

**ALTERATION OF CORONER AREAS UNDER SCHEDULE 2 OF THE CORONERS AND
JUSTICE ACT 2009¹
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE BUSINESS CASE TEMPLATE FOR MERGERS**

NAMES OF CORONER AREAS THAT ARE PROPOSING TO MERGE

- Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire
- South Staffordshire

PROPOSED NAME OF NEW AREA

- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Coroner Area

INFORMATION ON AREAS THAT PROPOSE TO MERGE

- Please provide key details in the table as follows:

Coroner area	Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Coroner Area
Geographical area covered	Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Coroners Service
Local authority/ authorities that fund(s) coroner area and %	Stoke-on-Trent City Council 51% Staffordshire County Council 49%	Staffordshire County Council 100%	64 % as now. Total budget agreed max. spend will not exceed existing budget for either authority
Relevant authority (formerly lead authority)	Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Staffordshire County Council	Stoke on Trent City council will be the responsible authority operating under an agreed Joint committee
Police Force(s)	Staffordshire Police	Staffordshire Police	Staffordshire Police
Transport links	West Coast Rail Line M6	M6 motorway, M6 Toll Road, M54 as well as several major A-roads, main west coast rail line to/from London and the North West.	West Coast Rail Line M6 M6 motorway, M6 Toll Road, M54 as well as several major A-roads, main west coast rail line to/from London and the North West.

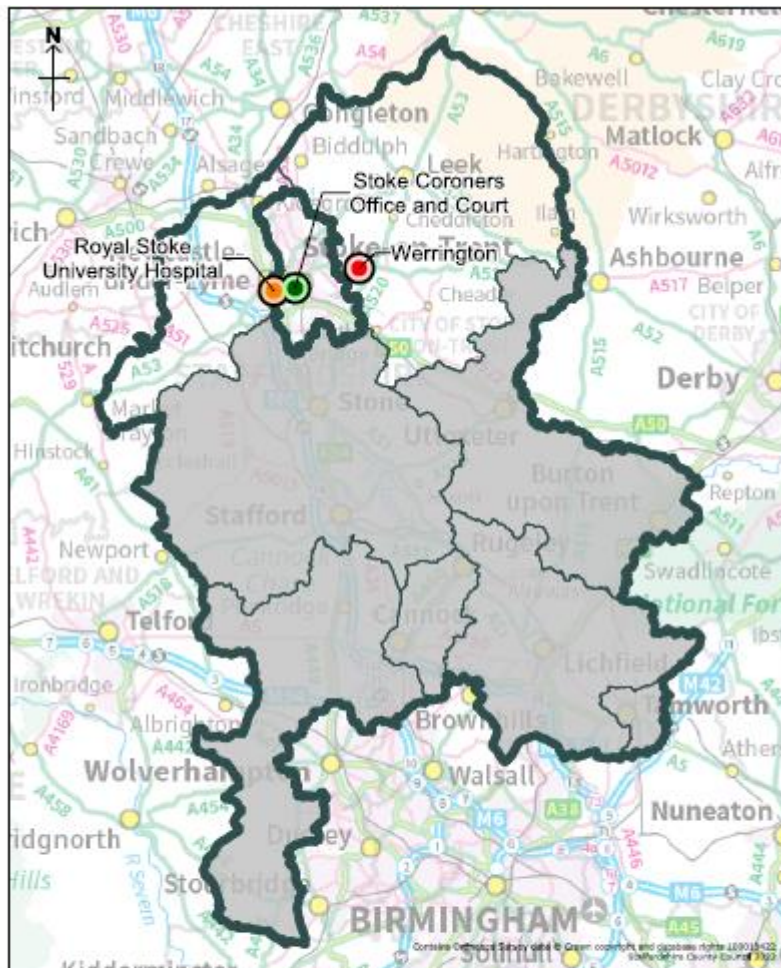
¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/schedule/2>

Coroner area	Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Coroner Area
Major hospitals	University Hospital of North Midlands – Royal Stoke	County hospital (managed by UHNM) Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	University Hospital of North Midlands – Royal Stoke County hospital (managed by UHNM) Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Prisons in area		HMP Featherstone HMP Stafford HMP Oakwood HMP Brinsford HMP Drake Hall HMP Dovegate HMP Swinfen Hall YOI	HMP Featherstone HMP Stafford HMP Oakwood HMP Brinsford HMP Drake Hall HMP Dovegate HMP Swinfen Hall YOI
Other state detention facilities	HM Werrington young offender detention centre	NHS mental health unit with facilities for compulsorily detained persons in St Georges hospital, Stafford.	HM Werrington young offender detention centre NHS mental health unit with facilities for compulsorily detained persons in Hatherton Centre at St Georges hospital, Stafford.
Courtrooms/ inquest venues	Currently Stoke Town Hall, planned moved to Swann House, Stoke from Autumn 2022 with improved accommodation 2/3 Court rooms Digital - Microsoft Teams	Cannock Chase Coroners Court Staffordshire Place, County Buildings, Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Digital – Microsoft Teams	Continued use of existing or new and improved facilities proposed
Office/staff accommodation – location and capacity	Currently Stoke Town Hall, planned moved to Swann House, Stoke from Autumn 2022 with improved accommodation. Office suite in Stoke Town Hall accommodating all coroners, support staff and Coroners officers	First Floor Offices in County Buildings capacity for Coroner, two support staff and Coroners Officer	Continued use of existing or new and improved facilities is anticipated with a move to a single back office location in the medium term Staff are digitally enabled and hybrid working will continue.

Coroner area	Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Coroner Area
	There is capacity to accommodate additional staff and expand into an adjacent area if necessary		
Employer of coroner's officers'	Staffordshire Police	Staffordshire Police	Staffordshire Police
Name of senior coroner	Mr Andrew Barkley	Mr Andrew Haigh now retired – Mr Andrew Barkley Interim Senior Coroner	Mr Andrew Barkley
Number of area coroners	1	0	2 Additional Area Coroner to be recruited following agreement by MOJ that merger can proceed.
Number of assistant coroners	6 Sukhdev Garcha Mark Henley Duncan Richie Daniel Howe Sarah Murphy Heath Westerman	6 Sukhdev Garcha Mark Henley Duncan Richie Daniel Howe Sarah Murphy Heath Westerman	6 Sukhdev Garcha Mark Henley Duncan Richie Daniel Howe Sarah Murphy Heath Westerman
Number of coroner's officers	5	4	9
Number of administrative support staff	1 X Office Manager 3 X Coroners Support Staff who take all initial deaths reported and investigate all deaths that do not progress to inquest	3 (2 FTE) Coroner's Office Support Staff + nil hours contract staff - take all initial deaths reported and investigate all deaths that do not progress to inquest	As Now It's proposed that we retain existing staff in the short term to allow processes to be reviewed and stream lined. The staffing structure will be reviewed, new Job descriptions evaluated, and a new staffing structure introduced as the merger progresses
Number of deaths reported in the	2020 – 2,401 2021 – 2,477	2020 – 2,395 2021 – 2,376	2020 – 4,796 2021 – 4,853

