

diligence, sensitivity and understanding  
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# Berkshire Coroner Service CHARTER

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## Working with diligence, sensitivity and understanding

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## From the Coroner

For most people, contact with the Coroner Service is part of a very upsetting period of their lives, when they feel vulnerable and distressed by bereavement.

The aim of all of us who work in the service is to treat everyone with sympathy, courtesy and consideration and to do our very best to carry out our duties not only diligently but also with sensitivity and understanding.

We hope our Charter will help you by explaining the standards of service you should expect from us, the way you should be treated in all your contacts with our staff and what to do if, despite all our efforts, things go wrong.

Please read this information carefully and if you have any concerns or questions, don't hesitate to contact us. You will find our address and telephone numbers below.

HM Coroner  
Berkshire

## How to contact us

The Berkshire Coroner Service covers the Reading, Windsor, Maidenhead, Slough, Wokingham, Bracknell and West Berkshire areas. The Coroner's Office is at:

Yeomanry House, 131 Castle Hill, Reading RG1 7TA

☎ 0118 901 5447

Fax: 0118 901 5448

Email: [peter.bedford@reading.gov.uk](mailto:peter.bedford@reading.gov.uk)

If you need to contact us outside office hours, please call:

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maidenhead Police Station | 01628 645631  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slough Police Station     | 01753 211826  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bracknell Police Station  | 01344 823432  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading                   | 0118 986 3116 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newbury                   | 01635 264745  |

Court hearings are normally held at: The Civic Centre, Reading, Newbury Town Hall and The Guildhall, Windsor, unless otherwise notified. Toilet and telephone facilities are available and there is access for wheelchairs (subject to prior notice).

Although there are no refreshments available, there are many cafes, restaurants and other places near all the venues.

## The Coroner Service

It is the Coroner's legal duty to investigate deaths reported to him because they appear to be unnatural or violent, or are sudden with an unknown cause, or have happened while the person was in legal custody. Once a death has been reported, the Coroner has certain responsibilities which, by law, he must carry out.

The Deputy and Assistant Deputy Coroners act when the Coroner is not available and have the same duties and powers.

## How we will treat you

We are committed to treating you with courtesy and sensitivity at all times, taking into account (within the constraints of the law) the religious faith and cultural traditions of the person who has died and their families.

We will carry out our duties impartially with a view to learning the facts surrounding the death so that the Coroner can fulfil his statutory responsibilities.

Whenever possible, we will protect confidentiality. However, the system is based on public court hearings and there will be times when matters that relatives, friends and others feel should remain private may, of necessity, not remain so. Explanations about the procedures in particular cases will be given, on request, where the Coroner is satisfied the person making the request has a proper interest and is entitled to the information.

## When an inquest is not needed

If an inquest is not needed after a reported death, a certificate giving the cause of death will be sent to the Registrar of Deaths within five working days of the Coroner completing his inquiries.

## When an inquest is needed

### Before an inquest

#### Interviews

If the Coroner or his staff need to interview someone about a death, they will try their best to do so only once and at a time and place convenient to the person concerned. Every effort will be made to avoid causing additional distress to relatives or close friends of the person who has died and they will be given the opportunity to have a friend or supporter with them during the interview.

Anyone who has made a statement may receive a copy if they wish. It will be provided, on request, within four working days, unless the Coroner has good reason for not releasing it.

#### Post Mortems

We fully understand that, where there is a need for a post mortem, it can be very upsetting for relatives and friends. If the Coroner decides that a post mortem is necessary, wherever possible, he will contact the immediate next of kin and provide:

- An explanation of why the post mortem is to be held and, if requested, what it involves.
- Advanced notice of the arrangements so that the next of kin may be represented by a Doctor if they wish. However, most post mortem examinations must normally be carried out as soon as possible - usually within 24 hours of the death being discovered so it may not always be practicable to give this advance notice.

Afterwards a copy of the post mortem report will be made available to the next of kin, if requested.

**Disclosure of information:** The Coroner may also, on request and at his discretion, provide copies of the report to others who are interested persons within four working days. Payment may be required for this service.

#### Arrangements for the inquest

If you are asked to attend an inquest you will be given details about:

- The date and time of each hearing (if there is to be more than one) at

least 10 working days in advance. Remember, however, that the formal opening of an inquest - for taking evidence of identity and the medical cause of death - generally takes place within two days of the death being reported.

- Details of where the court will be held and the facilities available.
- A contact telephone number and the name of a person who can be contacted for further information or enquiries.

The Coroner will also:

- Provide a leaflet explaining the purpose of the inquest and the procedures.
- Explain to witnesses and jurors how to claim for travel and subsistence expenses and for financial loss allowances.
- Find out how people wish to swear their evidence—in accordance with their religious beliefs or as an affirmation.

### Timing

The Coroner will do his best to hold the inquest at the earliest possible date. Most hearings in Berkshire take place within four months but sometimes there are circumstances outside the Coroner's control which may cause a delay. If this happens, you will be notified at the earliest possible opportunity and given an explanation for the delay. You will also be kept informed on a regular basis if the delay continues - unless the inquest has been formally adjourned to a specific date.

