

## GUIDANCE No.20

### ASSISTANT CORONERS

The purpose of this Guidance is to set out, for Senior Coroners and Local Authorities, the Chief Coroner's expectations as to Assistant Coroners ('ACs').

#### Assistant Coroner sittings

1. There is an expectation that ACs should be offered, and should sit, a minimum of 20 sitting days per year per appointment, except from some historic appointments where a minimum of 15 days was agreed<sup>1</sup>. The number of days may vary depending on an AC's individual terms and conditions ('T&Cs').
2. It is expected that ACs will offer days suitable to the jurisdiction, which may include block bookings. This expectation will be discussed at a meeting with the Senior Coroner ('SC'), to take place on appointment and then on an annual/twice a year basis. At this meeting it is expected the SC and AC will discuss sitting commitment, diary commitments and allocation of appropriate work/inquests.
3. To help support management of ACs' sittings, this guidance sets out the recommended process which should be followed. It is always recommended that ACs keep their own records.
  - A. Each relevant Local Authority ('LA') should annually provide a rolling report to the Chief Coroner's Office [on the prescribed form] which details how many days their Assistant Coroners have sat and full details of any dispensations that have been previously agreed. It is asked that the report is sent by 30 May with information as of 31 March.
  - B. It is expected that the report will also confirm what communication the LA/SC have had with the AC. This should cover:
    - a. if no sitting days have been booked by the end of Quarter 2 of a financial year, the AC should be contacted by the LA, on behalf of the SC, and reminded of their sitting expectations.
    - b. if by the end of Quarter 3 the AC still has not arranged any sittings, or has not sought a dispensation, it is expected the SC will make contact to establish the position. If contact is by telephone or in person, it should be followed up in writing.

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<sup>1</sup> "Sitting" should be read as including both court activity and associated back-office work.

- C. The Chief Coroner, supported by the Chief Coroner's Office, will review the report (at the end of Quarter 1), to review non and low sitters from the previous financial year.
- D. To assist the coroner area, provided the Chief Coroner is satisfied with the data, the Chief Coroner will, at the end of a financial year, write to an AC who has not:
  - a. provided a reasonable explanation for not sitting any days towards their minimum sittings or
  - b. meaningfully engaged with the process.

The letter may refer to the fact that failure without a reasonable excuse to meet sitting requirements can be grounds for disciplinary action under the Judicial Conduct Rules 2023 rule 47(n).

- E. If agreed with the SC, the Chief Coroner may also write to an AC who has sat fewer days than required, requesting they endeavour to increase their sittings to their minimum requirements or seek a dispensation.

### **Dispensations from sitting**

- 4. From time to time, it may be appropriate for a SC to agree with an AC to reduce the minimum sitting days they are to sit. This must be reviewed annually and a record of the dispensation, when given, should be kept and sent to the Chief Coroner's Office on the prescribed form.
- 5. Total dispensations from sitting may be given in exceptional circumstances. Notification should be sent by the AC to the Chief Coroner's Office [chiefcoronersoffice@judiciary.uk](mailto:chiefcoronersoffice@judiciary.uk) copied to the relevant SC after an appropriate conversation(s), which should include the LA.

### **Training**

- 6. New ACs are expected to attend the mandatory Assistant Coroner induction training which now falls into two parts. They will be required to attend part one of the induction course (usually in December of the year they are appointed) before they undertake any inquest work, including inquests in writing. This is in line with other judicial appointments. They should also attend part two of the induction course (usually in June of the following year).
- 7. All newly appointed ACs, who do not hold any other judicial appointments, must also attend the 'Faculty Induction' course as part of their initial training.
- 8. ACs are then expected to attend the mandatory annual Coroner Continuation Course. It is suggested that in line with other judicial appointments newly appointed ACs should be offered two days of sitting-in before part one of the mandatory induction training and two days after the completion of that

component. Any completed sitting-in would count towards the AC's minimum sitting requirements and paid in the same way as a normal sitting day.

## **Key Skills**

9. [The revised Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework can be found on the Judicial Intranet](#). The updated Framework reflects the skills required of the modern judiciary, and it is encouraged that all current and aspiring members of the judiciary read it. The Framework sets out what is expected of those in judicial roles. A simplified structure now covers three areas: Legal and Judicial Skills, Communication Skills and Personal Qualities, and Effective Working. A fourth section details the skills required for judicial leadership roles. The updated Framework is to be used to support the development and recruitment of judicial office holders.
10. SCs are expected to satisfy themselves that a newly appointed AC (with no or limited previous coroner experience) has sufficient knowledge of the key skills required before acting alone, making reference to the Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework referenced above. SCs should make arrangements so that newly appointed ACs may learn and develop the necessary experience.
11. Opportunities should always be provided for a newly appointed AC to learn the procedures of the local office and for in-house training and shadowing. It is also important that the SC should work together with all coroners in the team and hold meetings, preferably when all coroners can be together, to discuss local issues of importance.
12. It is the responsibility of the SC to ensure ACs are competent before they act in any coroner capacity without supervision.

## **Resignation of office**

13. Pursuant to paragraph 12 of Schedule 3 to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, a coroner may resign office by giving notice in writing to the relevant authority for the area. To ensure formalities are completed, it is asked that a coroner copies the Chief Coroner's Office ([chiefcoronersoffice@judiciary.uk](mailto:chiefcoronersoffice@judiciary.uk)) into the written notice of resignation that they send to the relevant authority.

## **Preparation time**

14. In line with the rest of the judiciary, the booking of ACs should take into account reasonable preparation time and additional fees should usually not be paid.
15. If an AC carries a case load for which they have case management responsibility (e.g. instructing an expert, managing disclosure and redaction of documents) they should be allocated sufficient time in the office to manage this (alongside other routine work).

16. If an AC requires extra preparatory time to prepare for a lengthy or factually complex inquest, this should normally be factored into a sitting/office day. Where a case requires a high degree of focus, a sufficient period of time should be given without other duties, rather than expecting the AC to undertake their preparation around signings and/or progressing other inquest files.
17. In exceptional cases an agreement may be reached between the SC and AC to allow an AC to undertake some paid preparation away from the office.
18. There is no provision for additional time for judgment writing, as remarks and conclusions are expected to be prepared within the time for which the AC is booked.

### **Travel Arrangements**

19. Where an AC holds multiple appointments, it is expected that they will associate the costs of any travel and subsistence to the LA where they will be sitting and in line with that area's policies.
20. If an AC holds another salaried appointment (i.e. SC or Circuit Judge), they are expected to travel in line with the policy that applies to the appointment with which the travel is associated. If there is a need for upgrades to an AC's travel arrangements to facilitate work associated with their salaried appointment, the increased cost should be funded by the salaried jurisdiction.

**HHJ ALEXIA DURRAN  
CHIEF CORONER**

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