

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



7

Title:	Surrey County Council Response to Covid - providing a temporary body storage facility until March 2022
Divisions Affected:	All Boroughs and Districts
Key Decision:	Yes
Decision taken under delegation by virtue of:	Cabinet decision 31 March 2020 Min ref: 41/20

Summary

Surrey County Council (SCC) has a statutory responsibility to provide the support required by Surrey’s Coroner to fulfil their function. This includes administrative support and all necessary infrastructure, including court buildings and mortuary provision.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 body storage within Surrey was experiencing high pressures with hospital mortuaries having insufficient capacity during winter months. There was also a significant backlog in post-mortems. Similar pressures have happened in previous years when due to increases in death in the winter and other staffing issues, body storage capacity had been stretched and post-mortems had not been conducted in a timely manner. This issue has been recognised by SCC and pipeline provision has been made for a new public mortuary within the capital programme.

During the pandemic, emergency mortuary provision was created at Headley Court in Epsom. In previous winters it has been provided on an ad hoc basis, utilising temporary hospital storage and funeral director’s facilities. This required the constant movement of the deceased around the county. The latter is not sustainable moving forwards, and the continued use of temporary storage has been flagged by Human Tissue Authority as a risk.

To address the immediate risk of lack of capacity it is proposed to retain the temporary facility at Headley Court until March 2022. This will allow contingency to mitigate any risk of additional COVID-19 deaths during the winter months as well as provide for winter pressures. In the meantime work will continue on the provision of a medium term interim facility and the longer term public mortuary.

This option assumes that central government will continue to meet the costs of leasing the portacabins.

Decision made

Decision made:

It was AGREED that:

1. Headley Court body storage facility will be retained until the end of March 2022, subject to continued Government support.

Reasons for Decision:

To enable the continuation of additional body storage capacity to respond to the risk generated by the Covid-19 pandemic and winter pressures experienced by the Coronial Service.

Decision taken by:	Steve Owen Hughes – Director Community Protection Group Tim Oliver – Leader of Surrey County Council
Decision taken on:	15/05/2021
To be implemented on:	Backdated to 09/06/2020

Alternative options considered

The alternative is to provide contingency at another location but there is a significant risk that this would not be operational in time and/or of sufficient capacity.

Summary of any financial implications

Retaining a body storage facility at Headley Court until the end of March 2022 is expected to cost c.£0.5m, subject to the outcome of ongoing discussions with the landowner and other providers, and the Government's continued provision of portacabins. Costs will be met within existing budget envelopes, including Government grant provided to meet the costs of responding to Covid-19.

Declarations of conflicts of interest

None

Consultation/Process Followed

Decision taken in consultation with Leader & Chief Executive of Surrey County Council

Background Documents

None

Exempt: