

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	24 January 2017
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Public Mortuary – Status Report
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/16/298
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise on the legal framework surrounding public mortuaries; local arrangements; policies and procedures adopted to ensure effective service delivery and future proposals to provide a modern purpose build facility in compliance with best practice guidance, and a status report on the Aberdeen City Council mortuary in the light of a proposed National review of mortuaries by Scottish Government.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Notes the content of the report;
- b) Request that, once information is available, a further report be submitted on the scope of the national review of mortuaries and on completion of any subsequent audit of the city mortuary;
- c) Requests that on completion of discussions with partners, a further report be submitted with a business case for a new mortuary facility; and
- d) Refer this report to the Audit, Scrutiny and Risk Committee for information.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the provision of a replacement mortuary facility are at this stage not known. It is likely that the most efficient method of provision will be as a partnership arrangement with other

public sector stakeholders. A business case will be submitted to this Committee.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Council has a statutory duty under the Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008 to provide, or ensure the provision of, a mortuary and Post Mortem facility. Recent events reported in the media have indicated an interest in the quality of mortuary provision by both the general public and Scottish Government. In the interests of the public purse it is important that Mortuary facilities are delivered as efficiently as possible while having regard to relevant standards and legislation for dignity for the dead, requirements for public health, health and safety of mortuary staff, and the environment.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

Background

The Public Mortuary is situated below, and is structurally part of the Police Scotland offices on Queen Street. Aberdeen City Council's Public Mortuary ("the City Mortuary") provides a Grampian-wide service in a partnership arrangement with Aberdeenshire Council and The Moray Council, Shetland Islands Council, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland. A Service Level Agreement prescribes the legal arrangements and cost allocations. Staff at NHS Grampian Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI) mortuary provide assistance and support to Council employees on procedures and practices and on health and safety matters, while the ARI mortuary also provides storage accommodation when the City Mortuary is full. The City Mortuary is unusual in that it is one of only two local authority run mortuaries in Scotland. The majority of Scottish authorities have a joint arrangement with their local NHS board for body storage and post mortem examination.

The Public Mortuary has insufficient capacity for the service provided and at present there is an agreement with NHS Grampian to use the ARI mortuary to provide additional storage space. Both the Public Mortuary and ARI mortuary are old, many facilities outdated and neither have scope to expand or develop the existing premises. Furthermore, Police Scotland are reviewing their estate, including the use of the Queen Street premises. Due to these constraints, discussions commenced in 2015 regarding the potential provision of a joint NHS Grampian/Public Mortuary.

Statutory duties and local arrangements

The Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 places a duty on local authorities to provide, or ensure the provision of, premises and facilities for the reception and temporary storage of the bodies of persons who die in the authority's area; and premises and facilities for the post-mortem examination of such bodies.

No professional qualification is required for staff working in a mortuary where they only manage and record the receipt and dispatch of the deceased from the premises. However, like many other public mortuaries, the City Mortuary provides facilities for post mortem examination. Post mortems are carried out by a pathologist contracted by the Crown Office and assisted by mortuary staff. The mortuary staff who assist in post mortems require to hold at least a Level 3 Diploma in Anatomical Pathology Technology. The more advanced Level 4 Diploma enables assistance in more complex post mortems and 'high risk' cases where there is greater risk of infection. Three members of staff are employed at the Aberdeen mortuary, a Senior Anatomical Pathology Technician (APT qualified to level 4), a Trainee APT (qualified to level 3 and training for the level 4 qualification) and a recently appointed Trainee APT who will commence the Level 3 course in February.

A thorough review of operational procedures and , risk assessments at the mortuary was carried out in 2015 with support from an external consultant. New processes were developed to ensure more effective management systems and improved practices to protect the health and safety of staff and visitors to the premises, including undertakers, police officers, Crown Office personnel and contractors. These procedures and risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated in accordance with Council policies.

Assurance of the operation of the Mortuary

NHS mortuary design is defined in Scottish Health Planning Note 20 "Facilities for Mortuary and Post-Mortem Room Services Design and briefing guidance".

Hospital mortuaries provide a wider range of services than public mortuaries and receive regular external inspections from the Human Health Authority and other agencies to ensure the facilities comply with national guidelines for NHS mortuaries.

There is no formal external overview of the public mortuary and, indeed, there are no equivalent operational standards for non-NHS mortuaries. However, the Forensic Pathologists and the APTs who work in the mortuary, plus the Environmental Health staff who manage the facility, all have professional qualifications and are aware of standards to be achieved in terms of protecting public health and health and safety issues. In addition, those who work with the deceased are

trained and aware of standards in terms of treating both the deceased and the bereaved with dignity and respect. 6 monthly health and safety inspections are undertaken internally by Protective Services staff, and the premises are periodically inspected by the Council's health and safety team. Staff working at the mortuary, including the Crown office contracted forensic pathologist, do flag up faults and any matters of concern with Protective Services managers as and when they arise.