Coroner area	Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Coroner Area
previous calendar year			
Inquests opened in the previous calendar year	2018 – 397 2019 – 361 2020 – 433 2021 – 543	2018 – 360 2019 – 347 2020 – 336 2021 – 341	2018 – 757 2019 – 708 2020 – 769 2021 – 884
Post-mortem rate as % of reported deaths in the previous calendar year	2020 – 27 % 2021 – 25%	2020 – 16 % 2021 – 16%	2020 – 22% 2021 – 21%

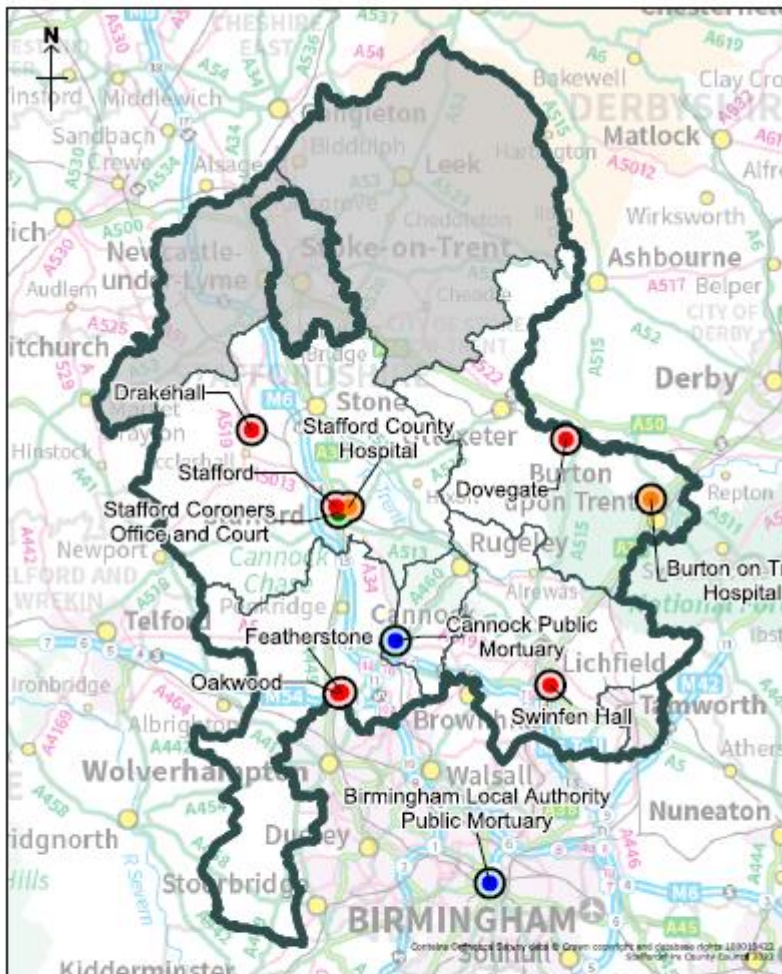
Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire current coroner area Map



- Hospital
- Office and Court
- Prison


Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire North - existing coroners area
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Staffordshire South existing coroner area Map



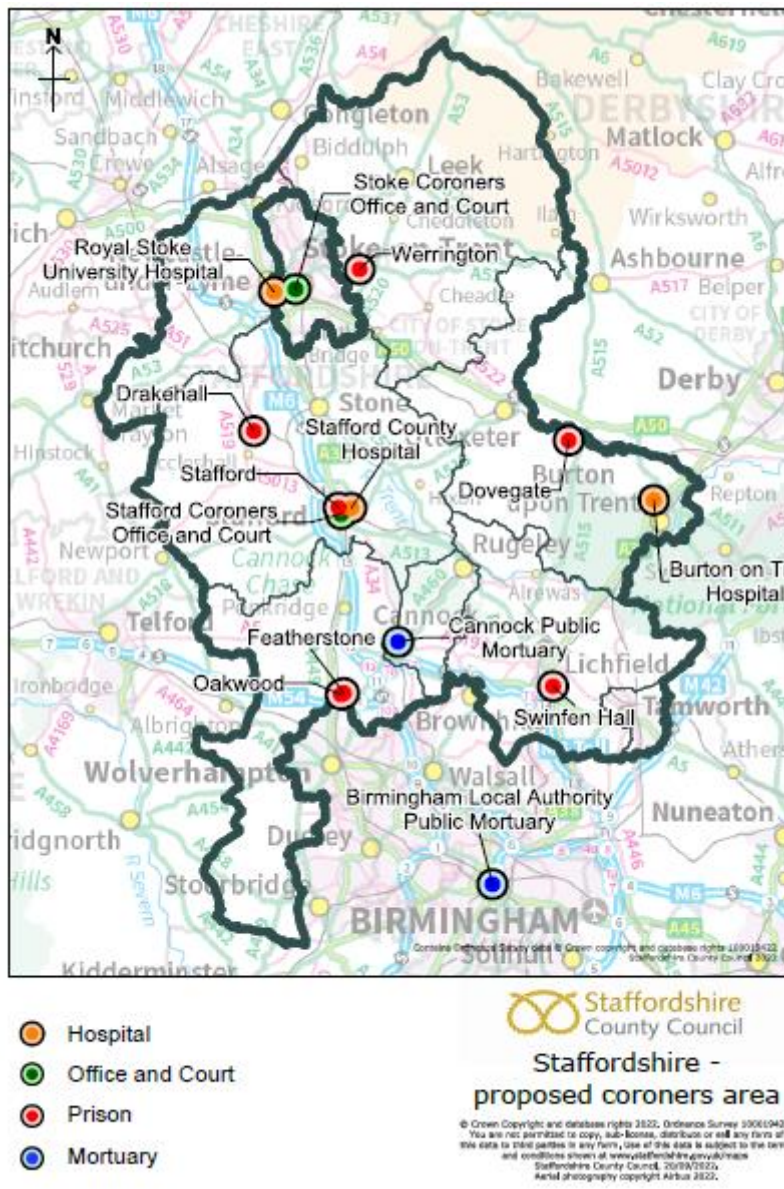
-  Hospital
-  Office and Court
-  Prison
-  Mortuary

 Staffordshire
County Council

Staffordshire South - existing coroners area

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Staffordshire County Council, 20/09/2022.
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Staffordshire and Stoke- on- Trent – Proposed Joint Coroner Area Map, Day One



SENIOR CORONER APPOINTMENT

- **Why are you seeking a merger now (i.e., which area’s senior coroner is stepping down, when and why)?**

The request for a merger is following the retirement of Mr Andrew Haigh, Senior Coroner for Staffordshire South coroner area, on 31 October 2021. This has provided the potential to form a new (merged) coroner area comprising the Staffordshire South coroner area and the Stoke on Trent and North Staffordshire coroner area. Mr Andrew Barkley, Senior Coroner for Stoke-on-Trent, and North Staffordshire is providing cover following Mr Haigh’s retirement. This is an interim arrangement pending a decision relating to the proposed merger to form a new coroner area.

