

THE CHIEF CORONER OF ENGLAND AND WALES

SUMMARY JOB DESCRIPTION

MAY 2012

ROLE OF THE CHIEF CORONER

The Office of the Chief Coroner was created under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to provide national leadership to the coroner system, to drive up performance standards and improve consistency with the aim of delivering better local services to the bereaved.

The Chief Coroner will play a key role in setting new national standards and developing a new framework for coroners including rules, regulations, guidance and practice directions within which coroners will operate. The Chief Coroner will ensure coroners meet those standards by providing leadership, support and guidance, with the overarching aim of improving the timeliness of investigations and the level of service received by bereaved persons.

The Chief Coroner will be expected to engage with a range of interested groups, including coroners, local government and voluntary organisations.

MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE CHIEF CORONER

The main activities of the Chief Coroner are:

1. IMPROVING STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE

The Chief Coroner will have a key role in setting national standards and ensuring that coroners meet these.

He will chair a specialist committee to develop new inquest rules and advise on new regulations. He will be responsible for issuing guidance and practice directions to coroners.

The Chief Coroner will be able to make regulations as to the training of coroners, their officers and other staff.

He will be responsible for monitoring performance across the system in order to drive up standards. He will prepare an annual report, summarising his work and proposing improvements to the Lord Chancellor on the coroner system, to be laid before Parliament. The report will include an assessment of the consistency of standards between coroner areas.

The Chief Coroner will be required to keep a register of all investigations lasting more than a year and will also be responsible for monitoring investigations into service personnel deaths.

He will also have powers to tackle delays within the system, for example by using his power to appoint a former coroner to conduct an investigation.

2. JUDICIAL ROLE

Conducting an investigation

The Chief Coroner may conduct an investigation into a person's death. He may also ask the Lord Chief Justice to nominate a judge or former judge to conduct an investigation. The circumstances in which the Chief Coroner or another judge will carry out an investigation will be determined by the Chief Coroner.

The Chief Coroner will also have responsibility for overseeing the transfer of cases between coroner areas and in some circumstances directing particular coroners to conduct investigations. Such powers are not expected to be used routinely and in most cases senior coroners will agree transfers between them, notifying the Chief Coroner in the process. The Chief Coroner will, however, have the power to allocate cases in the event of a disputed transfer.

3. LEADERSHIP ROLE

The Chief Coroner will provide leadership, support and guidance to coroners. This will be based primarily on the standards established through the new national framework and through training.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE

Coroner appointments

Local authorities are currently responsible for appointing coroners. Under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, Local Authorities will continue to be responsible for appointing coroners, however the Lord Chancellor and the Chief Coroner must consent to their appointment. The Chief Coroner will have some input as to the job description and selection criteria for these appointments, so as to ensure the quality of the candidates.

Emergency planning

The Chief Coroner will make appropriate arrangements in relation to disaster and emergency planning. This will be in respect to incidents occurring in England and Wales and fatal incidents involving British nationals in foreign jurisdictions.

Coroners' reports to prevent future deaths

The Chief Coroner will be responsible for collating reports by coroners of actions to prevent future deaths and the responses to these from the relevant bodies. He will publish a summary of these in his annual report to the Lord Chancellor.