
Social Care Inquests – annual update

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| Committee considering report: | Health Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of Committee: | 12 March 2024 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Alan Macro |
| Date Head of Service agreed report: | 14 February 2024 |
| Date Portfolio Member agreed report: | 15 February 2024 |
| Report Author: | Jo England |
| Forward Plan Ref: | N/A |

1 Purpose of the Report

To advise Health Scrutiny Committee on the current position regarding Social Care Inquests.

2 Recommendation

None. For information only.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|------------------------|---|
| Financial: | There are potential financial implications; the Council has insurance in place for any civil claims but other ancillary payments, such as waiving care costs, are not. Each matter is considered on a case by case basis. |
| Human Resource: | Inquests place a burden on staff in both Social Care and Legal Services, due to the amount of information that needs to be gathered and submitted to the Coroner in a short period of time. |
| Legal: | Work undertaken will seek to ensure that the Council is meeting its legal obligations. |

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|--|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Risk Management: | There is a risk that the Coroner may issue a Prevention of Future Deaths report following an Inquest. Work undertaken seeks to mitigate wider associated risks (see above). | | | |
| Property: | N/A | | | |
| Policy: | N/A | | | |
| | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Commentary |
| Equalities Impact: | | | | |
| A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality? | | X | | |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | X | | |
| Environmental Impact: | | X | | |
| Health Impact: | | X | | |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | |

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|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | X | | |
| Core Business: | | X | | |
| Data Impact: | | X | | |
| Consultation and Engagement: | | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 As a result of an increased number of cases in which West Berkshire Council was being approached by the Berkshire Coroners' Office for information and/or identified by the investigating Coroner as an Interested Person in Inquests, work was undertaken to strengthen internal processes relating to these matters and this report is an annual update.
- 4.2 A summary of recent/current Inquest activity is provided below.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Following concern regarding a growing volume of Inquest activity within West Berkshire, a meeting was chaired by Nigel Lynn on 25 May 2022 to identify required actions, if any, to manage these. All actions identified at that time have been completed.
- 5.2 One of the relevant actions was the establishment of an Inquest Review Panel. This Panel meets on a regular basis and includes representatives from ASC, Legal, H&S and Insurance as a minimum. These Panel meetings provide corporate oversight of cases where the Coroner has asked for information and/or those which are more complex and to consider if a Lessons Learned piece should follow/how learning from the Inquest process can be disseminated. The Panel also provides a useful method of monitoring cases which have identified areas of development, particularly with partner agencies such as Health.
- 5.3 Other actions which were identified to strengthen internal processes in relation to deaths in West Berkshire's area include: reviewing the reporting function in CREST to consider if it can be made easier for staff and ensure issues are identified at an early stage corporately, review the Inquest Protocol internal guidance document and arrange training regarding Inquests for Officers.

- 5.4 Since the last report in March 2023, West Berkshire Council has received 2 requests for information involving a Coroner's investigation (prior to this, the number of requests from May 2020 to March 2023 was 13 requests).
- 5.5 None of these have required the Council to be an Interested Person (providing evidence, receiving disclosure and attendance at the Inquest). In all cases there was some level of Health involvement which is unsurprising given the circumstances surrounding each one. Both individuals were receiving a domiciliary package of care.
- 5.6 No requests were made in relation to safeguarding processes.

6 Conclusion

There has been a significant reduction in requests for information from the Coroner and/or Inquests where WBC is an Interested Person, this would suggest that the range of actions have been completed in relation to Coroner investigations within West Berkshire have been effective. This has included a review of internal guidance, procedures, delivery of training and the development of an Inquest Review Panel.

7 Appendices

None.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All Wards affected.

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