

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Long term lease of Coroner's Court and associated offices (SC/2025/56)	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Cabinet	DATE 10 th December 2025
STRATEGIC CONTEXT <p>We Make Camden is our joint vision for the borough, developed in partnership with our community. Co-locating the Coroner's service to a single location means we are better able to support the area's Senior Coroner discharge her duties in a more effective and timely manner. In doing so it enables the police, bereaved or other relevant agencies hold those responsible for the death of an individual(s) to account and ultimately bring justice to the loved ones of the deceased.</p> <p>The Way We Work is the Council's response to We Make Camden. There are challenges in the current model where the coroner's service is delivered across three sites (we are the only area in London not to operate from a single site). Operating from a single site will enable us to address any service shortcomings in the way the Senior Coroner is supported and ensure that the cause of death can be determined as efficiently as possible, with greater support and empathy to the bereaved. It will also facilitate service enhancements that enable the Senior Coroner to align the service to better reflect individual, community, and religious needs.</p>	
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>Camden Council is the lead authority for the Inner North London coronial consortium. This consortium consists of Camden, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. The Consortium's role is to support the Senior Coroner – Mary Hassell.</p> <p>This report asks Cabinet to agree to enter a 25 year lease on the new coroner's court and associated offices in Bow Road, Bow (Tower Hamlets). The report also provides an update on the improvement programme underway and the notification from the Police that they are ceasing their contribution to the resourcing of the coroner's office which then passes this requirement to local authorities.</p> <p>The report is coming to the Cabinet because the length of the lease and total cost for its duration require a Cabinet decision.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information Report to Inner North London Consortium 9th May 2022 "Inner North London Coroner's Court Co Location"</p>	

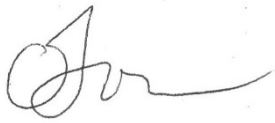
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. Cabinet is recommended to approve in principle the entering into a 25 year lease with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets on the Bow Public Hall, Bow Road, Bow E3 3AA on behalf of the Inner North London Coronial Consortium for which Camden is the lead authority based on the outline heads of terms in Section 2.6.
- II. To delegate to the Director of Recreation and Public Safety, following consultation with the Borough Solicitor and Director of Finance, the authority to enter into detailed negotiations and should they be content with the outcome of those negotiations thereafter authority to enter into a lease.

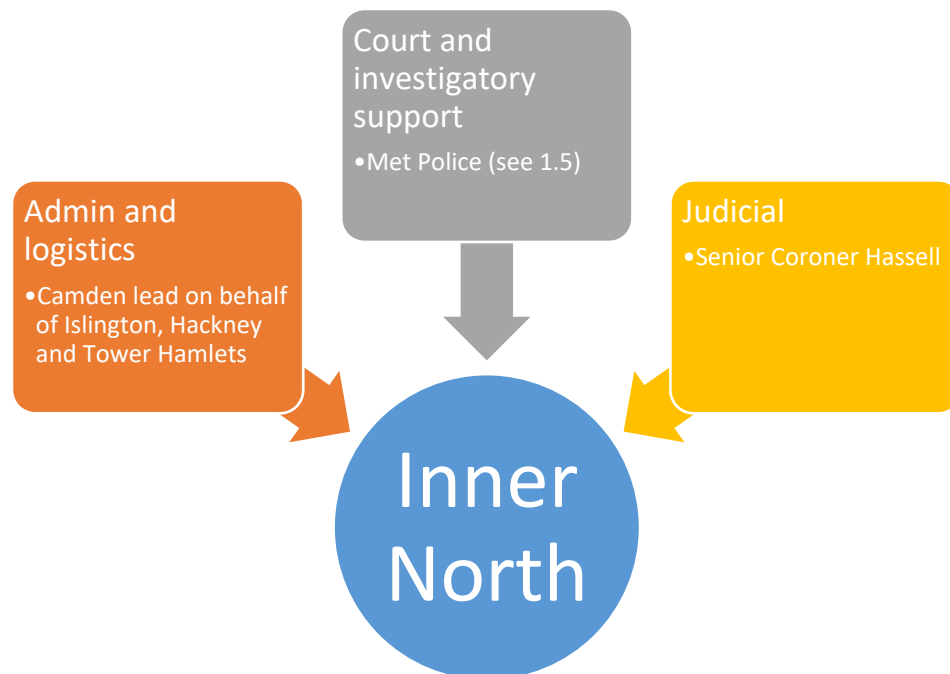
Signed:



