

Candidate Information Pack

ASSISTANT CORONER

For North and South Northumberland, The City of
Newcastle and North Tyneside

Relevant Authority:

Northumberland County Council

Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council

4 posts

20 May 2021

1. Advert	page 3
2. Coroner Service Information	page 4
3. Job Summary	page 6
4. Summary of Terms and Conditions	page 8
5. Recruitment and Selection Process	page 10
6. Recruitment Timetable	page 11

This recruitment pack has been drafted in accordance with the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

1. ADVERT

Assistant Coroner for North and South Northumberland

Salary – fee paid, £459.00 per day. [in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]

Closing date: 14 June 2021

Assistant Coroner for the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside

Salary – fee paid, £472.00 per day. [in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]

Closing date: 14 June 2021

This is a joint recruitment between Northumberland County Council, Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council who are seeking to appoint four new Assistant Coroners to support the Senior Coroner in North and South Northumberland and the Senior Coroner in the City of Newcastle and North Tyneside across the full range of coroner duties in order to deliver a high-quality coroner service to the people of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside.

This will be a cross jurisdictional appointment.

About the post:

Northumberland County Council, Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council are looking for exceptional candidates with excellent proven organisational, management and efficiency skills, as well as experience of exercising sound judgement and communicating effectively. You will work closely with the Senior Coroner for Northumberland County Council and the Senior Coroner for Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council to ensure value for money, performance and financial efficiencies.

You will be required to demonstrate knowledge and experience of Coronial law and of basic medicine, have proven skills in conducting investigations and an understanding of court procedure. You will also need to demonstrate the excellent communication and interpersonal skills necessary to deal with sensitive situations.

The successful candidates will be required to carry out the duties and responsibilities of a coroner as defined in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and associated rules and regulations and as further described in various guidance issued by the Chief Coroner.

These are fee paid positions although they are likely to involve a regular commitment, which is to be agreed between the Assistant Coroner, Senior Coroner and the Local Authority. You will be expected on occasion to be available to assist on an out of hours rota system [or as applicable].

It is a Coroner's personal responsibility (and not that of his/her clerk/secretary) to ensure that they sit when possible. The Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor would expect an Assistant Coroner to offer a minimum of 20 sitting days each financial year (in line with the Chief Coroner's Model Coroner Area 2nd Edition July 2020. However, it is recognised that there is a variance of workload in each area.

Who can apply:

The successful candidate will be a barrister or a solicitor or Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives and satisfy the judicial-appointment eligibility condition which means they will have 5 years of experience *whilst* holding that qualification. They will be under the age of 70 and be subject to the appointment and eligibility conditions within the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (s.23 and Schedule 3).

Statutory terms of the appointment:

Once a Coroner is appointed they are then a Judicial Office holder until they reach the age of 70 years (compulsory retirement age) unless they choose to resign or are removed by the Lord Chief Justice or Lord Chancellor prior to their 70th birthday.

How to apply:

If you wish to have an informal discussion or arrange a visit, for Northumberland please contact Senior Coroner's Officer Linda Dean on 01670 623 135. For the City of Newcastle and North Tyneside please contact Lorraine Stark on 0191 211 2631.

Suitably qualified applicants are requested to email their CV, supporting statement and declaration form to: Jane Tait, Personal Assistant to Andrew Hetherington HM Senior Coroner for North Northumberland and Acting Senior Coroner for South Northumberland who will act as single point of contact for Newcastle and North Tyneside and Northumberland on the following email address:

Jane.Tait@northumberland.gov.uk

Notification

The vacancy for this post has been notified to the Chief Coroner and Lord Chancellor (as required by statute).

2. CORONER SERVICE INFORMATION

Northumberland (North and South) Area information

The Northumberland coroner area includes an area of 1,940 square miles with a current population of around 319,000. Bordering counties include: North Tyneside, Newcastle, Gateshead, County Durham, Eden, Cumbria and Scottish Borders.

