



H.M. Coroner for the
County of Devon
(Plymouth & South West District)

CHARTER

This document should be read in conjunction with Home Office Circular, No.46/1999. It is the duty of any person who has any information touching and concerning the death of a person, which may lead a Coroner to hold an Inquest, to inform the Coroner.

General

Application

1. This Charter tells you what standards of performance are to be expected in the coroner service, and what to do if something goes wrong. This Charter relates to the coroner service in Plymouth and South West Devon District.

Legal Position

2. The Plymouth and South West Devon Coroner Service operates within a legal framework. It is the duty of coroners to investigate deaths which are reported to them and which appear to be due to violence, or are unnatural, or are sudden and of unknown cause, or which occur in legal custody or which are reportable to a Government Department or Agency, and to carry out certain related responsibilities. Plymouth City Council are the lead authority for the provision of coroner services and have the legal obligation to support and fund the service.

Conduct

3. The Plymouth and South West Devon Coroner and his 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 the statutory duties, to the deceased's religious faith and cultural traditions.
4. Duties will be discharged impartially, with a view to ascertaining the facts surrounding a death for the purpose of the coroner's statutory responsibilities.
5. 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.

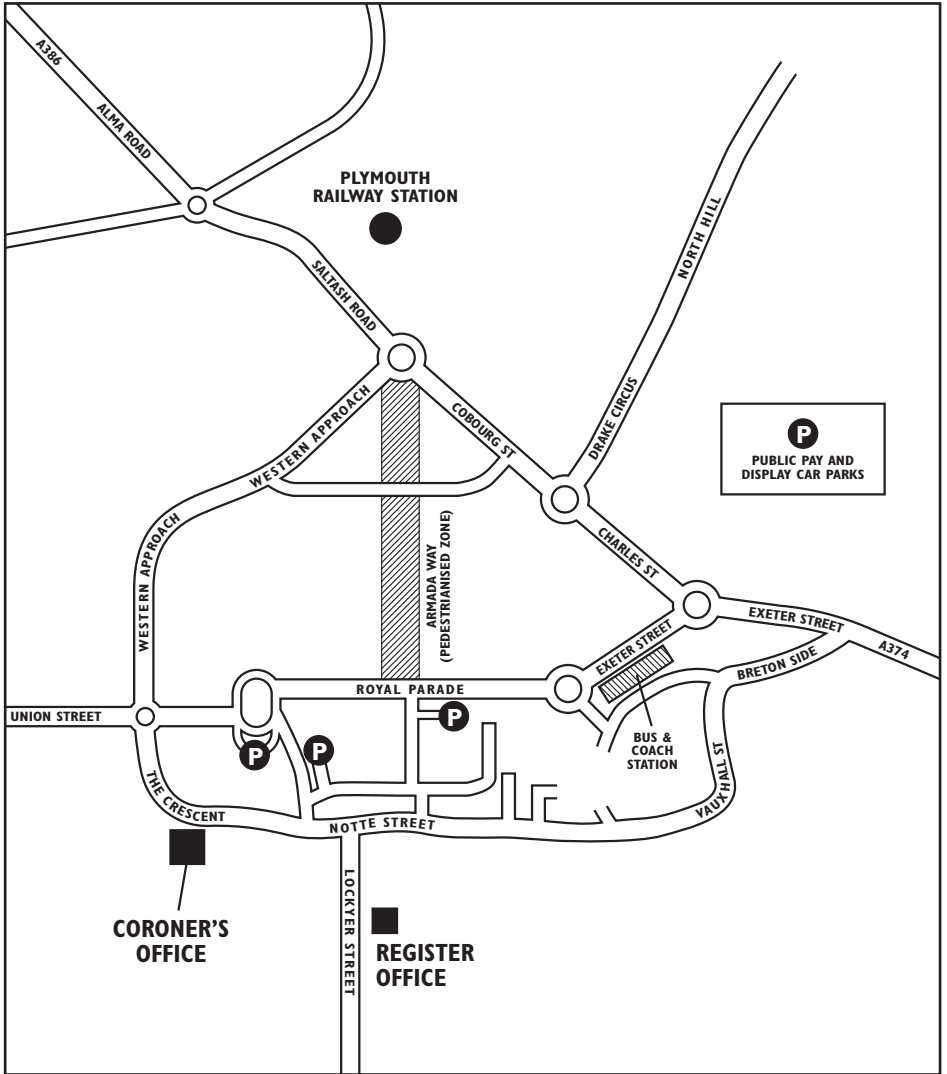
Correspondence

6. Written enquiries to the coroner will normally receive a reply within 10 working days of receipt. If the matter cannot be resolved within that time, an acknowledgement will be issued within 5 working days with an estimate of when a substantive reply will be sent.

