

## **Charter for Buckinghamshire**

This document should be read in conjunction with Home Office Circular, No 46/1999, details of which are at the bottom of this page.

### **General**

#### **Application**

This Charter tells you what standards of performance are to be expected in the Coroner Service, and what to do if something goes wrong. This Charter relates to the Coroner Service in Buckinghamshire.

#### **Legal position**

The Buckinghamshire Coroner Service operates within a legal framework. It is the duty of Coroners to investigate deaths reported to them which appear to be due to violence, are unnatural, are sudden and of unknown cause, or which occur in legal custody. The Coroner also carries out certain related responsibilities.

#### **Conduct**

The Buckinghamshire Coroner and his staff will treat the bereaved and other members of the public courteously and sympathetically at all times. They will have regard (within the constraints of the statutory duties) to the deceased's religious faith and cultural traditions.

Duties will be discharged impartially, with a view to ascertaining the facts surrounding a death for the purpose of the Coroner's statutory responsibilities.

Confidentiality will be preserved as far as possible within a system based on public court hearings. Explanations for the procedures adopted in particular cases will be given, on request, where the Coroner is satisfied that the person has a proper interest.

#### **Correspondence**

Written enquiries to the Coroner will normally receive a reply within 7 working days of receipt. If the matter cannot be resolved within that time, an acknowledgement will be issued within 5 working days with an estimate of when a substantive reply will be available.

#### **Contact and enquiry points**

The Buckinghamshire Coroner's Office is situated at:

Coroner's Service  
Wycombe District Council  
Queen Victoria Road  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP11 1BB  
Telephone: 01494 534939  
Fax: 01494 441591

The office is open from 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Emergency out of office hours, contact can be made through Thames Valley Police on 0845 8 505 505.

Inquests are held at various venues in the County, including

High Wycombe Magistrates Court  
Easton Street

High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire HP11 1LR  
[http://www.hmcourt-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GenerateMap.do?court\\_id=287](http://www.hmcourt-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GenerateMap.do?court_id=287)

Amersham Crown Court  
King George V Road  
Amersham  
Buckinghamshire HP6 5AJ  
[http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GenerateMap.do?court\\_id=15](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GenerateMap.do?court_id=15)

The Winslow Centre  
Winslow  
Park Road  
Winslow  
Buckinghamshire MK18 3RB  
[http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/leisure/winslow\\_centre.page](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/leisure/winslow_centre.page)

The buildings have toilets, waiting rooms, telephones, are accessible and some have refreshments facilities. Those wishing to attend court who have any special requirements for example, translating or interpreting services, they are requested to contact the Coroner's Office at least eight weeks in advance of the hearing.

A map giving directions to the location of the court will only be sent by request.

Coroners and their staff will identify themselves by name in their dealings with members of the public. Deputy and Assistant Deputy Coroners act when the Coroner is not available. In doing so, they exercise the full powers of the Coroner.

### **Inquiries not requiring an inquest**

If a death is reported which does not need to be the subject of an inquest, a certificate giving the cause of death will be sent to the Registrar of Deaths within five working days of the completion of the Coroner's enquiries.

### **Before the inquest**

#### **Interviews**

If the Coroner or his staff need to interview someone about a death, the aim will be to do so no more than once, at a time and place convenient to the person concerned. If the person wishes, they may be accompanied during the interview by a relative, friend or other person. Every effort will be made to avoid causing any additional distress to close friends or relatives of the deceased. A copy of any statement to be used at the inquest will be provided to the person who made it, on request, at least 5 working days in advance of the hearing (unless the Coroner has good reason not to release it).

### **Post mortems**

When the Coroner decides that a post mortem is necessary, wherever possible, the immediate next of kin whose details are known will be given:

- an explanation why a post mortem is necessary and what is involved, if requested;

- advance notice of the arrangements, so that they may be represented (by a doctor) if they wish (but post mortem examinations must normally be undertaken as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours of the discovery of the death). Notice may not always be practicable;
- a copy of the post mortem report, is automatically sent to the GP for the deceased who can then explain the findings to you.

After considering the results of a post mortem the Coroner may decide that an inquest is not necessary.

### **Administrative arrangements**

The Coroner will supply the following information to those asked to attend an inquest:

- the date and time of each hearing (if more than one) at least 10 working days in advance (but note that the opening of the inquest - for taking evidence of identity and the medical cause of death - will generally take place within 3 working days of the report of the death, at which point the body will normally be released);
- details of the telephone number and the name of a contact for enquiries.