The number of deaths registered annually in Northumberland averages 3500 with approximately 1700 cases (48.5%) referred to the Senior Coroner. Post mortem examinations are conducted by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust by hospital pathologists. Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust also has a Medical Examiner service in operation. In 2019, 55 inquests were held and 154 post mortem examinations were carried out in North Northumberland, and 165 inquests were held and 376 post mortem examinations carried out in South Northumberland.

The coroner area contains a section of the A1 motorway as well as several major A-roads, the east coast main rail line to/from London as well as the east/west rail link to/from Newcastle to Carlisle. The county has one prison for adult males, HMP Northumberland which has a capacity of 1354 inmates. There is also a secure mental health hospital at St George's Park Hospital.

The primary hospital within the county is the Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital (NSECH) at Cramlington. In addition, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust also has Alnwick Infirmary, Berwick Infirmary, Blyth Community Hospital, Haltwhistle War Memorial Hospital, Hexham General Hospital, Morpeth NHS Centre, Rothbury Community Hospital and Wansbeck General Hospital located within the county.

Daily Operations and accommodation

In Northumberland, the Coroner service is located in dedicated modern and purposely designed accommodation, including offices and a coroner court in County Hall, Morpeth. The service is co-located with the Council's Registration Service. The coroner's court, which is next to the coroner service offices, is available Monday to Friday allowing inquests to be opened quickly with dates set for inquest hearings, usually within the required six months. The average time from opening to hearing is currently 23 weeks for North Northumberland and 13 weeks for South Northumberland, based on 2019 figures.

3.6 FTE Coroner's Officers are employed by the Northumbria police authority. The Senior Coroner, the Assistant Coroners and Coroner's Officers are supported by two administrative staff employed by Northumberland County Council. All staff are co-located with the Senior Coroner and based within the dedicated new Coronial Service premises at County Hall in Morpeth.

Accommodation, contracts, tendering, finance and support staff are managed by the coroner service manager, who is employed by the Council in the Cultural Services Department. The coroner service manager works closely with the Senior Coroner and Northumbria Police who are responsible for the Coroner's Officers, on the delivery of the service to ensure those impacted by the work of the Senior Coroner receive a high quality service.

The administrative support staff are responsible for answering incoming calls from the public and other stakeholders on weekdays 8am to 5pm.

The Senior Coroner is the head of the local coroner service and leads the team of coroners. This team includes three fee paid Assistant Coroners. Cover is provided by the Assistant Coroners when the Senior Coroner is unavailable due to leave, sickness, training etc., and they are used as additional support (by agreement with the Local Authority) in office and case work.

City of Newcastle and North Tyneside Area information

Newcastle is a major city with a current population of 814,000. North Tyneside includes an area of 82.39 square kilometres with a current population of 207,913. Bordering counties include Northumberland, Gateshead and South Tyneside.

The number of deaths registered annually for Newcastle is 2906 and in North Tyneside 2412 of which 2000 are referred to Coroner in Newcastle (68.8%) and 1000 in North Tyneside (41.5%).

Post Mortems are conducted by Newcastle NHS Foundation Health Trust Pathologists which includes some Post Mortem CT Scanning. Post Mortem examinations as % of deaths referred were:

Newcastle – 40.4%

North Tyneside – 37.75%

Newcastle Pathology Service include Forensic, Paediatric, Neuro and Cardio.

In 2019 400 inquests were heard in Newcastle and 75 in North Tyneside.

Newcastle and North Tyneside Coroner area contains Newcastle Airport, A1 and A19 Motorways as well as several major A roads, the East Coast main rail line to/from London and Metro. There is a secure mental health hospital at St Nicholas' Hospital.

There are 2 major teaching hospitals in Newcastle; Royal Victoria Infirmary and Freeman Hospitals include Regional Major Trauma and Transplant centres. In North Tyneside – North Tyneside General Hospital includes Palliative Care and rehabilitation services for the Northumbria Trust area.

Medical Examiners Services are available in Newcastle and North Tyneside hospitals.

