

BRIEFING PAPER

Transportation of Bodies on behalf of HM Coroner



1. BACKGROUND

The Coroner for Plymouth, Torbay and South Devon is required to arrange the removal of bodies from the place of death or body holding area to the designated mortuary in order to allow the investigation of sudden unexpected death, unnatural deaths and those required to be reported to the Coroner under the Coroner's Act. This service is a statutory service in which the Coroner needs to work closely with police and other statutory agencies such as the Health and Safety Executive to preserve the evidence and establish the identity of the deceased to an appropriate level, and establish the cause of death. Removal of the body by an undertaker to a public mortuary or designed holding place is required by the Local Authority to comply with Public Health legislation especially where it is a destitute body.

Plymouth is the relevant authority for the combined coronial jurisdiction for Plymouth, Torbay and South Devon. Torbay Council also has a contract for body removals, which ceases at the same time as Plymouth's current Contract. As part of the Service Level Agreement arrangement, Torbay's contract is the only legal contract that they hold in their own right and it was agreed that any new contract going forward reflects the whole Coroner area. Plymouth has agreed to take the lead on any new procurement process.

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

The project will provide a 5-year Contract for contractors to provide a service to transport deceased persons between the place of death to the Coroner's chosen destination(s). The majority of bodies are currently transported to the Department of Anatomical Pathology at University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust in Plymouth. In some cases, bodies may need to be transported to other locations including long distance transfers within the UK for forensic and non-forensic post mortems.

In certain cases when there is a sudden death other than by natural causes, it is the responsibility of the Coroner to examine the cause of death. This may result in a post mortem examination being carried out. It is also the Coroner's responsibility to remove bodies from the scene of death to the mortuary, pending investigation into the death.

The current Contract expires 28 May 2022 and has one contractor.

3. PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Following a procurement options appraisal, it was determined that a competitive procurement exercise should be undertaken utilising the 'Open' Procedure in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

The Tender opportunity received a good level of interest, with 9 organisations registering an interest, of which 2 submitted Tenders, 1 opted out and a further 6 not providing a Tender response.

The received Tender submissions, were evaluated in accordance with the overall evaluation strategy set out above, and were independently evaluated by Council Officers, all of whom had the appropriate skills and experience, in order to ensure transparency and robustness in the process. In order to ensure fairness of the process the evaluation of Quality, Social Value and Price were split, with Price information being held back from the Quality evaluators.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION

A 5 year Contract at £130,000 per year (totalling £650,000).

We anticipate a material reduction in expenditure for the transportation of bodies for both Plymouth and Torbay and we hope to quantify this over the next few months. The number of collections vary on a year to year basis and the new contract will be delivered part year for 2022/2023.

Most significantly, the Successful Tenderer has not submitted an additional charge for recovery of a dirty or decomposed body which is likely to bring more favourable billing.

The new service arrangements will provide continuity of service to the Coronial function and it is proposed to effectively mirror the current arrangements in terms of specification and outputs. This will be the first year of a combined approach to the transportation of bodies across the Coronial jurisdiction.

5. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that a contract be awarded to the highest scoring Tenderer to deliver services on behalf of HM Coroner within Plymouth, Torbay and South Devon.