

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 16th of July 2024

LOCATION: Hybrid

TITLE: Report on Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2023 Statistical Return and Report of the Chief Coroner

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To provide information contained in the Senior Coroner's 2023 Report

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE PURPOSE: Requested INFORMATION:

BACKGROUND:

The Senior Coroner for Ceredigion prepares an annual report ('Statistical Return') on deaths reported to the Coroner, which is sent to the Ministry of Justice for publication as part of the Coroners' Statistics on the UK Government website. 2023 statistics are available at [Coroners statistics 2023: England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coroners-statistics-2023-england-and-wales).

The Senior Coroner is required to provide a Local Authority report to the Council to be published on the Council's website and includes relevant statistics on current/concluded cases (with comparison figures for previous years), an update on Coroner work and relevant issues, a summary of the Coroner's team and staffing arrangements, and any future plans.

The Coroner Report for 2022 was brought to the Committee on 12th March 2024. The committee noted the report and its contents but also agreed to:-

- Write to the Senior Coroner requesting a report within 3 months to the Council which should be published on the Council's website, and include relevant statistics on current/concluded cases (with comparison figures for previous years), an update on Coroner work and relevant issues, a summary of the Coroner's team and staffing arrangements, and any future plans as it was important to receive a Local Authority report, to support the Council with its public body transparency and accountability arrangements, given the fact that the Council makes financial and service provision to the Ceredigion coronial area.

A letter was sent to the Coroner by the Committee Chair on 13th of March 2024.

The Senior Coroner replied to the letter on the 22nd of March confirming he would produce a report within the 3 month deadline. As at date of writing, the report has not been forthcoming

CURRENT SITUATION:

1)Ceredigion Statistical Return for 2023

The Ceredigion Statistical Return for 2023 is yet to be published but the report is expected by the end of June 2024 and will be presented to the next Committee in meeting on 8th of October 2024.

2)Report of the Chief Coroner

The Annual Report of the Chief Coroner for 2023 has now been published and can be found at this link:[chief-coroner-annual-report-2023](#). The Report outlines the findings of the Chief Coroner for 2023. These are:

- The service has insufficient personnel
- There is an unacceptably wide variation in the provision by local authorities of material resource
- There remains a general need for more salaried Area Coroners
- The 'triangle of responsibility' creates operational difficulties
- Judicial independence is impacted by the current resourcing structure
- Court security arrangements vary considerably and are rarely adequate
- Recent work increases are likely to be permanent
- Delay
- Judge-led inquests
- The appointment of coroners
- Coroner support

Prospective action

- engaged with the Senior Coroner and relevant local authority to try to encourage improvement
- challenged many local authority representatives about inadequate office and court accommodation
- encouraging local authorities and police forces to consider simplifying the funding model in their coroner areas by arranging for the relevant local authority to assume responsibility for providing and line-managing the coroner's officers
- provide general education on constitutional matters of particular relevance to coroners.
- plans to implement the statutory medical examiner scheme and reform the death certification system with effect from April 2024
- To educate local authorities on security considerations

Conclusion

- many coroner areas has not yet been modernised to reflect the deeper implications of those national reforms.
- need for structural change to simplify and streamline the governance and management of individual coroner areas
- moving away from the outdated 'triangle of responsibility' to adopt a simpler and more efficient system of governance.
- shortage of pathologists

The report also looks at the number of cases over 12 months old for 2023 compared to 2022. Ceredigion had 10 cases over 12 months old for 2023 compared to 2 in 2022.

3) New Chief Coroner

A new Chief Coroner has been appointed on the 25th of May 2024, namely Her Honour Judge Alexia Durran for a term of three years. More information on the appointment can be found at this link: [Appointment of new Chief Coroner - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#).

4) Coroners Statistics 2023

The National statistics for the Coroner for 2023 have been published and can be found at this link:

[Coroners statistics 2023: England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) The report shows that in 2023 across the UK there were 36,855 inquests opened which is a 2% increase on 2022. This is the highest number of inquests opened since the start of the annual time series in 1995, excluding the years when DoLS investigations were required. Reported deaths which led to inquests represented 19% of all the deaths reported to coroners in 2023, an increase from 17% in 2022. The number of inquests opened as a proportion of deaths reported in 2023 varied across coroner

areas, from 4% in Ceredigion to 39% in Liverpool and the Wirral. However, most coroner areas held inquests for between 10% and 20% of all deaths reported.

The Coroners Statistics Annual 2023 Tables report also shows the following local information: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/663cfe66993111924d9d31f0/Coroners_Statistics_Annual_2023_Tables.ods

Table 11: Reported deaths, post-mortems and inquests by coroner area 2023, and comparison with 2022

Coroner Area and Region	2023 cases					2022 cases					% change, 2022 to 2023		
	Reported Deaths 2023, inc. NFA ¹	Post-Mortems 2023	PMS as % of reported deaths 2023	Inquests opened 2023	Inquests as % of reported deaths 2023	Reported Deaths 2022, inc. NFA ¹	Post-Mortems 2022	PMS as % of reported deaths 2022	Inquests opened 2022	Inquests as % of reported deaths 2022	% change in reported deaths, inc. NFA ¹	% change in PMS	% change in inquests
Ceredigion	324	142	44%	12	4%	378	178	47%	22	6%	-14%	-20%	-45%

Table 12: Inquest conclusions recorded, by coroner area, 2023

Coroner Area and Region	Conclusion category										Total, all conclusions ¹	
	Killed lawfully and killed unlawfully	Suicide	Drugs/Alcohol Related	Road Traffic Collision	Lack of care or self-neglect	Death from industrial diseases	Death by accident or mis-adventure	Deaths from natural causes	Open	All other conclusions ¹		
Ceredigion	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	5

Table 13: Average time taken to process an inquest (in weeks), by area, 2019–2023¹

Coroner Area and Region	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ceredigion	23	36	38	35	14

5) Inquests

The Coroner’s Officer was contacted to provide Inquest data for 2024 to date. However, no information has been received to date. An update will come to the next meeting in October 2024.

Has an Integrated Impact No Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why

Summary: This report does not represent a change in policy or strategy.

GENERATIONS:

Long term:

Integration:

Collaboration:

Involvement:

Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S):

That the Committee:

- Notes the contents of the report

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

Monitoring of the annual information relating to deaths reported to the Ceredigion Senior Coroner.

Appendices

N/A

Contact Name: Elin Prysor
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Date of Report: 20.06.2024
Acronyms: N/A