

## Equality Impact Assessment

### Provision of Public Mortuary Service

<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Environmental Services Community Protection 154 Blackhorse Road, E17 6NW</b>
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<b>Head of Service:</b>	<b>Linda Wacey</b>
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<b>Lead Officer:</b>	<b>Garry Seal</b>
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#### **Names and Roles of people carrying out the EIA**

**Andrew Bourlet, Health & Safety Section Manager**

**Garry Seal, Public Protection Group Manager**

### **Section 1 - Introduction**

#### ***Identify the aims of the Service***

- Facilities and staff are provided to enable Home Office pathologists to conduct post-mortem examinations of people who have died in circumstances where the Coroner deems that the physical cause of death must be ascertained or confirmed

#### ***What is the rational behind the service and its delivery?***

- The service supports the legal duties of the Coroner. It helps to give justice to the relatives of the victims of crime, and reassurance to the relatives of those who die without obvious cause. It is not a mandatory service, but the service cannot be closed without Home Office permission.

#### ***Is the service aimed at a particular client group?***

- Any member of any client group could be a victim of crime or die in unexpected circumstances.
- Almost all of the deceased admitted were living in Waltham Forest

#### ***How is the service delivered***

- The mortuary is based, with the Coroner's Service, next to the Queens Road Cemetery
- Two mortuary technicians (currently only one) control the admission, storage, preparation and discharge of the deceased

- Most post-mortems are carried out at short notice. They require co-ordination with pathologists, forensic officers and the Coroner. Out-of-hours working is sometimes required.
- The mortuary has a role in accommodating the large number of fatalities which could result from a disaster outside the borough
- There is little direct contact with bereaved families

## **Section 2 - Broad Needs Analysis of the Service Area**

### Training:

- The Section Manager has been trained in equality awareness and is aware of the cultural needs of existing clients.
- The Group and Section Manager have been trained in undertaking equality impact assessment.
- The mortuary technician has been trained on the Race Amendment Act, and Disability Awareness.
- Managers and Officers – received customer care training.

### Service Accessibility:

- Awareness of the service with professional partners, e.g. the police and funeral directors, is very high
- Awareness of the need for post-mortems is lower amongst client groups but the first contact in such cases is through other services, e.g. Coroner's Officers or Registrar of Deaths
- An Access database is used to collect information about the deceased, including some equalities monitoring information.
- Liaison with funeral directors about the arrangement of funerals could have an impact on relatives

## **Section 3 - Data collection and analysis**

- In 2004, 440 deceased people were admitted to the mortuary. Of that number, 22 were Muslim and 3 Jewish.
- Women represent approximately 45% of the total. The deviation from 50% being probably due to the greater number of men dying from suicide, accidents and crime.
- As the numbers of people from an ethnic minority reach old age increases, so will the proportion of deceased people admitted to the mortuary.
- Homicides per 10,000 population, by ethnic group, combined data for 2000/01 to 2002/03 show that black people are 500% more likely to be victims and for Asian background 75% more likely than white people. However, because homicide is rare, the actual numbers of victims are only a few percentage of the total admitted to the mortuary.

#### **Section 4 - Consultation**

- On two occasions, local mosques have been visited to explain the role of the mortuary and discuss any concerns
- There is frequent, informal consultation with the Coroner.
- A visit to a meeting of local funeral directors is planned in September/October 2005.

## Section 5 - Assessment

The principal characteristics profile of the people served by the mortuary regarding:  
are:-

Race  
Sexuality  
Gender  
Age  
Disability  
Religion/faith

- ~~Differences of race, sexuality, gender and age are not considered significant in the provision of this service.-~~ The service is provided consistently regardless of race, sexuality, gender, or age. (Andrew, could you highlight if there is a different provision for children. Also if we included a sixth category of a socio-economic group, is there any special provision for people who do not have an ability to pay?).
- ~~Disability is relevant in so far as there is a~~ A viewing room is occasionally used by the public. The area is accessible to wheelchair users and has a toilet for people with disabilities.
- The religion of the deceased subject to post mortem is very relevant. Whether a post mortem is required is not a decision of the service, but to some extent the treatment of the deceased is as explained below.-

### Current Practice:

- The deceased who have been identified as Muslim or Jewish are prioritised to allow the undertaker to collect the body early in the day and thereby comply with religious tradition for quick burial. Post mortems have been arranged on a Saturday morning in the case of a Muslim baby or child death.
- If at all possible, we avoid opening the head of Muslims and Jews in compliance with religious tradition
- At the request of local Muslim religious leaders we do not brush the hair of the deceased, and try to avoid handling women directly (currently only men work at the mortuary).
- The retention of organs removed for detailed examination is tightly controlled by law, with a strict paper trail. It is the pathologist's decision to remove organs or take tissue samples is the, but our service has a role in ensuring continuity and reclamation. It is recognised that this is particularly upsetting for some religious groups, so the circumstances are explained sensitively.
- Cloths used to cover the deceased when being viewed by relatives no longer have religious symbols on them. There are only a few viewings each year.

## Section 6 - Adverse Impact

- Many people do not understand the role of the Coroner, and consequently the

mortuary, in the deaths of their loved ones.

- Modest daily storage charges are made from seven days after the post mortem. This charge is normally made through funeral directors but is ultimately paid by relatives or the estate, who could face some hardship in extreme cases. The purpose of the charge is mainly to encourage funeral directors to move the deceased to their own or private storage to free up space for more urgent cases. Again reiterate if there is special provision for those who cannot pay.

### **Section 7 - Monitoring and Review of Service**

- The service is due to be reviewed this year during 2005/6.

### **Section 8 - Conclusions and Recommendations**

- The service is highly specialist and linked very closely to the Coroner's service which is outside of the Council's control.
- The client groups dealt with are not self-selecting, so the importance of sensitive handling is great.
- Changes to the way the deceased are dealt with have been made following consultation with local mosque officials.
- It is recommended that the service finds out more about the wishes of religious groups other than Muslim, Jewish and mainstream Christian, such as Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and minority Christian groups.
- It is recommended that the service send information to all local mosques ~~and~~, synagogues, temples and gurdwaras, to explain ~~our~~ the role of the service.

### **Section 9 - Publish the Results**

- A summary of our policy to accommodate the special needs of different groups will be put on the Council's relevant web page as part of a fuller explanation of our role
- The Registrar of Deaths will be asked to give relatives a summary of the mortuary's role, equalities action and storage charges.

Date Completed: 29<sup>th</sup> July 2005

#### Improvement plan should include actions for:

1. Many people do not understand the role of the Coroner, and consequently the mortuary, in the deaths of their loved ones (I suggest producing a leaflet eg like the service promise leaflets, and providing info on the internet.

2. The client groups dealt with are not self-selecting, so the importance of sensitive handling is great.
3. It is recommended that the service finds out more about the wishes of religious groups other than Muslim, Jewish and mainstream Christian, such as Hindu, Sikh , Buddhist, and minority Christian groups.
4. It is recommended that the service send information to all local mosques , synagogues, temples and gurdwaras, to explain the role of the service.
5. The Registrar of Deaths will be asked to give relatives a summary of the mortuary's role, equalities action and storage charges.
6. A summary of our policy to accommodate the special needs of different groups will be put on the Council's relevant web page as part of a fuller explanation of our role