

Report to the Employment Committee
Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 14 January 2025

Report of the Director of Law and Governance

Review of Coroner Salaries and Fees 2024/25

Part I	Corporate Priorities: N/A
Electoral Division(s): (All Divisions);	
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Summary

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from the Committee to implement a pay award of 4.75% across the Senior and Area Coroner salaries and a 2.5% pay award to the daily rates paid to Assistant Coroners.

Recommendation

The Employment Committee is asked to agree that:

- (i) The salaries and fees paid to the Senior and Area Coroners are to be increased by 4.75% with effect from April 2024.
- (ii) The daily rate paid to Assistant Coroners is increased by 2.5% with effect from April 2024.

Background

1. Coroners are independent judicial office holders under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and the Chief Coroner. The county council has a duty to provide all reasonable resources to support the Coroner Service and is responsible for the remuneration of all coroners within their administrative area.
2. Coroners are not employees of the local authority but are appointed by them. The Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner Area covers Lancaster, Wyre, Preston, South Ribble, West Lancashire, Chorley, Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley (the whole of Lancashire excluding Blackpool and Fylde) serving a population of 1.4 million. Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner Area has one full time Senior Coroner and two full time Area Coroners.



3. This jurisdiction is considered highly complex as it is home to four prisons, two large teaching hospitals, three large district general hospitals with maternity units, has significant road and rail networks, and is in the top four jurisdictions by size in England and Wales. Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen is held as a national benchmark for innovation amongst Coroner Areas, due to the implementation of CT scanning, operating an entirely paperless system from a police officer stood over the body to the final referral to the Registrars, a leading lifesaving approach to organ donation, resolving the problem of extended times to a public funerals and implementing the introduction of the Medical Examiners Service.
4. The TV documentary "Cause of Death" has also given Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner's Service a high profile nationally.
5. Coroners' pay is set by agreement between the local authorities responsible for the coronial area (Lancashire County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council) with regard to the recommended national pay scales negotiated between the Coroner's Society for England and Wales (CSEW) and the Local Government Association (LGA). The Coroner's Society for England and Wales initially proposed a 10% award, whilst the Local Government Association proposed 2%. National discussions were protracted.
6. In 2023/24 Coroners were awarded 3.5% in line with the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Coroner Circular 68 in relation to the Coroners' pay agreement for 2023/24. This was less than the 3.88% agreed by the National Joint Council for green book employees above spinal column point 44.
7. Under the assessment undertaken by the Coroner's Society for England and Wales, the role of a Senior Coroner is closely reflected in the role of a Circuit Judge, whilst the role of an Area Coroner is reflected in the role of a district judge. The Senior Coroner is retiring in early summer 2025 and, as one of the Area Coroners will be appointed as the new Senior Coroner, the local authority is recruiting an Area Coroner from the same pool of candidates who could also enter the judiciary at District Judge level.
8. As such, it is relevant to consider the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body for those judges. It has recommended a pay award of 6% for judges for 24/25. The 23/24 pay award (3.5%) was half of the 7% recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) for the judges.

Current salaries

9. Coroners' salaries do not have a pay range. They are paid a spot rate subject to annual pay award. Other than this, there is no pay progression.

Post	Salary	Comments
Senior Coroner	187,788.58	Includes out of hours and court suit allowances
Area Coroner	125,583.00	Includes out of hours and court suit allowances



Assistant Coroners

10. Assistant Coroners are paid a day rate, and often have other judicial posts alongside their coronial role. The current rates are:

Fee per day for standard inquests	Fee per day for complex inquests
£444	£503

Options

11. As the national negotiations were protracted the following options were considered locally for the Senior and Area Coroners:

- a. Option 1 – 4.75%
- b. Option 2 – 6%

12. Option 1 (4.75%) has been indicated to be acceptable by the existing Senior and Area Coroners as reasonable following local negotiations. Whilst lower than the 6% recommendation of the Senior Salaries Review Board, it is above the 2.5% award for local government staff above Spinal Column Point 44. It represents a reasonable compromise which recognises the complexity of the role regionally and the need to recruit and retain high quality Coroners in our complex jurisdiction. This proposal is recommended.