In addition the Coroner will:

- provide immediate relatives with a copy of a booklet called 'A guide to Coroners and Inquest' (a copy is available at the bottom of this page) explaining the purpose and procedures of inquests;
- advise those who express a wish to do so that they may attend an inquest as an observer;
- explain to those called as a witness or juror how to claim for travel and subsistence expenses and for financial loss allowances;
- ascertain any preference for swearing evidence (e.g. in accordance with specified religious beliefs, or an affirmation).

### **Timing**

The Coroner will endeavour to hold any necessary inquest at the earliest date, usually within 4 months of the death. However, there may be factors outside the Coroner's control which can cause delay. Where the inquest is likely to be delayed, the Coroner will notify interested persons of the position, including the reason for any continuing delay, on a regular basis, unless the inquest has been formally adjourned to a specific date.

### **Release of the body**

The Coroner will release the body of the deceased for the funeral at the earliest opportunity, normally within 3 working days. Where there are uncertainties as to the cause of death, or where the death is suspicious, it may be necessary to retain the body longer for further investigation. The Coroner will ensure that relatives are advised of potential delays and the reasons for them.

### **Disclosure of information**

The Coroner will, on request and at his discretion, provide to interested persons copies of the post mortem report, for which payment may be required. These will be provided not less than 10 working days in advance of the inquest

## **Jurors**

For jurors, the Coroner will:

- send a leaflet explaining the duties of a juror at an inquest, and provide other relevant information, 10 days beforehand;
- the Coroner will provide an indication in advance of how long the jury service will last.

## **After the inquest**

At the end of the inquest, the next of kin will be provided with an application form to apply for a death certificate from the Registration Service.

If, in the interests of preventing further fatalities, the Coroner decides to report the matter to a relevant person or authority, he will do so within 10 working days of the inquest outcome. He will also send copies of his letter to all the interested persons. A copy of any subsequent reply will be sent within 5 days of the receipt.

The Coroner will supply on application:

- a copy of the inquest verdict (although this is reproduced on any death certificate);
- a copy to an interested person of the documents produced in evidence.

These will be supplied within 25 working days of receipt of the prescribed fee (which will vary according to the number and size of the documents to be copied). The copies will not be issued until the fee has been received.

The Coroner will also supply a copy of his notes of evidence. This may take up to 6 weeks to provide. In all cases, an estimate of the fee based upon the prescribed fee scale, will be given. The copies will not be issued until the fee has been received.

The Coroner/Local Authority will pay witness and juror expenses claims promptly. This will be within 10 working days of receipt of properly completed applications.

## **Applications for permission to remove a body abroad**

The Coroner will make every effort to complete his enquiries and decide such applications within 5 days of receipt of notice including weekends and bank holidays.

## **Treasure inquests**

Coroners have responsibility for enquiries into treasure finds. An information leaflet about treasure are available from the Coroner's Office.

## **Feedback and complaints**

Coroners will not normally enter into correspondence about the cases they have completed. Comments and suggestions for improvements to the Coroner Service are always welcome and can be made by contacting the Registration & Coroner's Service Manager on 01296 383521 or email [coroners@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@buckscc.gov.uk).

The aim of the Coroner Service is to provide a service of excellent so that you should have no cause for complaint, but if you do, the complaint will be dealt with speedily and courteously.

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 be able to explain the procedure on request, but cannot give legal advice (strict time limits apply).

All complaints about the administration of the Buckinghamshire Coroner Service, or the conduct of the Coroner or his staff, should be raised in the first instance with the Coroner concerned by writing to him or telephoning him. The Coroner will reply to such complaints in accordance with the correspondence timescales:

Richard Hulett, HM Coroner for Buckinghamshire  
Browns Solicitors  
The Galbles  
Princes Risborough  
Bucks HP27 0AN  
Tel: 01844 273121

If the Coroner fails to deal with the complaint satisfactorily, the complainant may refer it to the Home Office (Coroners Section, Room 972, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9AT. Tel. 0207 273 2888/3574). 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.

### **Performance**

The Coroner's performance will be monitored regularly against the standards as set out in this Charter.

### **Further information**

More detailed information is contained in the booklet 'A guide to Coroners and Inquests' which you can download at the bottom of this page.

For more information call 01494 534939 or email [coroners@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:coroners@buckscc.gov.uk)

**Other useful websites** (this site will open in a new window)

[Home Office Circular, No 46/1999](#)