### Introductions

On the day of the hearing, the Coroner and his staff will identify themselves by name so that everyone attending is aware of who they are and what they do.

### Making funeral arrangements

We realise that this will be a distressing time for relatives and friends, the Coroner will ensure that the body of the person who has died is released at the earliest possible opportunity, usually within three working days.

However, this may not always be possible if there are uncertainties about the cause of death or where there may be suspicious circumstances. If this is the case, the Coroner will ensure that relatives are advised of the delay and are fully informed about why this is happening.

### Jurors

If you are selected for service as a juror you will be sent a leaflet explaining your duties and given other relevant information at least ten days before the inquest. The Coroner will also give you an indication of how long your jury service is likely to last.

### After an inquest

When the inquest is over, if you are the next of kin you will be given a written explanation of how, where and when you may obtain a copy of the death certificate.

There may be times when, to help prevent further fatalities, the Coroner will decide to make a report to a relevant person or authority, for example the Health and Safety Executive or the local council. He will do this within ten working days of the inquest and copies will be sent to all interested persons, who will also be sent copies of the replies within five days of receipt.

Copies of the inquest verdict and any documents produced in evidence will be available, on application, to anyone who is an interested person. A fee is charged for this service according to the number and size of the documents, which will be supplied within ten working days of the fee being received by the Coroner's Office.

The Coroner will also supply a copy of his notes of evidence or an audio tape recording of the evidence heard at the inquest. Again, there is a fee for this service and it may take up to six weeks for the copy or tape to be provided. In all cases, an estimate of how much the service will cost will be given to the person making the request.

### Funerals and other arrangements abroad

Every effort will be made to consider applications for permission to move the body of the person who has died to another country within five days of receiving the request (including weekends and bank holidays).

## Treasury Inquests

Coroners also have responsibility for enquiries about treasure finds. Information leaflets are available from the Coroner's Office (see back for address details).

## Correspondence

If you write to the Coroner you will normally receive a reply within seven working days of his receiving your letter. If he feels it will take longer to answer your questions to resolve the matters you have raised, he will send an acknowledgement within four working days, giving you an estimate of when you may expect a full reply.

## Your comments are welcome

The Coroner and his staff are committed to providing a service of excellence for everyone.

This is why your comments and suggestions for improvement are always welcome, although the Coroner will not normally enter into correspondence about individual cases he has completed.

There may be times, however, when - despite our best efforts - you are not happy with the standards of service. If so, we give you our assurance that your complaint will be dealt with speedily and courteously.

All complaints about the administration of the service or the conduct of the Coroner and his staff should be raised in the first instance with the Coroner himself, either in writing to:

Yeomanry House, 131 Castle Hill, Reading, Berks RG1 7TA

Or by telephoning him on 0118 901 5447. You will receive a reply within the correspondence timescales set out above.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint and want to take the matter further you should contact the Home Office (Coroner's Section), 5th Floor, Allington Towers, Allington Street, London, SW1E 5EB (telephone 0870 000 1585). The Home Office has no disciplinary powers or power to award compensation but may, in appropriate cases, refer the complaint to the Lord Chancellor who is responsible for the discipline of coroners.

Complaints about a coroner's decision or the outcome of an inquest can only be dealt with through the High Court. The Coroner's Office will explain the procedure but is unable to give legal advice.

## Performance

How the Coroner's Service is performing will be monitored regularly against the standards set out in this Charter.

## Further information

Additional copies of this Charter are available from the Coroner's Office and it is also available in large print and on audio tape on request. The Home Office also has copies of the Home Office general information leaflets, *The Work of the Coroner* and *When Sudden Death Occurs*.

ਇਸ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਪੱਤਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਹ ਦੱਸਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਬਾਰਕਸ਼ਾਇਰ ਦੀ ਪੜਤਾਲਕਾਰ (ਸ਼ੌਕੀ ਜਾਂ ਦੁਰਘਟਨਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਹੋਈ ਮੌਤ ਦੀ ਛਾਨਬੀਨ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਅਫਸਰ) ਸੇਵਾ ਤੋਂ ਕਿਸ ਪੱਧਰ ਦੀ ਉਮੀਦ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ। ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਤ੍ਰਿਕਾ ਦੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਜਾਂ ਉੜਦੂ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 0118 955 3717 ਜਾਂ 0118 939 0587 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ। (Punjabi)

یہ منشور خدمت کے اُس معیار کی وضاحت کرتا ہے جس کی امید آپ برکشائر میں کورنر سروس (ناگہانی اموات کا تحقیقاتی شعبہ) سے کر سکتے ہیں۔ اگر آپ کو اس لٹلٹ میں درج معلومات پنچابی یا اردو میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی 0118 955 3717 یا 0118 939 0587 پر ٹیلیفون کیجیے۔  
(Urdu)

The Berkshire Coroner Service covers the Reading, Windsor, Maidenhead, Slough, Wokingham, Bracknell and West Berkshire areas.

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