13. Option 2 (6%) would match the level recommended for equivalent judicial roles. However, it would be a significant increase. Whilst recruitment and retention are recognised as significant risks, this proposal is not recommended.

14. Option 1 would result in the following Senior and Area Coroner Salaries (With effect from 1 April 2024):

Post	Salary	Comments
Senior Coroner	£196,708.54	Includes out of hours and court suit allowances
Area Coroner	£131,548.19	Includes out of hours and court suit allowances

15. For Assistant Coroners, an increase in daily rates of 2.5% from 1 April 2024 is proposed. The local experience is that there is no shortage of high-quality applicants for these positions. This proposed increase would result in the following pay rates:

Fee per day for standard inquests	Fee per day for complex inquests
£455	£516

16. Following local negotiations on the 19 December national negotiations were concluded and the Joint Negotiating Committee (LGA and Coroner Society for England and Wales) recommend a 2.5% rise (Appendix 'A' JNC Coroners' Circular no 69). The recommendations in this report align with this recommendation for Assistant Coroners but due to the complexities of the local



jurisdiction, recruitment and retention risks and significant out of hours requirements it is recommended that 4.75% is awarded for Senior and Area Coroners which is a middle ground between the circular position and the judicial award. This reflects not just the complexity of the jurisdiction but the efficiency with which the local service is run.

Consultations

17. Blackburn with Darwen Council have been consulted on these proposals and confirmation is awaited. Negotiations have also taken place with the Senior and Area Coroners.

Context and Implications

Legal (including Human Rights)

All Coroners can refer their proposed salary to the Lord Chancellor who would make a final judgement. Whilst it is not known how long this would take and we cannot prejudge the Lord Chancellor's decision, it is anticipated that the Lord Chancellor would be likely to aim to align Coroners awards with those of other judicial roles.

Financial

18. Efficiency savings within the service will allow for the budget to meet the additional costs of the pay award.

19. Subject to confirmation from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, 23% of the salary costs of the Senior Coroner and one Area Coroner will be met by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council under the terms of a Governance Agreement between the county council and Blackburn with Darwen Council. The figure of 23% is based on the population of the former jurisdiction as a percentage of the overall population of the new larger jurisdiction.

20. The increased costs for the Senior and Area Coroner salaries, including oncosts are:

	No. of posts	Current total cost	Proposed total cost (6%)	Total Increase	Increase to Lancashire County Council	Increase to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Senior Coroner	1	£243,058	£254,325	£11,267	£8,676	£2,591
Area Coroners	2	£324,258	£339,328	£15,070	£13,337	£1,733
Total	-	£567,316	£593,653	£26,337	£22,013	£4,324



	No. of posts	Current total cost	Proposed total cost (4.75 %)	Total Increase	Increase to Lancashire County Council	Increase to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Senior Coroner	1	£243,058	£251,978	£8,919	£6,868	£2,051
Area Coroners	2	£324,258	£336,188	£11,930	£10,558	£1,372
Total	-	£567,316	£588,166	£20,849	£17,426	£3,423

Equality and Diversity

21.No disproportionate impact on protected characteristics groups identified. The renumeration of the coroners does reflect the needs of religion or belief groups within the community due to the provision of an out of hours service.

Risk Management

22.The recruitment and retention of coroners is a long-standing issue nationally. Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen Coroner's Service is a complex coroner area which demands the outstanding leadership and exceptional legal skills. The risk of not implementing the pay award includes not attracting the highest quality candidates and not retaining the coroners already appointed to lead this innovative and efficient service.

Appendices

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	JNC Coroners' Circular no 69

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		

Part II Reason

N/A