This proposed merger would follow national policy established by the Ministry of Justice and supported by the Chief Coroner to merge smaller coronial areas and reduce the overall number of coroner areas in England and Wales. This will benefit the bereaved in Staffordshire by providing one consistent and standardised service across the whole of the County including the Unitary authority of Stoke on Trent. This is done with the full consensus and agreement of the local authorities involved.

Stoke on Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council already successfully operate a Joint Archives Service which is jointly funded by both Councils.

- **How do you propose to appoint the Senior Coroner for the new merged area – (i.e., does the relevant authority propose to appoint one of the senior coroners from the affected areas or to hold an open competition)?**

It is the intention that the current Senior Coroner for Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire, Mr Andrew Barkley, will be appointed as Senior Coroner for the merged coroner area. At the time Mr Barkley was appointed as the Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire Coroner in April 2019, the potential for a future merger was discussed. Mr Barkley confirmed his support for a merger should the opportunity arise and is fully engaged in this request.

- **Are all affected senior coroners aware of and content with this approach?**

The retiring Senior Coroner, Andrew Haigh was in full support of the merger prior to his retirement in October 2021. The current Senior Coroner for Stoke on Trent and North Staffordshire, and acting Senior Coroner for South Staffordshire, Andrew Barkley is in full support of the merger, and it is the intention that he will become the Senior Coroner for the new merged coroner area. At the time of Mr Barkley's appointment, the Chief Coroner required assurance that the incoming coroner would be supportive of a merger when the situation arose.

IMPACT OF PROPOSED MERGER ON SERVICE DELIVERY

- **What will be the impact of the proposed merger on service delivery?**

Based on the latest Annual Return 2021, there were 2,376 reported deaths in Staffordshire South and 2,477 reported deaths in North Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. On this basis the total number of deaths reported in a merged area would be approximately 4,850.

The merger will have a positive impact on service delivery. It will provide an opportunity to focus on improving services to bereaved families, whilst retaining high quality and consistent services for local people across both coroner areas. It will also ensure that the service is sustainable and fit for the future.

Through the leadership of a single Senior Coroner, the merger presents an opportunity to streamline processes and procedures across the merged coroner area and therefore deliver efficiencies. Work has already commenced on looking at these processes which will be introduced in due course. Aligning and improving work practices across the merged coroner area is already being drafted in preparation. Mr Barkley is working with members of the team to include them to drive positive change, to deliver a single simplified process for partners who currently engage with both coroner areas and different processes to deal with. This will clearly deliver economies of scale going forward. For example, both local authorities use the same service provider for IT, but the systems operate very differently. The merger will provide the opportunity to move to a single platform and to have one single contract with the IT service provider.

Staffordshire County (including Stoke-on-Trent), which encompasses both coroner areas, is a large and geographically spread county. It is therefore intended to keep current arrangements for the location of inquests; these will continue to be held locally, both in Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent. However, a merger will create the opportunity to enhance the local service through the use of additional sites, which will provide enhanced access to the service across the new coroner area.

- **Will additional coronial or administrative support be provided in the new area? (e.g., will additional coroners need to be recruited or will workloads be increased/redistributed etc? How will additional caseloads be managed?)**

The merged area will deal with approximately 4,850 deaths per annum.

The recruitment of an additional Area Coroner, alongside a small team of Assistant Coroners, will ensure that the caseload is managed effectively, and that the service is resilient and would also support in a situation should unexpected additional cases present themselves.

Both Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council provide administrative support to their respective teams. Ultimately, it is proposed to have one centralised back-office team based in one location (anticipated to be Stoke-on-Trent). However, it is expected that the existing officers and administration staff will remain in their current locations and with their existing employer, should they not wish to move to the central location. This situation will remain until such time as staff retire or leave, which will then enable us to move towards achieving a single physical office space. This will ensure a smooth transition to the new structure, minimise the early loss of experienced staff, and keep the use of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) to a minimum. However, any new appointments will be employed Stoke on Trent City Council as the lead authority.

Whilst it is important that the Coroners Team have a single base where they can be co located we will continue to operate hybrid working arrangements as now. All staff have been issued with laptops and other equipment to enable them to work remotely. This will continue and will be enhanced as new digital solutions become available.

It is intended to use a Section 113 agreement to allow the joint service to operate under the Local Government Act 1972. This allows staff to be shared by authorities and means in practice we would not be using TUPE to transfer staff to the single relevant authority. Instead, staff will stay with their existing contract of employment but be placed at the disposal of the relevant authority. Over time as staff leave, they will be replaced and employed by the relevant authority

- **What will be the impact of the merger on associated services – such as post-mortem examinations, and mortuary provision?**

Public mortuaries at Cannock and Stoke are used by the coroner for post mortems in the south and north coroner areas, respectively. In the Staffordshire South coroner's area, due to the geographical spread, arrangements are also in place to carry out post mortems at Birmingham Local Authority public mortuary.

For deaths occurring in hospital that require a post mortem, these are carried out at Burton upon Trent hospital in the south and the Royal Stoke hospital in the north.

However, following the merger we intend to review all the current arrangements to mitigate any deficiencies that exist due to shortage of pathologists.

It is recognised that the existing Public Mortuary facilities in the North and the South of the county are ageing and require significant investment to maintain them to the required standard. Therefore, the review will make recommendations on an appropriate way forward which will reflect the needs of the new joint service. There will also be an exercise to consolidate contractual arrangements to deliver increased value for money. It is anticipated that the procurement of services across the merged area will achieve economies of scale and create financial savings which will benefit both authorities.

There is also an opportunity to review body removal arrangements and align these arrangements to provide a more cost-effective single service.

There are several options for mortuary provision which will be considered once the merger has taken place, as follows:

1. Own Mortuary Service – provide an inhouse mortuary, including pathology provisions, to fully meet the demands of the merged service. This option includes exploring the potential to work in partnership with Keele University

- School of Medicine to create a centre of excellence. The University is situated in Newcastle under Lyme, which sits to the north of the merged coroner area.
2. Subcontract – consider outsourcing of the arrangements to a third party e.g., another Local Authority.
 3. Arrangement with NHS – via contract to provide comprehensive mortuary services, removing the need for a public mortuary infrastructure.

- **How will the relevant local authority administer the new coroner area?**

In order to meet the statutory requirements of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 Stoke-on-Trent City Council will assume the role of the relevant authority. Both councils have a vested interest in the coroner service within their own areas and will jointly fund the service. The Local Government Act 2000 sets out the Executive powers vested in the cabinets of both Councils.

For the purposes of the Coroners Service, these powers and all decisions relating to them including funding, will be made by a joint Executive Committee consisting of representatives from both local authorities which will ensure consistency and co-ordination. The joint Executive committee will also act as a board to receive reports on the performance of the local coroner service and will seek to drive the transformation and continued development of the service including new mortuary and pathology provision and arrangements for the body removal service.