Date: 28th November 2025

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Coroner's Court is a judicial body that investigates certain types of death, particularly those that are unnatural, violent or where the cause is unknown. The Coroner themselves are independent judicial appointments whose prime responsibilities are to decide on the cases of death and conduct inquests.
- 1.2. The Coroner's service is currently delivered via a tripartite arrangement within London, with London split into seven consortium areas. The arrangements see Camden (on behalf of Inner North London area consortium partners Tower Hamlets, Islington and Hackney) providing administrative and logistical support to the Coroner, the Police providing court and investigatory support and the Senior Coroner herself being responsible for the judicial oversight of the service.



- 1.3. The arrangements are underpinned by the provisions of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and our consortium has been in existence since the mid-1980s. There is a formal agreement in place, dated 1986, that allocates the cost in equal 25% proportions across the four partners. A revised and updated agreement has been developed and will be signed off by the partners at their next meeting in early December.
- 1.4. These tripartite arrangements present many challenges which led in January 2024 to the Chief Coroner issuing a newsletter, "10 years post reform", in which he observed that local authorities and the Metropolitan Police service may need to change their approach to resourcing and service delivery to provide a more consistent resourcing model. Furthermore, in March 2024 the Chief Coroner addressed local authorities at the Chief Coroner's conference outlining that the tripartite model delivering the Coroner's service was sub optimal.



- 1.5. Working with the police, consortium partners and the coroner we have been developing a roadmap to an improved service that addresses many of the concerns and service shortfalls currently being experienced. This road map covers the following:
- Transferring the function of Coroner's Officers from the Police to Local Authority control to ensure a seamless support service for the coroner and bereaved. It is currently expected this will take place in April 2026.
 - Additional short term resources being added to deal with current staff shortages and backlogs, funded by the Police and Consortium partners.
 - The modernising of the Inner North London estate to provide facilities that are fit for purpose for all stakeholders and users.
 - The co-location of all staff from three sites to a single building at Bow. We are currently the only area in London that does not operate from a single site.
 - Addressing the resourcing barriers that are preventing us from introducing an out of hours service. Both the coroner (this has been confirmed by the Senior Coroner) and the consortium partners are committed to introducing such a service as soon as possible. However, the issues relating to coroner's officer vacancies and the operational impact of being spread across three sites means that there is not enough resilience within the service to have confidence that it can be introduced in a sustainable manner that does not further negatively impact on the core Monday to Friday delivery. Once we have the transfer for coroner's officers completed, we will engage staff on suitable terms that means we can move forward with introducing this service. This will enable the introduction of the service with greater confidence. With a transfer of Coroner Officers in April, this will have a target introduction date in 2027/28, this will however be brought forward as soon as possible.
 - Maximise the benefits from modern ways of working, including non-invasive autopsy.
- 1.6. A detailed review in 2022 of our current office and court facilities concluded that the overall office accommodation was not fit for purpose and identified that Bow Public Hall could accommodate all staff in one location allowing the creation of three, possibly four, courts in a single location. As such it was identified as the preferred option of the consortium and work to agree this recommendation, the specific design works with the Senior Coroner and negotiation the commercial agreement with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Freeholder) has proceeded to allow this decision.
- 1.7. The Council has welcomed discussions with faith communities on challenges with the existing service and the road map of the service and we will continue to meet impacted community representatives on a regular basis to ensure transparency and open communication in the delivery of our shared vision for the service.

2. PROPOSAL AND REASONS

2.1. A detailed accommodation review in 2022 concluded that the overall office accommodation was not fit for purpose. There were three main reasons for this:

- The accommodation was aged and not designed to meet modern office and public building standards.
- Inner North London is the only coroner's area in London whose staff aren't located in one building with the coroner, and this provides challenges in building a coherent and effective service. If we are to fully exploit the benefits of the transfer of coroners officers then co-location is key.
- There are a lack of facilities to serve the bereaved, solicitors and the increasing complexities of modern inquests within the current estate.