Contact and Enquiry Points

7. The Plymouth and South West Devon Coroner's Office is situated at 3 The Crescent, Plymouth, Devon PL1 3AB. The office is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday excluding Bank Holidays. The telephone number is 01752 204636 and the fax number is 01752 313297. Out of office hours - contact can be made to the Coroners' Officers via the Police by telephoning 08452 777444. In the event of an emergency, the Coroner, his deputy and his officers are contactable by the Police at any time. The Coroner or one of his deputies is available out of usual office hours 24 hours a day every day including Bank Holidays. Contact can also be made with the Coroner by email at coroner@plymouth.gov.uk
8. Court hearings may be held at 3 The Crescent, Plymouth or such other venues which may be available and appropriate (eg, The Crown or Magistrates Court or the Council Chamber) as the Coroner may direct. The named venues do have toilet facilities but no refreshments, public waiting rooms or public telephones. Access to the named Court venues for the disabled is limited. Unfortunately there are no special facilities available for the hard of hearing. Those wishing to attend Court who have any special requirements (including for example, translating or interpreting services) are requested to contact the Coroner's Office in advance.
9. A map giving directions to the location of the Coroner's Office is shown opposite.
10. The Coroner and his staff will identify themselves by name in their dealings with members of the public. Deputy and assistant deputy coroners act when the coroner is not available. In doing so, they exercise the full powers of the coroner.

Coroner's Office location map



Inquiries not Requiring an Inquest

11. If a death is reported which does not need to be the subject of the inquest, a certificate giving the cause of death will be sent to the registrar of deaths within 5 working days of the completion of the coroner's enquiries.

Before the inquest

Interviews

12. If the coroner or his staff need to interview someone about a death, the aim will be to do so no more than once, at a time and place convenient to the person concerned. If the person wishes, they may be accompanied during the interview by a relative, friend or other person. Every effort will be made to avoid causing any additional distress to close friends or relatives of the deceased. A copy of any statement to be used at the inquest will be provided to the person who made it, on request.

Post Mortems

13. When the coroner decides that a post mortem is necessary, wherever possible, the immediate next of kin whose details are known will be given:

- an explanation why a post mortem is necessary and what is involved, if requested;
- advance notice of the arrangements, so that they may be represented (by a doctor) if they wish (but post mortem examinations must normally be undertaken as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours of the discovery of the death). Notice may not always be practicable;
- a copy of the post mortem report, if requested.

Administrative Arrangements

14. The coroner will notify those asked to attend an inquest:

- the date and time of each hearing (if more) usually at least 10 working days in advance (but note that the formal opening of the inquest - for taking evidence of identity and the medical cause of death - will generally take place within 2 days of the report of the death, at which point the body will normally be released);
- details of the location of the court where the inquest will be held and of the facilities which will be available there;
- details of the telephone number and a named contact for enquiries;

and will:

- provide or advise on the availability of a leaflet explaining the purpose and procedures of inquests;
- advise those who express a wish to do so that they may attend an inquest as an observer beforehand;
- explain to those called as a witness or juror how to claim for travel and subsistence expenses and for financial loss allowances;
- ascertain any preference for swearing evidence (eg in accordance with specified religious beliefs, or on affirmation).

Timing

15. The coroner will endeavour to hold any necessary inquest at the earliest possible date. Most inquests in Plymouth and South West Devon District take place within 6 months of the death. 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 of the position, including the reasons for any continuing delay, on a regular basis, unless the inquest has been formally adjourned to a specific date.

Release of the Body

16. The coroner will release the body of the deceased for the funeral at the earliest opportunity, normally within 3 days. Where there are uncertainties 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.

Disclosure of Information

17. The coroner will, on request and at his discretion, provide to interested persons not less than 10 working days in advance of the inquest copies of the post mortem report, for which payment may be required.

Jurors

18. For jurors, the coroner will:

- send a leaflet explaining the duties of a juror at an inquest, and providing other relevant information, usually 10 days beforehand;
- provide an indication in advance of how long the jury service will last.