- **How will administrative governance be achieved between the relevant local authority and other funding local authorities?**

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent City Councils have a well-established and positive working relationship which has operated successfully for many years. On approval of the merger, both local authorities will enter into a legally binding agreement which will clearly set out the provision of the service, accountabilities, responsibilities, monitoring arrangements and financial arrangements. Governance will be through the Joint Committee who will agree funding allocations, approve, and authorise expenditure and other appropriate decision making.

When appropriate there will be the opportunity for significant decisions to be scrutinised through the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees prior to debate and agreement at the Joint Executive Committee.

It is anticipated that there will be an Accountable Officer within each authority who will have strategic and operational oversight of the coroner service and they will provide appropriate advice and reports into the Joint Committee.

There will be equally weighted membership, with an alternating chair using the North and South locations to host the joint executive committee.

- **How will the affected local authorities manage budgets?**

Budgets will be set and agreed by the Joint Committee consisting of Staffordshire County Council Cabinet Members, Stoke-on-Trent City Council Cabinet Members, with support from finance and legal officers.

The Joint Committee, in addition to setting budgets will, act as the management board for support activities, review the production of an annual report and carry out performance monitoring of the joint service. Meetings will be held quarterly, and the Senior Coroner will attend these meetings

It has been agreed that the existing budget envelope will be available to the new joint service with the existing percentage split. However, this will be reviewed on a triennial basis and should it be required, a revised cost sharing basis will be considered between the two authorities and agreed at the Joint Committee. The service will not exceed funding over and above the current financial commitment of either authority. Therefore, the total budget envelope for this joint service will not exceed £2,132,130 with Staffordshire County Council's commitment not exceeding £1,363,780 and Stoke-on-Trent City Council's commitment not exceeding £768,350.

The current proportion of total costs equates to 64% being met by Staffordshire County Council and 36% by Stoke on Trent City Council. This proportion will be maintained in the new service which shall be subject to periodic review and adjustment if required.

The financial commitments for both local authorities are capped at the current budget envelope for 2023/24 as highlighted above. Future budgets will be agreed annually as part of both local authorities' annual budget setting process. Apportionment of the costs will be reviewed triennially by both authorities.

Please note that Local Authority overheads are not included in the direct budgets of the Coroners Service of Stoke or Staffordshire. Within the corporate financial arrangements, the treatment of overheads is that they are shared across the whole authority, and these will remain in place when a joint service is created. Both local authorities agree that therefore overheads should not be included and operational budgets for the service remain at the level they currently are.

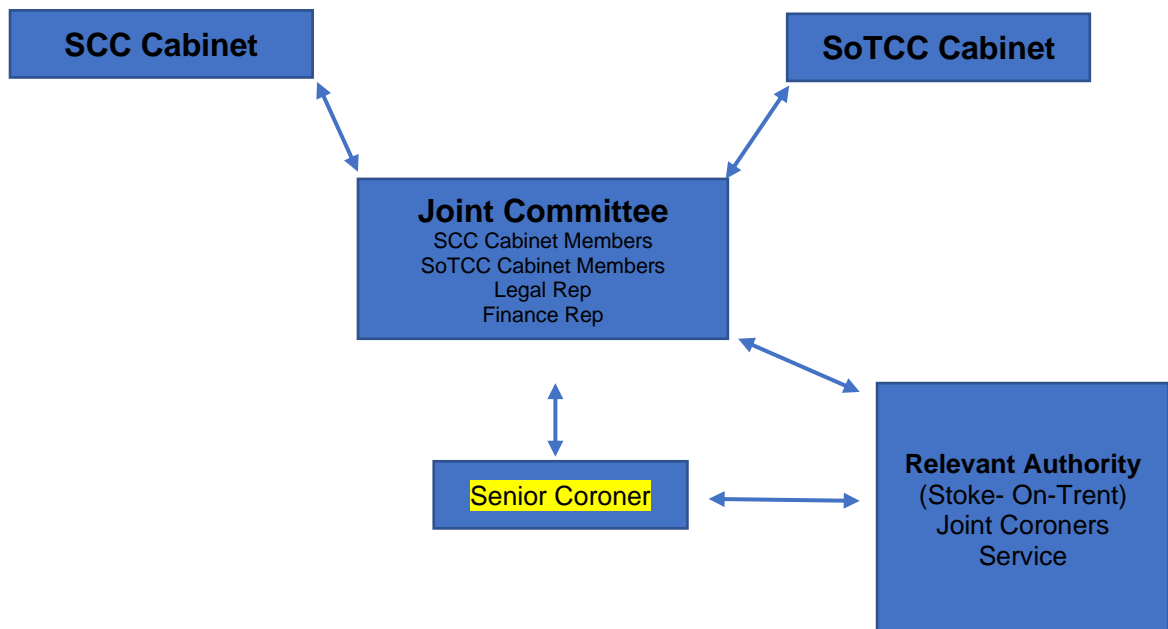
Overheads from Staffordshire are not included in the figures below as these will not transfer when the service is managed as planned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. In the event of Staffordshire County Council being the host authority then the same principle would apply, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council's overheads would not form part of the budget envelope transferring into the joint service. It is the aspiration that the total cost of a joint service will over time deliver efficiencies as described elsewhere in the business case.

Summary Costs – Budget Envelope for Joint Service

	Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffordshire £	Staffordshire (South) £	Total Funding Available for Merger £
Operational Budget	1,447,900	678,400	2,126,300
Overhead Recharge Budget	43,000	-	43,000
Staffordshire's 49% Contribution – North Staffs Coroners Service	(722,700)	722,700	-
Overall Total	768,200	1,401,100	2,169,300
*Staffordshire's overheads are not shown in the table as they are notional - It is only the operational budget that will transfer to the joint service administered by Stoke		*19,040	

A full breakdown of existing budgets for both local authorities Coroners Service are included at Annex A

Proposed Governance Arrangements



IMPACT OF MERGER ON THOSE WORKING IN / WITH THE SERVICE

- **What will be the impact of the merger on:**
- **Coroners (e.g., will the workloads of the Senior Coroner, Area Coroner (if applicable) and assistant coroners be affected? Will all existing assistant coroners transfer to the new area? Are the current assistant coroners all currently working and being trained? Do they or will they all have the Chief Coroner's recommended 15 days a year of work?)**

A joint recruitment process took place in September 2021 to recruit four new Assistant Coroners to support the Senior Coroner and ensure resilience across the coroner areas.

Due to the scale and average number of deaths for the merged area, it is proposed that the Senior Coroner will be supported by the existing and a new Area Coroner plus the existing 6 Assistant Coroners.