Daily Operations and accommodation

The Newcastle and North Tyneside Coroners Service are located in a dedicated accommodation (close to Family and Civil Courts) in the Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne and include offices and a Coroner's Court.

8 Coroner's Officers and 1 Administrative Officer are employed by Northumbria Police and 2 Business Support Officers by Newcastle City Council. All staff are co-located with the Coroner at Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Accommodation, contracts, tendering, finance and support staff are managed by Coroner's Service Manager who is employed by Newcastle City Council and who works closely with the Coroner on the delivery of the service to ensure that a high quality service is provided.

Telephone calls from the public and other stakeholders are managed by Police and Local Authority staff on weekdays 8am to 4pm.

The Senior Coroner is the head of the local Coroner Service and leads the team of Coroners which includes 6 Assistant Coroners who provide cover when Senior Coroner is unavailable due to leave, sickness, training etc and additional support where required.

3. JOB SUMMARY

The role of the Coroner:

- Coroners are independent Judicial Office holders. When made aware that a body or bodies of deceased persons lie within the coroner area, the coroner is responsible for conducting investigations and holding inquests when required (with or without a jury) into deaths to determine **who** the deceased was, **when** and **where** the deceased came by his or her death and **how** that death occurred. A referral is made to the Coroner when there is reason to suspect that:
 - i. The deceased died a violent or unnatural death;
 - ii. The cause of death is unknown; or
 - iii. The deceased died while in custody or otherwise in state detention.
- Conducting investigations of this kind will include where appropriate directing pathologists and others to determine these answers. Coroners also have a duty to produce Prevention of Future Death reports should an investigation give rise to concerns about future deaths occurring from the circumstances that caused the death. Coroners also deal with claims for treasure when required in accordance with statutory regulations and guidance.

The overview of the role of an Assistant Coroner:

- To support the Senior Coroner [and Area Coroner] in providing a high quality coroner service that puts the bereaved at the heart of the process. This includes preparing for any significant emergencies which may occur and [where appropriate] to be available to assist with 24 hour availability on a rota basis.

Assistant Coroner role responsibilities and assessment criteria

Assimilating and clarifying information

As an Assistant Coroner you will be expected to be able to quickly assimilate information to identify essential issues, seeking clarification where necessary so a clear understanding of this information is gained. This will include possessing the ability to explain legal and medical terms to people from non-legal or non-medical backgrounds.

Assessment criteria

1. **Excellent analytical skills and a consistency of decision-making and administrative direction.**
2. **Experience of legal work in the coroner jurisdiction (e.g. representing clients at inquest).**
3. **The ability to explain complex terms to those from non-legal or non-medical backgrounds.**

Managing work effectively

A large amount of coronial work takes place outside of the court setting and therefore Assistant Coroners are expected to work effectively both in the office and whilst conducting court hearings. They are required to run hearings efficiently to facilitate a fair conclusion, minimise delays and effectively deal with case management. Assistant Coroners must respond calmly and flexibly to changing circumstances and prioritise work effectively to make the most of available resources whilst taking in to account any budgetary considerations as appropriate. Assistant Coroners are committed to ensuring that any expenditure is reasonable and controlled and works to monitor this regularly with the Senior Coroner.

Assessment criteria:

- 4. An ability to prioritise work effectively to minimise delays.**
- 5. Able to work at speed and under pressure.**
- 6. Demonstrates resilience responding calmly and flexibly to changing circumstances.**

Working with others

An ability to work constructively with others whilst demonstrating an awareness of diversity and showing empathy and sensitivity in building relationships is required in this post. Assistant Coroners must work constructively with members of the coronial team and interact well with bereaved families and external stakeholders (e.g. relatives, police officers, medical personnel, mortuary staff, Registrars, witnesses and the media). Where necessary they assist the Senior Coroner to engage with the local community, for example giving talks and seeking feedback and views.

