

Title of Report	Confirmation of Arrangements for the Operations of the Public Mortuary
Key Decision No	AHI S280
For Consideration By	Cabinet
Meeting Date	11 December 2023
Cabinet Member	Cllr Kennedy, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Leisure
Classification	Open
Ward(s) Affected	All
Key Decision & Reason	Yes Significant impact on all communities of Hackney
Implementation Date if Not Called In	19 December 2023
Group Director	Helen Woodland, Group Director for Adults, Health and Integration

1. **Cabinet Member's introduction**

- 1.1. The Hackney Public Mortuary provides an essential service to local communities by:-
- storing the deceased pending a funeral
 - providing facilities for family members to view the deceased
 - facilitating the operation of the coronial process e.g. undertaking a post mortem
 - ensuring the legal requirements of the Public Health Act 1984 are met including that the deceased are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their circumstances.
- 1.2. The Council has committed to investing up to £1.979m in the refurbishment of the Mortuary to expand capacity, modernise the facilities and to improve the family viewing areas. This will ensure the mortuary continues to meet the legal requirements of the Human Tissues Authority who regulate the mortuary.
- 1.3. The Council also provides for a Public Health Funeral as part of the bereavement and mortuary service in a limited range of circumstances for example where the next of kin cannot be identified or the deceased died

without sufficient funds to pay for a funeral. A draft policy has been developed and is currently out for a twelve week period of consultation. The draft policy will be presented to cabinet for consideration as a key decision AHI S289 "Introduction of a policy for Public Health Funerals" on the 22nd April 2024.

2. **Group Director's introduction**

- 2.1. Following a competitive tender process Logan Construction have been confirmed as the lead contractors for the mortuary modernisation contract with a start date to commence in January/ February 2024 and scheduled completion date before the end of 2024.
- 2.2. The temporary operations of the mortuary have been agreed with the Human Tissues Authority and the local coronial district.
- 2.3. The following functions of the Hackney Mortuary which will be temporarily relocated to St Pancras during the renovation period include:-
 - receiving the bodies of deceased who have died in Hackney
 - ensuring safe and appropriate storage
 - providing for viewing facilities for the deceased's family
 - conducting any investigations into the cause of death as required by the coroner e.g. post mortem
- 2.4. There are insufficient frozen storage facilities at St Pancras for when a body needs to be stored in a frozen state. For example where a body may be received in an advanced state of decomposition or if the body needs to be stored for longer than 30 days whilst coronial investigations are undertaken. Frozen storage will be provided at Jacksons Hub in Rochester, Kent.
- 2.5. The costs associated with the transfer of a frozen body from Kent back to funeral directors in Hackney will be met by Hackney Council. This means that a funeral arranged by a family will not incur any additional costs during the temporary relocation of the Hackney Public Mortuary.

3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1. **To agree to the proposals for the temporary operations of the public mortuary to be relocated to St Pancras for the duration of the rebuild.**
- 3.2. **To agree to the frozen storage requirements of the deceased to be stored at Jacksons facility as agreed with the Human Tissues Authority.**

4. **Reason(s) for decision**

- 4.1. The current facilities at Hackney Mortuary are beyond their lifespan and need expansion and modernisation
- 4.2. The extensive renovation work required would not be possible without closing and temporarily relocating the mortuary.

5. **Details of alternative options considered and rejected**

- 5.1. To maintain the mortuary at another location in Hackney- no such facility exists.
- 5.2. To undertake the improvement work whilst the mortuary continued to operate- the nature of the required work is very extensive and it would not be possible to maintain the mortuary within the building whilst renovation work was carried out.
- 5.3. For the deceased who need to be frozen to be stored at St Pancras or another London facility- we were unable to identify another suitable alternative at a price that provided best value to the Council.

6. **Background**

Policy Context

- 6.1. Hackney Council has already agreed to provide funding for the renovation and expansion of the mortuary.
- 6.2. Maintaining the functions of the Hackney Mortuary by relocation during the building work supports the Council's strategic objectives for a Fairer and Safer Hackney by reducing the Public Health risks associated with the storage of the deceased.
- 6.3. The renovation of the Hackney Mortuary will provide for a more energy efficient building supporting the Council's plan for a Greener Hackney.

Equality impact assessment

- 6.4. The temporary facilities at St Pancras provide for accessible access for families to view the deceased.
- 6.5. The additional transport costs that would have been incurred to a family in arranging a funeral for a deceased person who had to be taken to frozen storage will be met by the Council during the temporary relocation of the mortuary therefore reducing the economic impact on poorer families.

Sustainability and climate change

- 6.6. The renovated mortuary will provide a more energy efficient building and improved fridge/freezer facilities therefore reducing the climate impact of the day to day operations of the new mortuary.
- 6.7. Wherever possible the renovation work will seek to reduce, reuse or recycle materials removed during the construction process.

Consultations

- 6.8. A formal 12 week consultation will be held on the proposal to introduce the Policy on Public Health Funerals.

Risk assessment

- 6.9. The risk of renovation work over running or not delivering to specification is being managed through ongoing contract management and there are contractual financial penalties within the contract.
- 6.10. In the event of over running work the temporary arrangements can be extended and the additional costs offset by the financial penalties within the rebuild contract.

7. Comments of the Interim Group Director, Finance

- 7.1. The Council has allocated £2m for a Mortuary refurbishment project aimed at expanding capacity, modernising facilities, and enhancing family viewing areas to comply with the Human Tissues Authority's standards. Logan Construction has secured the lead contractor role through a competitive tender process, to commence work in early 2024 and complete renovations by year-end.
- 7.2. During the renovation period, Mortuary operations will temporarily move to St Pancras, following agreements with regulatory bodies and the local coronial district. Key functions like body reception, safe storage, family viewing, and investigations into causes of death will relocate to St Pancras, ensuring continued service provision.
- 7.3. However, St Pancras lacks adequate frozen storage facilities, leading to the arrangement of frozen storage at Jacksons Hub in Rochester, Kent. The Council pledges to cover the costs of transferring frozen bodies from Kent back to local funeral directors in Hackney. Families arranging funerals during this transition won't bear any additional expenses due to the Mortuary's temporary relocation.
- 7.4. Any associated costs relating to the temporary relocation of Hackney mortuary services including frozen storage arrangements has already been built into the budget allocated for the Mortuary refurbishment project. The costs will need to be carefully managed by the service over the duration of

the temporary arrangements for the Mortuary to ensure costs are contained within the allocated budget.

8. Comments of the Acting Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services

- 8.1. In accordance with Article 5.2 of the Council's constitution the Elected Mayor and Cabinet shall carry out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council. Section 5.5 (b) authorises Cabinet to set priorities that contribute to the life and development of the borough.
- 8.2. Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to bury or cremate the body of a person in their area where no suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body has been made.
- 8.3. Cabinet would fulfil the Council's statutory and its constitutional obligations by approving the recommendations as set out in 3.1 and 3.2 of this report

Appendices

None

Background documents

None

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