Coroners Officers

Coroners Officers in the Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire coroner area are based within Stoke-on-Trent City Council Offices alongside the Senior Coroner and other staff. The Coroners Officers in the Staffordshire South coroner area are based remotely at Lichfield Police Station in Staffordshire. It is intended that the South Staffordshire Coroners Officers will relocate to the central back-office location in Stoke when the merger takes place. Coroners Officers currently have different working practices in each coroner area. It is intended that these working practices will be aligned, and the coroners' officers integrated into the centralised back-office arrangement. This will be subject to a Police-run HR consultation process at the appropriate time once the merger has been agreed.

- **Other staff in the coroner's offices**

It is proposed that Coroners Support Office staff will be based in the central location in Stoke with the Coroners Officers, and Coroners. However, it is anticipated that this will take place gradually as existing staff may initially operate as a virtual single team remaining in their existing location to minimise the risk of losing valuable experienced staff. Staff are digitally enabled and hybrid working will continue.

The creation of a single back office in Stoke ensures the appropriate support to the Coroner for his Chambers and Court activities. Police and local authority staff being co-located with the coroners has proved beneficial in the Stoke on Trent and North Staffordshire area to date. The coroner is keen to build on this best practice and has the support of both local authorities to do this.

It is anticipated that the majority of Court hearings will take place in the new Stoke facility. However, there is a wish from Staffordshire County Council that a coronial presence is maintained in the South therefore Court hearings will continue to be held in Stoke but will be accommodated in Staffordshire when necessary.

- **Pathologists**

Pathologists will benefit from having a single back-office function, as there will be one point of contact and back-office process.

- **Others**

It is intended that a contract remains in place with the Coroners Court Volunteers Support Service. Therefore, it is proposed to negotiate a single contract for when the merger takes place.

Currently there are differing practices across both coroner areas in respect of the body removal service; Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire have an in-house provision whilst Staffordshire South contracts out this service. The service in the Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire is currently under review and short-term contractual arrangements will be put in place as this needs to be addressed while we wait for the merger to be agreed and implemented. Following the merger, it is intended that arrangements will be reviewed to have a single contract and allow alignment, economies of scale and better market management.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS OF MERGER

A requirement of both local authorities is that the new service operates within existing resource/budgets on day one with an expectation that efficiencies are delivered as the joint service develops and matures.

It is planned that existing staff will remain on their current local authority terms to eliminate the cost of potential redundancies and the personal impact upon the office staff. However, as new appointments are made, these will be placed upon a contract with the relevant authority, Stoke on Trent City Council.

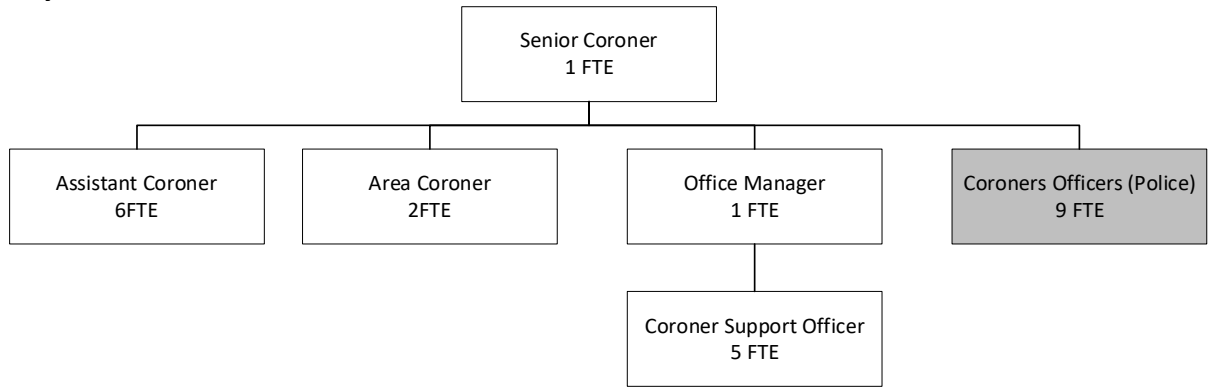
A local Coronial presence for inquests will be maintained in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, and it is intended that further access points for the bereaved will be introduced through utilising meeting rooms within libraries and other Council premises. Initial consideration for the location of touchdown centres has been given to those areas which are “remote” from the current Coroner offices, these being Leek, Wombourne, Burton on Trent and Cannock. Suitable access points within these locations will be identified.

Existing arrangements for post-mortems will be maintained until the completion of the review of public mortuaries.

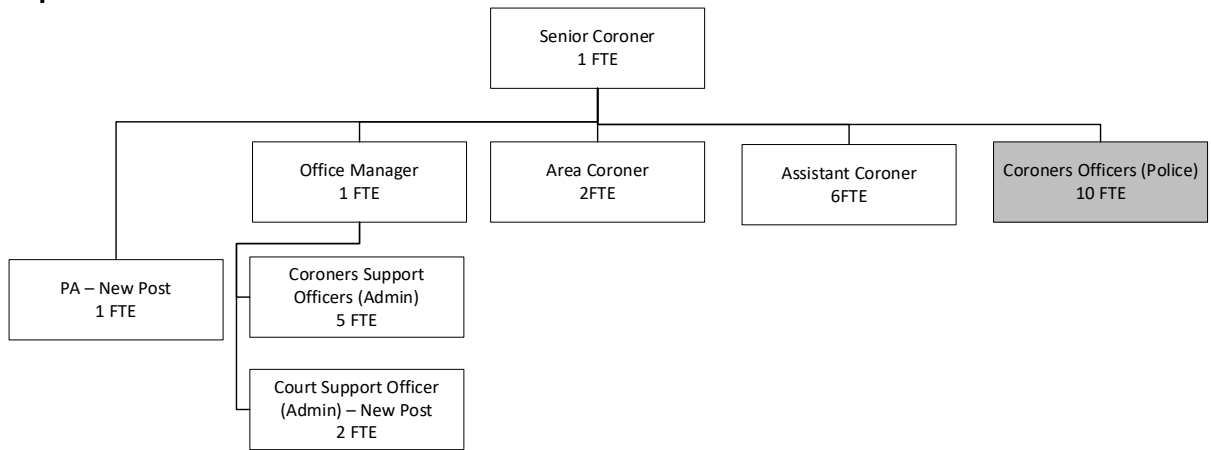
Please see Annex A for the full costing breakdown.