Assessment criteria:

- 7. Must have knowledge of the extent to which cultural and religious requirements can be met within the constraints of coroner law and practice.**
- 8. An ability to drive the service and be receptive to new ideas, reforms and diverse needs.**
- 9. Treats people with respect, sensitivity and in a fair manner without discrimination; ensuring the requirements of those with differing needs are properly met.**

Communicating effectively

Assistant Coroners must be excellent communicators. They must be sensitive and, as far as possible, responsive to the needs and requirements of those who engage with the coroner service and also possess the awareness to manage their expectations of the process. Assistant Coroners must be IT literate and provide clear directions to staff on coroner investigations whilst creating a safe, harmonious and effective working environment through co-operative working.

Assessment Criteria:

- 10. Excellent verbal and written communication skills.**
- 11. Establishes authority and inspires respect and confidence.**
- 12. Remains calm and authoritative even when challenged.**

Exercising judgement

Assistant Coroners must demonstrate integrity and apply independence of mind to make incisive, fair and legally sound decisions.

Assessment criteria

- 13. Able to deal with emotionally charged situations that require sensitive handling and confident/positive judgement.**
- 14. Experience of conducting investigative enquiries including demonstrating clarity of thought in identifying issues relevant to the investigation.**
- 15. Reaches clear, reasoned decisions objectively, based on relevant law and findings of fact.**

Possessing and building knowledge

It is the responsibility of the Assistant Coroner to keep an up-to-date working knowledge of coroner law, practice and guidance. Coroners must also undertake compulsory Judicial College and Chief Coroner training as appropriate. Assistant Coroners should take part in any local training as appropriate. Assistant Coroners are expected to take part in the on-going yearly Assistant Coroner appraisal scheme to build upon their knowledge and skills.

Assessment criteria:

- 16. All applicants must be a barrister or solicitor or Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives and satisfy the judicial-appointment eligibility condition which includes a requirement for the candidate to hold a relevant qualification, to have also gained experience in the law for a total period of at least 5 years *whilst holding that qualification* and be under the age of 70: paragraph 3 of Schedule 3.**
- 17. Thorough, up to date knowledge of legislation, case law and guidance relating to coroner's duties.**
- 18. Knowledge of structures and procedures of the police, in particular those relating to the investigation of sudden or suspicious deaths.**
- 19. Knowledge of the organisational structures of local government including an understanding of the challenges facing local government, both at present and in the future.**

Desirable criteria:

- 20. Full current driving licence (unless disability precludes this) and use of a vehicle for work purposes.**

Previous coroner experience:

If you have worked or currently work as a coroner it is important that you detail your coroner experience. Please can you confirm in your application the following:

- (a) how many days worked as coroner;
- (b) the nature of the work;
- (c) the division of time between office and court;
- (d) the extent of experience in completing Forms 100A and 100B;
- (e) the number and type of inquests conducted;
- (f) the number of long inquests and their subject matter; and
- (g) the number of Jury inquests conducted.
- (h) experience of digital case management system.

4. SUMMARY OF TERMS & CONDITIONS

The conditions of service applicable to the post are those set out in Schedule 3, Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The Assistant Coroner holds office on whatever terms are *from time to time agreed between the coroner and the relevant local authority*.

Fee

In North and South Northumberland the post is fee paid and the current fee is £459.00 per day. **[in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]**

In the City of Newcastle and North Tyneside the post is fee paid and the current fee is £474.00 per day. **[in line with the JNC Coroners Circular 63]**

Pension Scheme

An Assistant Coroner may join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LPGS).

Hours of work

As these are fee paid positions the Assistant Coroner will work on days and times as agreed with the Senior Coroner.

You may be asked to participate in an out of hour's service, by agreement with the senior coroner. Assistant coroners should live within a reasonable commuting distance from the court or office they will be expected to attend. *(Would you like to restrict this to say 1 hour or 2 hours or not at all?)*

Holiday entitlement

None (fee paid appointment).

