

Hertfordshire Coroner Service Charter

Standards of performance and customer care

Coroner Service
www.hertsdirect.org

Her Majesty's Coroners
for Hertfordshire



APPLICATION

- 1 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:

- make available to the bereaved, the general public and other stakeholders, up-to-date and accurate information about the service we provide and how it can be accessed
- investigate all sudden deaths effectively, efficiently and impartially. We will expedite the completion of the investigation, the release of the deceased's body and the holding of the inquest, in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009
- treat the bereaved and members of the public with consideration during the investigation and the inquest hearings
- hold inquest hearings at an appropriate venue and they will be properly managed. The hearing will be held in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009

- keep accurate, up-to-date and understandable records of referrals and inquest cases. We will protect the confidentiality of information at our disposal. Disclosure of information to interested parties will be dealt with according to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Confidentiality will be preserved as far as possible within a system based on public court hearings
- work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to secure the provision of the best response to and investigation of sudden deaths
- respond effectively to major incidents and multiple fatalities
- carry out enquiries into treasure finds as per the Treasure Act 1996
- ensure that we have enough staff who are competent, knowledgeable, trained, supported and provided with adequate guidance to carry out their job effectively and efficiently
- robustly assure and improve the quality of all our work by monitoring, auditing and reviewing our services, and through capitalising on the views, comments, compliments and complaints of the bereaved, partner organisations, agencies and other stakeholders

LEGAL POSITION

- 2 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 which appear to be due to violence, unnatural, are sudden and of unknown cause, or which occur in legal custody, and to carry out certain related responsibilities. Coroners also investigate finds of possible treasure.

In Hertfordshire one senior coroner is supported by a number of properly qualified assistant deputies.

CONDUCT

- 3 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.
- 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 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

- 7 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's Officers	01707 292705 - WEST HERTS 01707 292706 - EAST HERTS
Coroner Service Administrators	01707 292780 01707 292781 coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk

An answerphone is available out of hours.

- 8 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.hertsdirect.org /coronersinquests](http://www.hertsdirect.org/coronersinquests)
- 9 A map giving directions to the location of The Old Courthouse is available on application to the Coroner's Office.
- 10 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

- 11 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

- 12** 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 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

RELEASE OF THE BODY

- 13** 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

INTERVIEWS

- 14** The Coroner's Officer will write to the next of kin to request a letter regarding the events surrounding the death and for some family history.
- The information provided will assist with the Coroner's investigation.
 - This may be completed with assistance from friends or relatives and will be required prior to the inquest. Alternatively the letter can be completed with the help of the Coroner's Officer if preferred.
 - Provided with a copy of the post mortem report on written request.
 - 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).

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

15 The Coroner will notify those asked to attend an inquest of:

- The date and time of the hearing(s) at least ten working days in advance. However, 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. Next of kin and witnesses are not expected to attend.
- Details of the location of the court where the inquest will subsequently be held

And will:

- Advise those who express a wish to do so that they may attend an inquest as an observer
- Explain to those called as a witness or juror how to claim for travel and subsistence expenses and for financial loss allowances within the permitted limits
- 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

16 The Coroner will endeavour to hold inquests at the earliest possible date. Most inquests in Hertfordshire take place within four 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.hertsdirect.org/coronersinquests.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

17 The Coroner will, on written request and at his/her discretion, provide to interested persons not less than ten working days in advance of the inquest copies of the post mortem.

JURORS

18 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

- 19** On the conclusion of the inquest, the next of kin will be provided with an explanation about how, where and when a 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/she will do so within ten working days of the inquest outcome. Copies of the letter will be sent to all the properly interested persons. They will also be sent a copy of any subsequent reply within five working days of its receipt.
- 21** The Coroner may supply to a properly interested person, on written application, any of the documents produced in evidence, within five working days of receipt of the statutory fee. This will vary according to the number and size of the documents to be copied. An estimate will be provided in advance if requested.
- 22** In most cases 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.
- 23** Payments can be made by credit or debit card by telephoning the Coroner Service administrators.
- 24** The Coroner/Hertfordshire County Council will process witness and juror expenses claims promptly and within ten working days of receipt of properly completed applications.

MEDIA

- 25** The Coroner Service has a Press Officer who provides professional support to the bereaved when making statements to the press. This can be arranged through the Coroner's Officer.

APPLICATIONS FOR PERMISSION TO REMOVE A BODY OUT OF ENGLAND

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

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

- 27** 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

- 28** Coroners have responsibility for enquiries into treasure finds. All enquires into treasure are to be directed to the coroner service administrators.