STAFFING

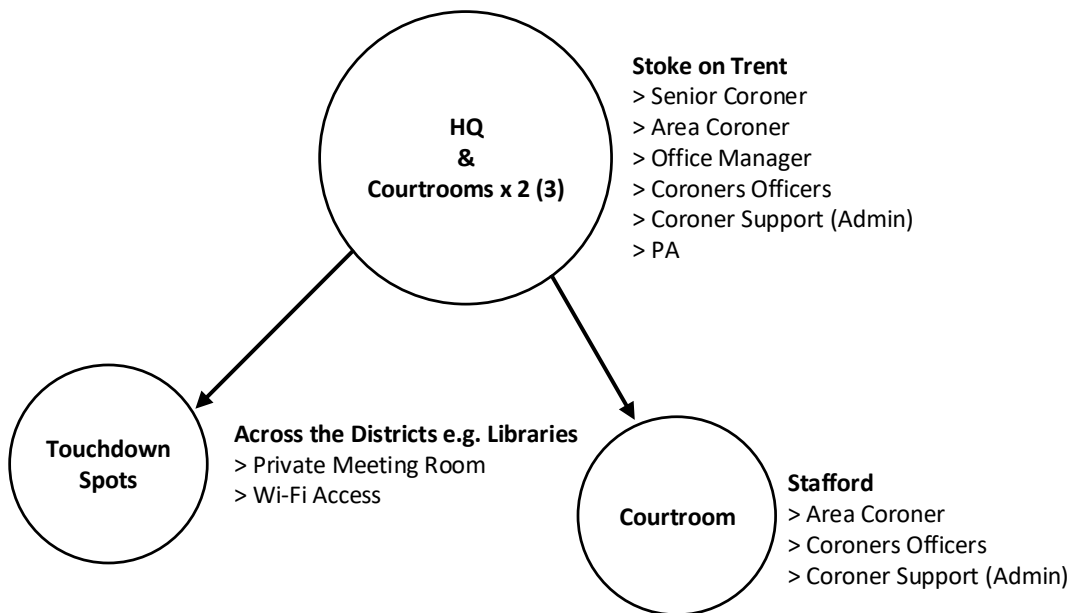
Day 1



Aspiration



Office Bases / Locations



LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Are you aware of any legal issues that need to be resolved before a merger can go ahead (in addition to the Lord Chancellor making an order under Schedule 2 of the 2009 Act)? If so, please give details.**

No. Legal representation from both local authorities will be key to the production of the Legal Framework for the joint service. The Legal framework will require sign off by both local authorities Governance processes.

VIEWS OF THOSE AFFECTED BY MERGER

- **Do all affected local authorities support the merger? Please provide details.**

Yes, both Chief Executives support this in principle, and this business case has been appended to reports for senior leadership teams and Cabinets for both local authorities.

- **Have the local authority councillors / cabinets approved the merger? Please provide details.**

Yes, Staffordshire County Council approved 16/02/22, please see link below
[\(Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/02/2022 10:00 \(staffordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

Yes, Stoke City Council Approved 01/03/2022, please see link below
<http://modern.gov/documents/s139992/Potential%20New%20Joint%20Coroners%20Service%20for%20Stoke-on-Trent%20and%20Staffordshire.pdf>

- **What is the view of affected coroners and their staff?**

Affected coroners and staff are all aware of the proposals and formal consultation will be taking place with staff and their trade union representatives following approval of the Business Case.

- **How will bereaved people be affected by the merger – e.g., travelling to inquests, being able to contact coroners' offices?**

Bereaved people will see a benefit from the merger and experience a more accessible service: inquests will continue to be held locally in Stafford and Stoke. Currently, most communication with families is carried out by telephone, email, and post. Post-merger, however, there will be an increased opportunity, if required, for officers to meet with the bereaved face to face at 'touchdown' locations throughout the coroner area.

Initial consideration for the location of touchdown centres has been given to those areas which are “remote” from the current Coroner offices, these being Leek, Wombourne, Burton on Trent and Cannock. Suitable access points within these locations will be identified.

- **Have you sought the views of other affected stakeholders - such as police authority and constabulary, hospitals, prisons, GPs, faith groups and funeral directors? Please provide details.**

A brief consultation has been sent out to key stakeholders; written and verbal responses which are supportive of the proposal have been received.

- **What are the views of other stakeholders?**

As above

- **What impact will the merger have in terms of disability, gender, and racial equality?**

The impact will be positive with the provision of more accessible touchdown centres across the merged coroner area. An Equalities Impact assessment has been completed and submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 27 October 2022.

RISKS AND MITIGATING ACTIONS

- **Please provide details of any risks identified and mitigating action (to be) taken.**

See Attached risk log as Annex C.

ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S)

- **Please describe other options considered, in addition to the proposed merger, and the advantages and disadvantages for each option.**

The alternative to a merger would be for existing arrangements to continue and for Staffordshire County Council to recruit a new Senior Coroner. This will be considered should it not be possible to achieve a merger.

Should existing arrangements continue there would be a need to undertake a lengthy recruitment process to employ a Senior Coroner in the South. There would be no opportunities to achieve economies of scale through single contracts and Staffordshire residents would experience differences in process dependent on their location when dealing with Coroners Services. The Police would continue to deal with 2 separate operational models when dealing with the 2 separate coroners' areas. Both local authorities would retain direct control on financial matters whilst managing the coroners service budget in their own area.

CONTACT WITH THE CHIEF CORONER'S OFFICE / MINISTRY OF JUSTICE / CONSULTEES

- **Have you had previous discussions with the Chief Coroner on the proposed merger? Yes (This is a requirement before MoJ can formally consult on the merger.) Please provide details of the discussion.**

A letter of intent was forwarded to the Chief Coroner and MoJ in October 2021. Communication from the Chief Coroner's Office on 7 December confirmed that discussions to date with the Office were sufficient for requirements.

- **Have you had previous contact with MoJ on the proposed merger?**

Yes, a letter of intent has been forwarded to MoJ and Chief Coroner in October 2021.

- **Are you happy for this business case in its entirety to be sent to all consultees? If not, please provide details.**

Yes

- **Please list consultees for the consultation on the proposed merger – the organisation's name and the most appropriate email address - at Annex B. MoJ will remove email addresses from Annex B before sending the business case to consultees**

List of consultees can be found at Annex B

Annex A

Resource implications of the merger

Table A: Details of current Senior Coroners and Area Coroner/s (if applicable) in each existing coroner area

Position (e.g., Senior Coroner, Area Coroner)	First name	Surname	Current salary (including National Insurance and pension contributions)	Long Inquest Payments (if applicable) or other additional payments	Proposed salary in amalgamated area (if applicable) (including National Insurance and pension contributions)
Senior	Andrew	Barkley	2023/24 £207,900	n/a	
				n/a	
*Senior	Andrew	Haigh	2023/24 £198,360	n/a	
Area	Emma	Serrano	£157,700	n/a	

*Please note the senior Coroner has retired however the funding has been retained for use in the Coroners Service budget and is currently being used to support casework in the South.

