

REPORT TO CABINET

Date of Meeting:	29 March 2022
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Nia Jeffreys, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support
Responsible Officer:	Iwan Evans, Head of Legal Services.
Author:	Siôn Huws, Propriety and Elections Manager
Title of Item:	Appointment of Senior Coroner for the North West Wales Area

Recommendation for the Decision:

- (a) **Delegate the power to the Head of Legal Services to prepare a job description and personal specification and an appointment process for the posts of Senior Coroner and arrange for advertising;**
- (b) **To establish a Panel that includes the Chief Executive, Head of Legal Services and a Head of Department in order to draw up a short list and interview applicants and appoint an Assistant Coroner as necessary.**

Reason for the need for a Decision:

1. Dewi Pritchard Jones, the former Senior Coroner, retired in November 2020. Kate Sutherland, the Assistant Coroner at the time, was appointed as acting Senior Coroner while the appropriateness of merging the North West Wales Coroner's area with other areas was considered. We are now in a position to proceed with the appointment of a permanent Senior Coroner. The need may arise in the future to appoint another Senior Coroner. There is a need to ensure that the delegated arrangements for the process are established and clear.

Reasoning and Justification for the Decision:

2. England and Wales are divided into coronial areas and in each such area there will be a Senior Coroner and at least one Assistant Coroner. The individual services are financed by local authorities and as the North West Wales Coronial Area includes Gwynedd and Anglesey, the service is financed jointly with the Isle of Anglesey Council. Notwithstanding this, Gwynedd Council is the relevant authority for the area which means that there is a statutory duty on us to meet the costs related to running this service. The relevant authority is also responsible for appointing the Senior Coroner and Assistant Coroners for the area notwithstanding that they will not be employees of the authority but rather independent judicial office holders.

3. The arrangements for appointments are set by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and by the Chief Coroners Guidance. Every appointment will need to be approved by the chief Coroner and the Lord Chancellor and it also a requirement that the Chief Coroner approves the appointment process to be followed, and the shortlist drawn up in order to conduct interviews.

4. The Chief Coroner has issued guidance on the appointment of coroners (Chief Coroner's Guidance Note 6 - Appointment of Coroners). It states that consideration must be given to merging an area with one or more other coroner areas before appointing a new permanent Senior Coroner.

5. We have now received a response from the Chief Coroner on the position as far as the review is concerned. This follows from discussions held with the UK Government Courts and Tribunals Department and both Gwynedd Council and Denbighshire Council (the relevant authority for the North Wales (East and Central) Area). Following these discussions, the Chief Coroner decided that he would not seek to merge these Coroner areas and that we should therefore appoint a permanent Senior Coroner for the North West Wales Area.

6. The authority therefore needs to form a panel to shortlist, conduct the interviews and decide on the appointment. The composition of the panel is a matter for the authority, but the Chief Coroner or representative may attend the interviews and will usually do so in the case of the appointment of a Senior Coroner.

7. The Panel will be advised by the Propriety and Elections Manager and the Chief Coroner's representative

8. Once the panel has come to a decision, a report will need to be sent to the Chief Coroner (if he was not present in the interviews) describing the process followed and the reasons for proposing the successful applicant or applicants. The approval of the Lord Chancellor will also be sought.

Views of Isle of Anglesey County Council

9. If the Coroner Area contains more than one authority then the relevant authority must consult with the other authority before appointing a Senior Coroner. We will therefore involve the Isle of Anglesey County Council in the process as appropriate.

Any consultations undertaken before making the decision:

Chief Finance Officer – Nothing to add from the perspective of financial propriety

Monitoring Officer – Report prepared by the Legal Services.