurement – this is the only 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. A six-month extension will be used to improve understanding of the service and associated costs to the Trusts of running the contract. New contract terms will be updated and developed using these findings and in line with KCC's future needs, including the approach to DA.

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