



To those who work within or who have a strong interest
in the Coroner System

3 December 2008

Coroners and Justice Bill

You might have heard that today's Queen's Speech sets out plans for a "Coroners and Justice Bill".

We should like to thank you for your interest, support and constructive feedback as plans for reform of the coroner system have evolved over the last two to three years. This note sets out some of the Bill's main measures on coroners, but we will write to you again with further details about the contents when the Bill is formally introduced in Parliament, which we anticipate will be early in 2009.

What are the aims of the coroners' legislation?

The aims are to:

- Introduce a national coroner service for England and Wales, headed by a new Chief Coroner;
- Improve the experience of those bereaved people coming into contact with the coroner system, giving them rights of appeal against coroners' decisions and setting out the general standards of service they can expect to receive;
- Reduce delays and improve the quality and outcomes of investigations and inquests through improved powers and guidance for coroners, and the publication of statistics and reports to prevent deaths; and
- Introduce a system - for deaths not investigated by the coroner - that enables independent scrutiny and confirmation of the medical cause of death in a way that is proportionate, consistent and transparent.

Why is it a Coroners and Justice Bill?

The Coroners and Death Certification Bill and the Law Reform, Victims and Witnesses Bill announced in the draft legislative programme on May 2008 have been combined, largely because they share the same overriding aim – to provide a better service for members of the public when they come into contact with the coroner, death certification or justice systems in this country. It therefore makes sense to address the reforms to these public services in the one Bill.

What are the non-coroner provisions in the Bill?

In addition to provisions to reform the coroner system the Bill will also contain a number of measures to deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive justice service for victims and witnesses. Further details are available on Bill page on the Ministry of Justice website.

When will the Bill be introduced?

We anticipate that the Bill will be introduced early in 2009.

What will the Coroners part of the Bill contain?

The key provisions will be:

- Introduction of a Chief Coroner
- Introduction of a new death certification system
- Relaxation of rigid boundary restrictions (but services remain based within local authorities)
- Appeals system
- Independent inspection
- New coroner areas
- New appointment system for coroners
- Powers to secure information and evidence
- Inquests, few and far between, to be held in private if non-publicly disclosable material is relevant to proceedings
- Charter for Bereaved Families

How has policy changed from the 2006 draft Bill and from the updates which have already been published?

The policy remains broadly the same as set out in the draft Bill and in the subsequent policy document published in March 2008, although the lay out is different from the draft Bill. We intend to issue a fuller note on the contents of the Bill shortly after it is introduced.

When will we see a revised draft of the Charter for the Bereaved?

We plan to publish a revised draft of the Charter when the Bill is introduced. This new version will highlight changes we have made as a result of the consultation which took place in 2008.

Coroner Reform Policy and Bill Team

This note is being sent to:

Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA)	Independent Police Complaints Commission	Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide
Association of Chief Police Officers	Elaine Isaacs	The Compassionate Friends
Association of Personal Injury Lawyers	Yvonne & Tony Brown	Trades Union Congress
British Medical Association	INQUEST	Victim Support
British Lung Foundation	JUSTICE	Victims Voice
British Museum	Justice for Victims	War Widows Association
Bromley Bereavement Centre	LACORS	Welsh Assembly Government
Cardiac Risk in the Young	Lady Justice Smith	Welsh Local Government Association
Centre for Corporate Accountability	Local Government Association	
Child Bereavement Trust	Liberty	
Coroners' Society	Tom Luce	
Coroners' Officers Association	Marchioness Action Group	
Coroners Administrative Staff representative	Metropolitan Police	
Coroners Court Support Services	MIND	
Cruse Bereavement Care	Ministry of Defence	
Death after Medical Negligence	Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire	
Department for Communities and Local Government	National Association of Funeral Directors	
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	National Bereavement Partnership	
Department for Transport	Northern Ireland Court Service	
Department of Health	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	
Disaster Action	Press Complaints Commission	
Epilepsy Bereaved	Prison & Probation Ombudsman	
Families Against Corporate Killing	Road Peace	
Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody	Royal British Legion	
Foundation for the Study of Infant Death	Royal College of General Practitioners	
General Register Office	Royal College of Pathologists	
General Medical Council	SAFE Justice Foundation	
Hertfordshire County Council	Samaritans	
Home Office	Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM)	
Health and Safety Executive	SAMM Abroad	
	Sudden Adult Death Trust (Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome)	