Table B: Budgets Summary – Updated to 2023/24 budgets

	Stoke on Trent & North Staffordshire £	Staffordshire (South) £
Operational Budget:		
Salary Costs of Senior Coroner including on-costs	207,900	198,360
Salary Costs of Area Coroner including on costs	157,700	-
Salary Costs of Coroners Officer(s) including on-costs (**picked up by Police)		N/A
Salary Costs of Admin Staff including on-costs	174,300	67,890
Casual Hours Cover		29,000
Assistant Coroner - Fees Charged	36,600	23,340
Insurance Charges	3,200	0
Buildings (exc insurance on above line)		0
Transport Related Costs	1,100	2,010
Supplies and Services Costs (ie. General Running Costs)	28,700	10,480
Funeral Director Costs		7,770
Post Mortems/Pathology Costs	241,000	140,900
SLA's with Other Providers of Services:		
Cannock		111,540
Burton		47,010
Stoke		13,970
Birmingham		6,920
Other Costs:		
Legal Charges	16,000	0
Other Costs Charged Against Inquest Expenses	198,000	19,210
I-gene	215,000	0
Coroners Removal Team	168,400	0
Public Mortuary		0
Total Operational Budget	1,447,900	678,400
Overhead Recharges Budget:		
Office Accomodation	1,000	5,880
ICT Costs	22,900	7,510
Finance	5,100	1,680
HR	8,200	2,690
Occupational Health	1,000	330
Property Services	700	230
Legal	0	0
Procurement	400	130
Central Expenses	100	30
Business Services	3,600	1,190
Total Overhead Recharges Budget	43,000	19,670
Overall Budgeted Cost of Service	1,490,900	698,070
Notes:		
North Staffs Coroner Recharge	(722,700)	722,700

	Stoke on Trent & North Staffordshire £	Staffordshire (South) £	Total Funding Available for Merger £
Operational Budget	1,448,500	640,880	2,089,380
Overhead Recharge Budget	42,750	-	42,750
Staffordshires 49% Contribution - NorthStaffs Coroners Service	(722,900)	722,900	-
Overall Total	768,350	1,363,780	2,132,130

Annex B**List of consultees**

[Please include:

- *All effected Senior Coroners, Area Coroners and Assistant Coroners in the areas in question.*
- *relevant local authority contacts from all neighbouring coroner areas (MoJ can assist with this if necessary).*
- *all MPs with constituencies within the effected coroner areas.*
- *pathologist contacts.*
- *representatives of local funeral directors within the effected coroner areas.*
- *representatives from hospitals and/or prisons within the area.*
- *the Chief Coroner (MoJ will have the relevant contact details)*
- *local police contacts (MoJ can assist with this if necessary and will include a national ACPO contact as standard))*

Organisation	Email address <i>(please note these will be removed when business case is sent to consultees)</i>
SCO	ben.adams@staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk
Police	Chris.noble@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk
Police	Colin.Mattinson@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk
Police	Alan.Lyford@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk
Police	Sarah.Hales@staffordshire.police.uk
Fire & Rescue	Carmel.Warren@staffordshirefire.gov.uk
Fire & Rescue	Rob.barber@staffordshirefire.gov.uk
CCU	Bethan.Morgan@staffordshirefire.gov.uk
Funeral Director	tim@cmcgoughandsons.co.uk
Funeral Director - Sophie Jukes	sophie@jukesfuneralservices.com
Funeral Director - Michael Taaffe	michael.taaffe@centralengland.coop
Funeral Director - Glen Speak	glen.speak@tamworth.coop
Medical council	gmc@gmc-uk.org
NHS Trust – Royal stoke	Mike.Elton@uhn.nhs.uk
NHS Trust – Royal stoke	Nick.Doorbar@uhn.nhs.uk
NHS Trust – Royal stoke	Tracey.bullock@uhn.nhs.uk
NHS Derbyshire	ifti.majid@nhs.net
NHS Derbyshire	gavin.regan@nhs.net
SCC Registrations	Adam.cooper@staffordshire.gov.uk
ICS/ICB interim Chief Executive	peter.axon@nhs.net
ICB Chair Designate	prem.singh@nhs.net

University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust, Chief Executive	gavin.boyle@nhs.net
HMP OAKWOOD	michelle.green@uk.g4s.com
HMP STAFFORD	safercustody.stafford@justice.gov.uk
HMP DOVEGATE	gez.walters@serco.com
HMP DRAKE HALL	tracey.sargeant@hmpps.gsi.gov.uk jan.lakin@hmpps.gsi.gov.uk
Werrington Young Offenders Institute – Security Governor	chris.banks@justice.gov.uk
FEATHERSTONE	omu.featherstone@hmpps.gsi.gov.uk
BRINSFORD	safety.brinsford@justice.gov.uk
SWINFEN	natalie.buxton@justice.gov.uk
Medical Council	gmc@gmc-uk.org
Coroners Court Support Service	roey.burden@ccss.org.uk
Bereavement group (Compton Care)	MarianneGrant@comptoncare.org.uk
Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide	swadlincote@uksobs.org
The Dove Service - Bereavement and Loss counselling Service	www.thedoveservice.org.uk/contact-us
Bereavement Office	Victoria.Poole@uhnm.nhs.uk
Staffordshire County Council	john.henderson@staffordshire.gov.uk
Stoke on Trent City Council	jon.rouse@stoke.gov.uk
Stafford Borough Council and Cannock Chase District Council	tclegg@staffordbc.gov.uk
East Staffs Borough Council	andy.obrien@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk
Lichfield District Council	simon.fletcher@lichfielddc.gov.uk
South Staffs District Council	d.heywood@sstaffs.gov.uk
Newcastle Borough Council	Martin.Hamilton@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk
Staffs Moorlands District Council	andrew.stokes@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
Tamworth District Council	andrew-barratt@tamworth.gov.uk
Chief Exec West Midlands Ambulance Trust	anthony.marsh@wmas.nhs.uk
Chief Coroner	chiefcoronersoffice@judiciary.uk
Leader of Staffordshire County Council	Alan.white@staffordshire.gov.uk
Leader of Stoke on Trent City Council	abi.bown@stoke.gov.uk
Interim Leader of East Staffs Borough Council	george.allen@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk

Leader of Lichfield District Council	Doug.pullen@lichfielddc.gov.uk
Leader of Tamworth District Council	Jeremy.oates@tamworth.gov.uk
Leader of Cannock Chase District Council	Olivia.lyons@cannockchasedc.gov.uk
Leader of Stafford Borough Council	pfarrington@staffordbc.gov.uk
Leader of South Staffs District Council	r.lees@sstaffs.gov.uk
Leader of Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	Simon.tagg@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk
Leader of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Sybil.ralphs@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk
Senior Coroner	Andrew.Barkley@stoke.gov.uk
Area Coroner	Emma.Serrano@stpoke.gov.uk
Assistant Coroners	Heath.Westerman@staffordshire.gov.uk sukhdev.garcha@stoke.gov.uk daniel.howe@stoke.gov.uk duncan.ritchie@stoke.gov.uk mark.henley@stoke.gov.uk sarah.murphy@stoke.gov.uk
Pathologists	Mark.Stephens@uhnms.nhs.uk Paul.Simcock@uhnms.nhs.uk louise.edwards2@uhnms.nhs.uk Lucy.Green@uhnms.nhs.uk andy.hitchcock@outlook.com
LRF Chair	richard.harling@staffordshire.gov.uk