2.2. The review identified that Bow Public Hall could accommodate all staff in one location allowing the creation of three, possibly four, courts in a single location. As such it was identified as our preferred option. Work was initially undertaken to add additional capacity in the form of one court at Bow for jury inquest trials. We have been working with partners to agree both the lease (with Tower Hamlets as landlord) and the additional capital funding required to refurbish the building, in readiness for co-location should Cabinet agree that it is the right option.

St Pancras Coroners Court <i>Camley Street</i> <i>London N1C 4PP</i> - 1 court	
Poplar Coroners Court <i>127 Poplar High Street</i> <i>London E14 0AE</i> - 1 court	

Bow Coroners Court

*Bow Road
London E3 3AA*

- *1 jury inquest court*

*2.4 sets out future
designed facilities*



2.3. The significant under resourcing of Coroners Officers by the Police and the limited leadership provided is compounded by the workforce being split over three sites and the amount of remote working. The transfer of Coroners Officers to the Council provides a real opportunity to co-locate all teams into one building. This will contribute to us addressing significant service issues. Whilst the drivers for this move are primarily around improving service delivery and performance, it is hoped that timely management of cases and more efficient service should see some revenue savings once the service is established.

2.4. When considering the suitability of any site the facilities should provide for:

- Security of tenure
- Accessible location
- Accessible facilities
- Ability to run three courts concurrently
- Space to accommodate the courts, private rooms for senior/assistant coroner, offices for administrative/investigative staff, legal teams, families, witnesses (including both private and public rooms)
- Sufficient security recognising the risk profile (recently increased) of conducting inquests
- Appropriate connectivity
- Welfare facilities

2.5. The facilities designed into the centralised court at Bow will include:

2 nd floor	Senior Coroner office Assistant Coroner office Shower and toilet Kitchen
1 st Floor	Large jury inquest court Jury room Jury tearoom and toilet Toilets (x3) including accessible

Ground floor	Medium court Lobby reception Admin offices Coroner officers' office (x2) Toilets (x2)
Basement	Toilets (x3) including accessible Waiting room Small court Tea room Store Assistant Coroner offices (x2) Family rooms (x3) Communications room Boiler Room Store

2.6. The lease has been negotiated between LB Camden's legal department (on behalf of the Consortium) and LB Tower Hamlets (on behalf of the Landlord). It is envisaged that the commitment for LB Camden in entering the lease on behalf of the Consortium is:

- The lease runs for 25 years
- We are committed to paying an annual rent of £135,000 (that is reviewed every 5 years). The lease sets out how that review is to take place and a process for settling any dispute between the parties
- That LB Tower Hamlets is responsible for ensuring that the building is insured but we are responsible for paying for the insurance. We do currently cover the cost of insuring our existing three Courts
- LB Tower Hamlets is responsible for the maintenance of the building, to which we will be liable for a service charge. The lease contains a clause that both parties will use their best endeavours to agree a programme of maintenance. This is considered a risk on a building of this historic nature and the programme remains an area of negotiation
- We may make structural alterations to the Property with the Landlord's consent in line with Grade II Listed Status of the Property, such consent not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed.
- We must pay an annual service charge for any reasonable and proper expenses incurred by the Landlord in providing the Landlord's Services
- We have the freedom to co-locate any service associated with the running and support of the Court.

Appendix 1 is the floor plans extracted from the full design and refurbishment proposal

The age and listed status of the building mean programmed maintenance and works are complex and potentially costly. As the draft lease contains provisions that Camden, on behalf of the consortium, are responsible for paying for the maintenance of the building beyond the initial capital expenditure this will be a focus of further discussion.

- 2.7. To date, the consortium has spent £149,158 on creating the additional inquest court to provide interim capacity to deal with Covid backlog. In addition to this, we have also spent £49,748 on Stage 2 consultancy work relating to creating the combined future designs. The total spend to date is £198,906 to develop the interim inquest court to respond to the covid workload and design works for the use of the whole building.