Payment of expenses

Expenses will be paid in line with the Council's expenses policy. Reasonable expenses for attendance at Judicial Training (including travel expenses, accommodation where necessary and a normal sitting fee payable for each day of training) will be paid by the relevant Local Authority.

Indemnity

The Local Authority will indemnify the Assistant Coroner for costs or damages in relation to legal proceedings in accordance with Regulation 17 of The Coroners Allowances, Fees and Expenses Regulations 2013.

Notice period

The Assistant Coroner may resign from office by giving notice in writing to the relevant Local Authority, however the resignation does not take effect unless and until it is accepted by the Local Authority.

Politically restricted post

This post is politically restricted under the terms of Schedule 3, paragraph 4 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

The Guide to Judicial Conduct

The Assistant Coroner will comply with the standards as set out in the Guide to Judicial Conduct and other associated guidance.

5. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

Applications

To apply for this position, you are required to submit a CV, and a full supporting statement of up to two sides of A4 (no smaller than font 11). It is important that your supporting statement fully addresses the assessment criteria detailed in **bold** in the job summary section above.

In particular please demonstrate how you meet the following criteria:

- 1. Assimilating and clarifying information**
- 2. Managing work efficiently**
- 3. Working with others**
- 4. Communicating effectively**
- 5. Exercising judgement**
- 6. Possessing and building knowledge**

If you do not complete a full supporting statement, your application will be rejected. Please ensure you include your work, home and mobile contact numbers, home address and e-mail addresses where applicable. Please note that correspondence will be via e-mail unless otherwise stated. All correspondence and details provided will remain confidential.

Employment references

Please include the name, address and contact details for two references. Candidates should also state their relationship to the referee and at least one should be your current/most recent employer/head of chambers/relevant authority. References will be taken up for short-listed candidates.

Evidence of qualifications

Candidates will be required to bring evidence of their qualifications to the interview.

Employment check

The successful candidate will be required to undergo the Council's pre-appointment medical screening.

Eligibility to work in the UK

Candidates must be eligible to work in the UK. The successful candidate will be required to provide original evidence of their eligibility to work in the UK.

Disciplinary proceedings and criminal convictions check

Due to the nature of the post, it is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and therefore any conviction, whether spent or unspent, must be declared. All applicants will be required to complete a declaration form when they attend for interview.

The successful candidate will be required to undergo a DBS check.

Applicants must specify in their application if they are the subject of any complaint or disciplinary proceedings by any professional body to which they belong (including personal conduct referred to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office), and clearly state the salary or fee payable. Applicants will also be asked in interview to declare anything about themselves including in their past that

might be an embarrassment to the Local Authority, the Chief Coroner or the Lord Chancellor particularly bearing in mind the basic set of guiding principles in the Guide to Judicial Conduct:

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/guide-to-judicial-conduct/>

Interview

You will be required to undertake a short presentation as part of the interview process.

Chief Coroner's role in the process

All appointments are subject to the consent of the Chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor.

Once appointed a Coroner becomes and remains an Independent Judicial Office holder.

6. RECRUITMENT TIMETABLE

Suitably qualified applicants are requested to email their CV, supporting statement and declaration form to: Jane Tait, Personal Assistant to Andrew Hetherington HM Senior Coroner for North Northumberland and Acting Senior Coroner for South Northumberland who will act as single point of contact for Newcastle and North Tyneside and Northumberland on the following email address:

Jane.Tait@northumberland.gov.uk

Closing date: Monday 14 June 2021

Interview invitations will be sent out: w/c Monday 5 July 2021

Interview date: Monday 19 July and Wednesday 21 July 2021

If you do not hear by 9 July 2021, please assume you have not been shortlisted.

The interview panel will be:

- HM Senior Coroner Karen Dilks, Senior Coroner for the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside
- HM Senior Coroner Andrew Hetherington, Senior Coroner for North and South Northumberland
- Karen Lounton, Service Manager Registration, Coroner and Archives – Northumberland County Council
- A representative from the Human Resources Department