Jury Service - Key Information

What happens if I am accepted to serve as a juror?

If you are accepted on to the jury, we will write to let you know.

It is very important that you attend on the date of your summons. If a problem comes up before the start of the inquest, for example if you are ill, you must let us know straight away, as we may be able to excuse you or defer your service.

If you fail to turn up without a reasonable excuse, you may be brought to court by the Police and face a fine.

What will happen on the first day of jury service?

Please bring photo ID with you on the first day of the hearing. If this causes you any difficulty, please contact the Coroner's Office prior to the start of the hearing.

When you attend the court building on the first day of the hearing you will be greeted by either the Coroner's Officer or one of the Coroner's Court Support Volunteers who will show you to the jury room and let you know where the facilities are.

There is no formal dress code for the Coroner's Court. However, the family of the person who has died will be there and we ask jurors to dress reasonably smartly out of respect. It is not necessary to wear a suit, smart casual clothes are fine.

There is often some waiting between court sessions, so you may want to bring a book or something to help pass the time. You will be provided with a locker in the Jury Room for you to store your personal possessions whilst you are in court, all possessions must be locked away and you are not able to access any electronic devices (including smart watches) unless on a designated break. You can bring a packed lunch if you wish, or there are several cafes just over the road from the court building.

A Coroner's jury consists of between 7 and 11 people. We always call more than 11 jurors to allow for sickness or last-minute problems, so some jurors will be stood down and will not need to serve on that day. You may be asked some questions on the day to ascertain if you

have any links to the case being discussed and this may lead to you being stood down, we may also ask for some volunteers to be stood down but this will be discussed on the day.

If you are stood down, we will pay any loss of earnings or travel expenses for the time you attended but not for the whole period of the inquest.

Once the members of the jury have been finalised, you will be shown through to the courtroom. You will need to take an oath or affirmation* that you will give a true conclusion at the inquest according to the evidence. You can do this on the holy book of your choice or in a non-religious way.

If you would like to take the oath on a holy book other than the New Testament, you will need to bring your own preferred holy book and let the Court Officer know on the day of the Inquest

Key People in the court room:

The Coroner – a legal professional who is responsible for investigating deaths in particular situations

Properly Interested Persons – People or agencies with the right to actively participate in the inquest proceedings. This always includes the family of the deceased but can also include agencies such as hospital trusts, mental health trusts, the prison service etc. They will usually be legally represented.

The Coroner's Officer – someone who works within the Coroner's Office who will work to ensure the smooth running of the inquest process, they will be the key point of contact for members of the jury if there are any questions.

Starting the case

The Coroner will introduce themselves and the properly interested persons. They will then begin by explaining what an inquest is in law and giving a summary of the facts of the case. This is not part of the evidence, but is simply to set the scene.

They will explain some very important rules for jurors. It is vital that you do not discuss the case with anyone else, including your family or partner. You must not do independent research, for example on the internet. You must not attempt to communicate with anyone involved. If you do, it may affect the case and could even mean it has to be stopped and restarted with a new jury. You may also face penalties. Please take the Coroner's directions on these issues very seriously.

Once the Coroner has given their introduction, they will call the first witness and the evidence will begin.

Hearing the evidence

There will be several witnesses at the inquest and this is decided by the Coroner, with input from the other Interested Parties, in advance of the hearing. The Coroner will call each one in turn and, in most cases, will take them through a statement or report that they have prepared in advance. The Coroner will ask any questions that they have. Then there will be questions from the properly interested persons.

If you as a juror have a question that you do not feel has been answered, you may ask it. The Coroner will give an opportunity at the end of each witness' evidence for you to do this. This is done by you writing your question down and providing it to the Coroner's Officer who will take it to the Coroner. The Coroner will review the questions and ask those that are relevant to the scope of the inquest.

Sometimes very interesting and important issues come out through jurors' questions, so always feel free to ask.

You will be given a notebook and you may want to write down key points, especially if it is a long case. You may also be given some documents or photos to look at.

Making your decision

Once all the evidence has been heard, the Coroner will sum up the facts to refresh your memory. They will give you a choice of conclusions that you can come to and legal directions on how to decide between them.

All the jurors will then go out into a separate room and discuss the evidence. The Coroner will advise you on how best to do this and how to manage if you disagree. When you have all come to a decision, one of the jurors will fill in a form stating the findings of fact and the conclusion. You will all go back into court and one of the jurors will read out the form.

Making these decisions may take some time. If it carries on for more than one day, you will go home as normal overnight.

Once this has been done, the Coroner will make some concluding remarks and you will be free to go. It is important to keep confidential what you discussed while you were deciding your conclusion even after the case has finished.

If you have any practical needs or problems during the inquest, please let the Coroner's Officer know - we are here to help.

How long will I be needed for?

Your summons form will have an approximate end date for your service. We cannot predict everything that will happen when the evidence is heard, and the inquest may last slightly shorter or longer than we anticipated. You will need to stay until it is finished.

What if I encounter a problem?

Once the inquest starts, all the jurors must be in court for every session. This is to make sure that everyone hears the same evidence. You cannot take a day away for illness or personal reasons and then come back.

If you have a problem that may stop you coming to court, you will need to let us know straight away. You will be expected to make every effort to attend. If you are to be excused, we will need written proof.

The important thing is always to keep in touch with us so that we know what is happening and can support you as much as possible.

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*** Oath of Juror**

I swear by Almighty God that I will diligently inquire into the death of _____ and make findings of fact and come to a true conclusion according to the evidence.

Affirmation of Juror

I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will diligently inquire into the death of _____ and make findings of fact and come to a true conclusion according to the evidence.