Bromley Public Hall	Spent	Estimated Budget
Original Refurb, 2022 - 2023	£149,157.83	
Stage 2 consultancy	£49,748.00	
Stage 3 & 4		£51,487.00
Works estimated budget		£1,021,807.50
Sub-total:	£198,905.83	£1,073,294.50
TOTALS		£1,272,200.33 (£318,050 per consortium member)

- 2.8. The anticipated spend for the remaining refurbishment is £1,073,295.00, which will only be spent if Cabinet agree to the lease. However, there are several points to consider along with this estimate:
- The scope of works only covers works deemed necessary to create the courts – it does not include other maintenance works as detailed by Tower Hamlets. If it is decided to include these works to reduce inconvenience further ahead, then this will affect the costs.
 - This budget estimate is from June 2024 and the impact of inflation will need to be assessed once we have a better idea of what we're delivering.
- 2.9. It should be noted that as part of the consortium agreement Camden's contribution is 25% of the expenditure with the other partners sharing liability equally. The relationship is underpinned by an agreement between the partners, and the consortium has been in operation since 1986. See finance section for more detail.

As with any partnership arrangements there are risks associated if the consortium breaks up or one partner does not pay. Whilst the legislation places statutory obligations upon partner authorities the revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be signed by the consortium partners prior to signing the lease. The lease and MOU should also mitigate risks to Camden as far as possible if we cease to be Lead Authority for any reason, facilitating the transfer to the appropriate new Lead Authority.

- 2.10 The proposal is that we therefore enter into a 25-year lease with Tower Hamlets on Bow Public Hall enabling the service to co-locate into one location. Cabinet should note that whilst we will be entering into the lease on

behalf of the Consortium it is Camden that retains primarily liability as the signatory to the lease.

We can enter into a 25-year lease agreement, and it is permissible to delegate this decision to Director of Recreation and Public Safety. Before signing the Director should work with the Borough Solicitor and Director of Finance to ensure that this agreement represents a balance between service needs and value for money. Whilst the lease has been subject to extensive negotiations between our legal services and their Tower Hamlets counterparts where necessary further detailed negotiations should take place before exercising the delegated authority.

3. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option 1 – Do nothing

3.1. This would continue to run the service from the three current sites. There are many positives to this approach:

- It is the least disruptive to service delivery and would provide for greater continuity in the short term,
- Having three sites across the four boroughs does mean that the service will operate on a more local footprint for our communities,
- It gives more flexibility to staff as to what office they wish to work from and may make us a more attractive employer.
- There is no capital expenditure associated with this decision.

The counter argument to this option is:

- The review that took place in 2022 did show that the current court/office provision is not fit for purpose (although this doesn't mean we could not update the facilities at the three current courts but that would be at additional cost),
- We would not be able to leverage the service improvements that having the whole team co-located would bring,
- It is unlikely that we would be permitted by the landlord to occupy the court at Bow without taking on the whole building, meaning that we would need to re-locate that court.

Option 2 – reconsider other options

3.2. The other alternative option would be to undertake another options appraisal and seek alternative single site. Given that the feasibility study took place in 2022 much has changed in commercial property since then. Whilst a potentially attractive option, Cabinet should hold in mind that the facilities required, as set out above, means that there will be limited commercial or public estate available that meets these specific requirements.

Option 3 – proceed with agreeing lease at Bow (preferred option)

3.3. The benefits to this option are:

- Provides certainty and security of tenure for the coroner's service.
- We can deliver service efficiencies and improvements through co-locating our staff.

- Having staff in one location addresses the concerns relating to isolation and lack of support for staff members.
- We will have the best possible facilities designed directly around the needs of the service, the bereaved families and key stakeholders.
- It is the Senior Coroner's preferred choice.

The counter argument is:

- We will be locked into a 25 year agreement which gives us less flexibility with regards our estate.
- There will be disruption to the service currently run from Bow during the physical refurbishment.
- The costs as outlined above.

4. WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1. The risks covered in this section primarily relate to the lease and proposed refurbishment. Other workstreams such as the transfer of coroner officers have their own detailed plans but are touched on here as appropriate.