Annex C -Risks

Risk Num	Risk Description	Owner	Likelihood	Impact	Score	Mitigation
R1	Agreement of Heads of Terms may be challenging due to differing requirements and/or priorities for both parties.	TC/CE	4	4	16	Joint Project Team developing designs in partnership
R2	Timescales for gaining SLT approval may be longer than expected	TC/CE	4	3	12	Accept approval process timescales Interim Coroner in place
R3	Forecast costs for the new joint service are higher than current service resulting in this being unacceptable to SCC & SoT	TC/CE	5	4	20	Work with Finance colleagues to monitor costs/budgets
R4	SCC and SoT are unable to reach agreement on the terms of the merger	TC/CE	4	5	20	Joint Project Team developing designs in partnership, keeping both authorities informed of proposals
R5	Unable to reach an agreement with SoT Coroner on merger	TC/CE	2	5	10	SoT Coroner supportive of merger and associate member of the project group Working with SoT Coroner, and recruited with a merger in mind
R6	SoT Coroner removes interim agreement before merger is complete or alternative SCC arrangements are in place	TC/CE	2	5	10	SCC would approach Chief Coroner for permission to recruit
R7	SCC and SoT do not fully engage all relevant partners with the joint vision for the proposed merger	TC/CE	2	3	6	Robust engagement plan & comprehensive list of consultee for views to be sought
R8	There is a risk that the merger loses political support with the council leadership	TC/CE	2	2	4	Maintain continual engagement and communications with the Leadership/Members/Overview/Scrutiny
R9	There is a risk that staff within the Coroners system do not feel sufficiently informed	TC/CE	2	2	4	Robust engagement plan & regular briefing sessions taking place
R10	External factors adversely impacting on the progress of the business case (eg issues with lack of pathologists, digital autopsy contract (Stoke), Covid related etc)	TC/CE	3	4	12	Seeking alternate business arrangements as they occur as part of business as usual
R11	Loss of specialist staff - uncertainty on location of service	TC/CE	2	3	6	Business Case addresses location and existing staff will not be made to move if they do not wish to do so
R12	Reputational risk if perception is that the "local" service is going to be removed	TC/CE	3	2	6	It is planned to keep the current arrangements in respect of the location of inquests; these will continue to be held locally, both in Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent, therefore no impact on residents access to the Coroners' service. it is also intended that further access points for the bereaved will be introduced through utilising meeting rooms within libraries and other Council premises.
R13	There is a risk that the merger doesn't go ahead	KM/JD	2	4	8	Local Authorities are communicating regularly with key stakeholders who have been supportive to date. The merger maintains a local Coronial presence in both local authorities so is unlikely to be a concern for residents. If the merger doesn't proceed, the status quo will be maintained by the recruitment of a replacement Senior Coroner for Staffordshire South

Appendix D - Addendum to business case following conversation with Chief Coroners Office on 17th March 2023

The addendum has been inserted to provide additional assurances in respect of quality and accessibility of mortuary provision following feedback received by the Chief Coroner's Office as part of the consultation exercise in early 2023.

Context

The Staffordshire South Coronial Area is made up of 6 districts (Cannock Chase, Tamworth, Lichfield, Stafford, East Staffordshire and South Staffordshire).

The Public Mortuary based in the local authority district of Cannock Chase, which was operated by Staffordshire County Council to provide a public mortuary service to the Staffordshire South Coroner's Service was closed on 31st October 2022. The facility provided invasive PM services to the Senior Coroner and refrigerated storage of 12 bodies (4 of which bariatric).

Post-mortems

Over time, the availability of pathologists has been a concern. Consequently, a community-based approach was adopted in 2019 to contract on a district-by-district basis with a nominated funeral director (as opposed to a centralised contract) to undertake collections of community deaths, provide initial rest and transfer of deceased to mortuary facilities for PM services, primarily digital autopsy.

Since 2019, Staffordshire South Coroner's Service have utilised digital autopsy capabilities at City of Stoke on Trent Public Mortuary. Over time, contractual arrangements meant that PM work which originated from the community was diverted to Stoke as the need for invasive PM services at Cannock Public Mortuary wound down.

As part of the considerations into closing Cannock Public Mortuary, the Senior Coroner requested centralisation of PM work, and greater utilisation of DA scans. For our southerly districts, contracts were set up to provide transfer of deceased to the Central Mortuary Birmingham for PM services. Tamworth and Lichfield arrangements have been in place for several years and the usage at Cannock has been well below its capacity in advance of the decision to close it. Other Districts followed this change and prior to the Cannock closure, the volume of PMs being carried out at that mortuary were averaging around 2 per week.

Community Approach

Following the closure of Cannock Public Mortuary, the following Community deaths arrangements now exist:

- Lichfield District – transfer to Central Mortuary Birmingham for invasive PM
- Tamworth Borough - transfer to Central Mortuary Birmingham for invasive PM
- Stafford Borough – transfer to Stoke Public Mortuary for DA scan/ invasive PM

- Cannock Chase District - transfer to Stoke Public Mortuary for DA scan/invasive PM
- South Staffordshire District - transfer to Stoke Public Mortuary for DA scan/invasive PM
- East Staffordshire Borough - transfer to Stoke Public Mortuary for DA scan/invasive PM

The community-based approach provides greater resilience within the system in respect of appropriate storage of deceased awaiting PM or investigation, and the responsibility for their care remains with the Senior Coroner. There is more contracted refrigerated storage capacity across the coronial area than ever before. More recently we have also contracted with an additional funeral director to provide contingency storage capacity in the Stafford Borough area following the winter pressures that we understand were experienced widely across the country. That contingency capacity provides storage arrangements for up to 60 bodies subject to specific requirements (single refrigeration, refrigerated racking, cold room storage), and has enhanced previous capacity.

The Borough of East Staffordshire continues to utilise mortuary and storage facilities operated by University Hospital Derby and Burton NHS Trust, and additional storage capacity within the NHS system is available at both County Hospital Stafford and Cannock Chase Hospital (although they are no longer working mortuaries). Also, University Hospital North Midlands (previously Royal Stoke) also has a working mortuary and storage facilities within the local authority area of City of Stoke on Trent.

Additional Storage

Following the pandemic, Stoke Public Mortuary has maintained the additional storage capacity (25) which was set up for mass fatalities, and now operates this as an overflow on a BAU principle. It is important to remember that this facility continues to service the three districts of the North Staffordshire Coronial Area (Newcastle Borough, Staffordshire Moorland and City of Stoke on Trent), and the four districts from the South identified above. Please be assured, that the Stoke Public Mortuary runs efficiently and can handle the BAU workload demands.

In summary, despite the closure of the Cannock Mortuary, Public Mortuary capacity across the North and South Staffordshire Coronial Areas has increased by 13 (additional 25 funded jointly by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent as BAU post Covid, minus 12 following the Cannock closure). Additional contingency storage of 60 bodies in the South has also been put in place with a contractual arrangement which provides further assurance that resilience has increased since the closure of the Cannock mortuary.

4th April 2023.