

23 March 2020**Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, PLACE AND COMMUNITIES****HM CORONERS' BUDGET****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide the Committee with background information about the management of the Coroners' budget and, in particular, the increase in expenditure forecast for the current financial year.

Information

2. Members requested an update report on the Coroners' budget following consideration of the Period 5 Financial Monitoring report at the October 2019 meeting of the Committee. The report had included that the Coroner's budget is forecasting an overspend of £0.5m due to an anticipated increase in the annual cost of mortuary services.
3. Nottinghamshire County Council funds the Coroners Service jointly (on a 50:50 basis) with Nottingham City Council. The City Council are the lead authority and provide the Coroners' Officers and accommodation for the service. The County Council is recharged for its contribution to the cost of the service. HM Coroners are at liberty to spend what they consider is required to fulfil their duties, and increasing costs for Coroners services has been a national issue over recent years.
4. The mortuary services contract for the Nottinghamshire HM Coroner service was previously split between Nottingham University Hospitals Trust (NUHT) and Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust (SFHT). NUHT took over the delivery for the whole contract when SFHT ceased their mortuary provision. The contract was extended for a year awaiting clarity over the national roll-out of the Medical Examiner (ME) role. The legislation around the ME's was agreed in late summer 2018 and there was no change to the way mortuary services would be delivered. Nottingham City Council then commenced work on procurement for a new contract with no significant change to previous requirements. As part of this, they made contact with all neighbouring hospital trusts to appraise them of plans as they were aware of the potential monopoly NUHT held. When bids were received, NUHT were the only tender and the price had increased substantially.
5. City Council procurement colleagues sought justification for the increase and were advised that it was due to the requirement for additional facilities which the trust would have to invest in. The City Council clarified that this was not a requirement in the contract and the price was reduced slightly. In the absence of a response to further enquiries, City Council colleagues escalated the issue to Director level and then Chief Executive level.

6. Dialogue continues between the City Council and NUHT in regard to the tender and currently, an extension is in place under revised terms whilst negotiations continue. Most recently, officers from Nottingham City Council met with NUHT in February to discuss issues and progress. A further meeting has been agreed to take place in March.
7. Officers from the County Council are in regular contact with colleagues from the City Council to ensure that every effort is made to control costs. In particular, the City have endeavoured to economise on property and staffing costs. Despite the efforts of the City Council to control expenditure, the cost of the Coroners service has increased markedly in recent years.

Other Options Considered

8. In the longer term, consideration is being given to joining with Lincolnshire in a joint procurement exercise. Opportunities for the development of a regional public mortuary will also be discussed, however this would require significant capital investment.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

9. The recommendations are made to fulfil the Committee's request for an update report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

10. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

11. The County Council has no direct influence on the cost of the Coroners Service. The service is managed by Nottingham City Council whose officers make strenuous efforts to control expenditure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. That Committee agrees to receive an update report in six months' time and considers whether any further actions are required as a result of the contents of the report.

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Constitutional Comments [KK 04/03/2020]

13. The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee.

Financial Comments [NS 09/03/2020]

14. The Nottinghamshire County Council budget for Coroners' services in 2019/20 was £966,000 and the budget for 2020/21 is £1,517,000.

Background Papers and Published Documents

- None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All