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 welcomed. Please contact the Coroner's Office at the address given on page 12 or email us at coroner.service@hertfordshire.gov.uk. 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.

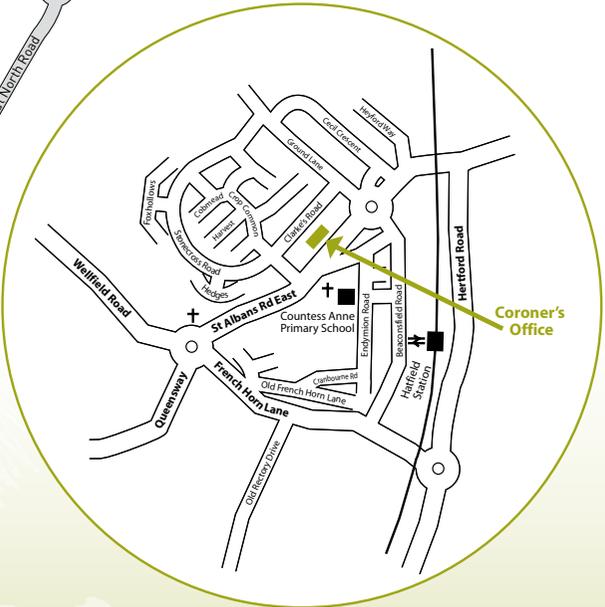
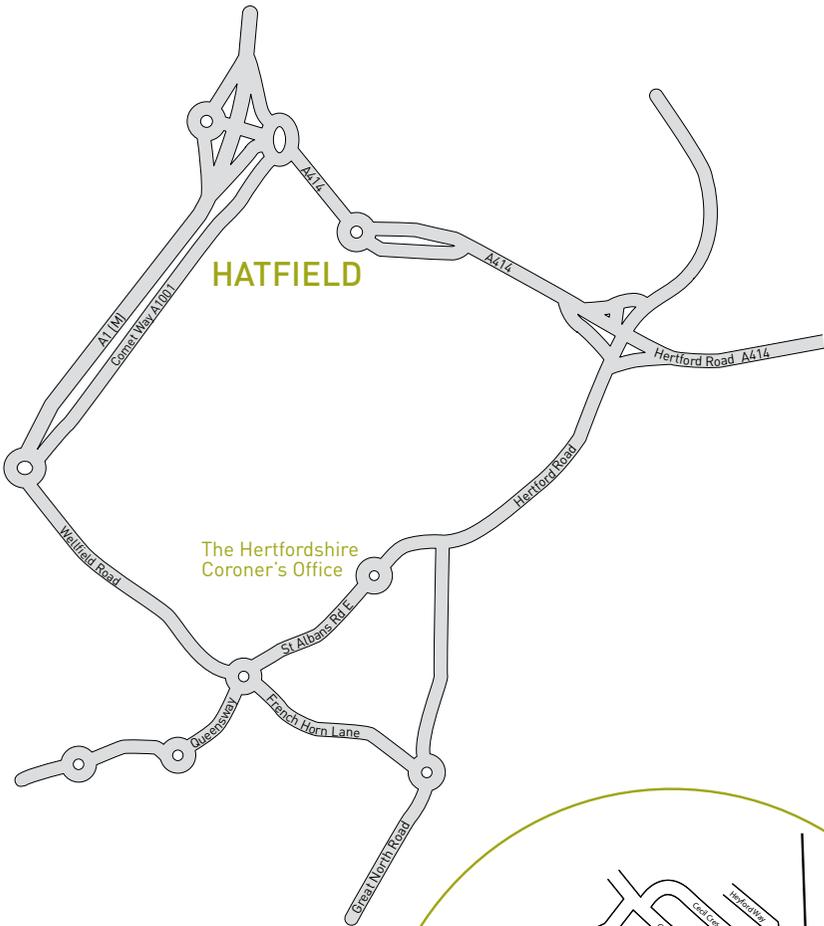
All complaints about the administration of the Hertfordshire Coroner Service or the conduct of Coroner's Officers should be raised in the first instance with the Head of Coroner Service by writing to The Coroner Service, The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield AL10 0ES. A reply will be sent within five 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

- 29 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 The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield AL10 0ES.
- 32 This charter was first issued on 1st October 2001 and last updated March 2015.

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



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.hertsdirect.org

www.twitter.com/hertsc

www.facebook.com/hertsdirect

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

March 2015

coronerservice@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Hertfordshire County Council - Coroner Service
The Old Courthouse, St Albans Road East, Hatfield AL10 0ES



Certificate Number 5230
ISO 9001