After the Inquest

19. On the conclusion of the inquest, the next of kin will be provided with a written explanation about how, where and when a copy of the death certificate may be obtained.
20. If, in the interests of preventing further fatalities, the coroner decides to report the matter to a relevant person or authority, he will do so within 10 working days of the inquest outcome. He will also send copies of his letter to all interested persons. A copy of any subsequent reply will be sent within 5 days of its receipt.
21. The coroner will supply to an interested person, on application, a copy of the inquest verdict (although this is reproduced on the death certificate), or any of the documents produced in evidence, within 10 working days of receipt of the prescribed fee (which will vary according to the number of documents to be copied). An estimate of the fee will be provided in advance if requested.
22. The coroner will also supply, for the prescribed fee, a copy of his notes of evidence, but this may take up to 6 weeks to provide. In all cases, an estimate of the fee will be given on application.
23. The Coroner or Local Authority will pay witness and juror expenses claims promptly and within 10 working days of receipt of properly completed applications.

Applications for Permission to Remove a Body Abroad

24. The coroner will make every effort to complete his enquiries and decide such applications within 5 days of receipt of notice including weekends and bank holidays.

Treasure Inquests

25. Coroners have responsibility for enquiries into treasure finds. Information leaflets about treasure are available from the coroner's office

Deaths in Hospital

26. When a patient dies in Hospital their family will receive support from both the Coroners' Officers and the Hospital Patient Liaison Team. If the

family have any concerns about the care which was given by the Hospital team then they should advise the Coroners' Officers and these will be addressed as part of the Coroner's enquiries.

27. The Coroner may ask the Hospital's Liaison team for assistance with his enquiries to ensure that he receives all the relevant information, from all sources, during the course of his enquiries. During this time the Hospital will liaise directly with the Coroner.
28. Once the Coroner's enquiries are complete and/or following the Coroner's Inquest, families may contact the Hospital direct if they would like further information or have any outstanding concerns.

Feedback and Complaints

29. Coroners will not normally enter into correspondence about the cases they have completed, but comments and suggestions on improving the coroner service are always welcome. Please contact the coroner's office at the address given above. The aim of the coroner is to provide a service of excellence so that you should have no cause for complaint, but if you do, the complaint will 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 procedure on request, but cannot give legal advice.
 - All complaints about the **administration** of the Plymouth and South West Devon coroner service, or the **conduct** of individual coroners or their staff, should be raised in the first instance with the coroner concerned by writing to him at: 3 The Crescent, Plymouth PL1 3AB or telephoning him on 01752 204636.
 - If the coroner fails to deal with the complaint satisfactorily, the complainant may refer it to The Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA), Coroners Division, 4 Abbey Orchard Street, London SW1P 2HT Tel 0207 340 6656. The DCA has no disciplinary powers or power to award compensation but may, in appropriate cases, refer the complaint to the Lord Chancellor who is responsible for the discipline of coroners.

Performance

30. The coroner's and Council's performance will be monitored regularly against the standards detailed in this document.

Further Information

31. Further copies of this Charter may be obtained from the Coroner's Office. General information is contained in the Home Office Leaflet "The Work of the Coroner", which is available from a Coroner's Office and Police Stations, Citizens Advice Bureau, Hospital, Libraries, and Counsel's Offices. The Home Office Booklet "Your Jury Service in the Coroner's Court" can be obtained from the Coroner's Office.

32. Further information is contained in the "Guide to the Coroner's Inquest System" and is available free on request from the Coroner's Office at 3 The Crescent, Plymouth PL1 3AB Tel 01752 204636 Fax 01752 313297. Please also see the death and bereavement sections for further detailed information on the main local authority website at www.plymouth.gov.uk and click on 'community and living' then 'death and bereavement' and follow the links, or go to:

www.plymouth.gov.uk/deathandbereavement

The following will take you directly to the relevant pages:

www.plymouth.gov.uk/thecoroner

www.plymouth.gov.uk/postmortem

www.plymouth.gov.uk/inquest

www.plymouth.gov.uk/movingabody

www.plymouth.gov.uk/formsandcertificatescoroner

www.plymouth.gov.uk/coronersfaq

33. This Charter was first issued on 1st January 2001 and was last reviewed and amended on 1st January 2006 and will be reviewed during each successive year thereafter.