Risk	Mitigation
Increased costs	Any refurbishment does carry the risks of increased costs during the delivery phase. The procurement of the contractor and their oversight will be undertaken by experts from the Camden Corporate Accommodation Programme Team in conjunction with Tower Hamlets. Camden's Corporate Accommodation Programme Team have delivered the first stage of the inquest court well within budget and the tender itself will mitigate our exposure to increased costs in line with Council procurement policies.
Time scale slippage – especially listed building consent and issues found during refurbishment	The timescale set out in the current plan allows for a total of 18 months not taking into account any delays with obtaining listed building consent. Whilst not optimal the service can in the short term continue to run from three sites. The main pressure point will be the actual refurbishment works, as this will require the court at Bow to relocate a temporary site. Whilst this is planned for 6 months the interim measures we put in will have the capacity to run for at least 9 months, providing an adequate buffer.
Supplier failure	Our procurement processes require us to carry out relevant due diligence on any preferred bidder.
Court relocation during refurbishment	We will have at least a 6 month lead in time to relocate the Court at Bow. The other two sites will operate as usual and can accommodate additional staff. A temporary site will be put in place to replace the jury court at Bow that can accommodate the court for a minimum of 9 months

Service failure during or post transition of coroner's officers	We are investing in additional staff to help support service delivery through transition. We have already designed and evaluated the job family to be as prepared as possible. Our pragmatic approach of working with regional colleagues whilst also addressing specific issues in our area means that we can address any issues through either mechanism.
Issues within the consortium	The consortium has been operating under an agreement since 1986. It should be noted the consortium has agreed to proceed with the lease and relocation (subject to Cabinet agreeing to the key decision). The London Borough of Hackney have expressed the desire to take the lease and other matters relating to the Coroner's service as a key decision through their relevant approval process. This had to be hoped to have been achieved by the time the report is presented to Cabinet. However, we were informed in September that this would not be the case, but they still intend to do so. Given the need to progress with refurbishment due to the inadequate current provision we still recommend that Cabinet agree to enter into the lease. Our legal advice is clear that this is a decision for Camden and the consortium itself is supportive of moving quickly on this, given the delays in getting to this point.

5. CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. We have a duty in legislation to take into account the views of the senior coroner when putting in place support and accommodation. She is supportive of the proposals.
- 5.2. The proposals have been worked out in close consultation with our consortium partners, as they are equally liable for the provision of support to the coroner. They have indicated that they are supportive of the proposals at Senior Officer level. Partners were encouraged to engage relevant governance processes within their authorities prior to this decision. Whilst this is not legally required it is an important step to ensure that all consortium members are fully aligned.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Section 24 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 places a statutory obligation upon us to provide accommodation and support to the coroner.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. This report asks Cabinet to agree to enter a 25 year lease on the new coroner's court and associated offices in Bow Road, Bow (Tower Hamlets)
- 7.2. This section only focuses upon the capital and revenue costs associated with the refurbishment and building/rental costs associated with the move to Bow. The costs associated with other matters such as the introduction of the out of hours service or the transfer of Coroner Officers will be addressed through the normal revenue budget setting process.
- 7.3. Estimated capital costs are a total of £1.272m (Camden's contribution £0.318m). £0.199m has already been spent primarily establishing the additional court. The capital budget available for this project is £1.355.
- 7.4. The ongoing lease costs are £135,000 (Camden's contribution £33,750) per annum, subject to regular reviews. This budget is available in the Coroners revenue budget. This will be reviewed every 5 years, The lease sets out how that review is to take place and a process for settling any dispute between the parties. It must be noted that LB Tower Hamlets are responsible for the maintenance of the building, to which we will be liable for a service charge.
- 7.4. Section 14 of the lease places an onus on Camden to pay for ongoing maintenance of the building. At this stage this is an unquantified risk and steps should be taken to ensure that lease mitigates this risk as far as possible.
- 7.5. As part of the consortium arrangements Camden are responsible for paying 25% of these costs, with the remainder being the responsibility of the other partners.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are the general risks associated with any construction work and as part of the tender process we will require perspective bidders to set out how they will minimise any environmental impact.
- 8.2. The building itself is listed, and any work will require listed building consent.
- 8.3. Our current estate is aged as stated in the body of the report. The move to a single, refurbished, site will enable us to have a building that meets modern environmental standards.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1. If Cabinet agrees to enter into the lease agreement the timetable would roughly be an 18 month design and construction phase. The construction itself taking approximately 6 months to complete.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 –floor plans for Bow refurbishment

REPORT ENDS