The facilities at the Public Mortuary are currently adequate to deliver mortuary and post mortem services. Operational practices follow the guidance for NHS mortuaries, however the age, layout and size of the premises restricts our ability to fully comply with all of the physical requirements of this standard.

Limitations of the current premises are listed below:

- Insufficient deceased storage facilities (additional storage is provided, at a cost, by Grampian NHS);
- The design restricts the ability to operate a workflow that properly separates 'dirty' (i.e. post mortem functions) from 'clean' areas (ie. office, deceased reception area, toilets) and the installation of footbaths, requiring additional measures to be in place for staff moving from one area to another;
- Equipment and fittings are outdated, and so more labour intensive to clean than modern facilities, and cannot accommodate bariatric bodies;
- Equipment design requires significant manual handling of the deceased; (modern facilities incorporate mechanical systems and other measures to limit manual handling);
- While the viewing room is adequate for deceased identification, visitors are unable to access the room to touch the deceased as recommended in the NHS guidance. Identification of the deceased is from the Police Scotland side of the building where welfare facilities for visitors are limited;
- There is no observation room for visiting police officers, Crown Procurator Fiscal staff and pathology students to view post mortems – observation can only take place within the post mortem/examination areas providing a greater risk of contamination of outer clothing and 'clean' areas;
- Limited storage space for boots, protective clothing and cleaning materials;
- The quality of staff changing and welfare facilities is compromised by the size of the facility with a cramped changing area and no gender separation, and the office also serves as a rest room;
- No designated waiting area for visitors, including police officers, photographers, students and the Crown Procurator Fiscal; with the pathologist's office being used for this purpose.

Proposed National Review of Mortuary Facilities

Following the recent parliamentary debate on arrangements for mortuary provisions in Scotland, Aileen Campbell, Minister for Public Health and Sport committed to a review and renewal of Scottish Government guidance for mortuary facilities in all NHS Boards, and to investigate mortuary facilities in their entirety across Scotland. Members will be informed of the format of any proposed review and new guidance and the implications for the Aberdeen Public Mortuary when information becomes available.

While the scope of the forthcoming national review is not known, recent events and the parliamentary discussion suggest that it is likely to cover:

(a) compliance with the standard for NHS mortuaries (the majority of LAs use the local NHS mortuary for storage of the dead) and possibly a review of the standard itself to check that it is adequate,

(b) public access to mortuaries and facilities for viewing the deceased, and treatment of the deceased and the bereaved by mortuary staff, pathologists and the police,

(c) a review and possible clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders,

It is possible that one outcome of the review could be an audit regime for mortuaries.

If the National mortuary review audits the city mortuary against the NHS mortuary standard the limitations listed above are likely to be highlighted as non-conformances. Due to the constraints of the size, layout and construction of the facility, it is not physically possible to upgrade it. There is no alternative facility in the area.

Proposal for a shared NHS Grampian/North-east public mortuary

A draft Business Case outlining options for a new facility has been prepared and work is progressing with NHS Grampian and other partners. A workshop for NHS Grampian and Council managers took place on 11 January 2017 to discuss possible options and timescales and to explore the development of a work plan.

Benefits of a joint NHS/public mortuary could include:

- Purpose built, modern facility complying with the latest guidelines, designed and fitted with equipment to maximise control of safety risks and biological hazards and meet the expectations of the bereaved and the wider public.

- Capacity to meet the future demand of increased population, bariatric body storage and potential flexibility to accommodate a mass fatality incident.
- Eliminate the need to transfer bodies between the two existing mortuaries, reducing time and cost.
- Additional savings through shared management, staff, equipment, facilities and services.

Contingency Plans

Local authorities must also consider arrangements and have contingency plans in place in the event of a mass fatality event. Co-ordination of Emergency Planning across the north-east councils is delivered by the Grampian Emergency Planning Unit (EPU), a joint team based in Aberdeen City Council. The EPU or Incident Control Team would determine any emergency mortuary requirements, including the type and location. Potential temporary deceased storage facilities have been identified in the Aberdeen area and are subject to regular review.

Ideally a new, shared public mortuary could incorporate flexible space that could be brought into use as an emergency mortuary facility.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

This report highlights the limitations of the public mortuary in terms of access and facilities for the public and a future report will outline how these will be addressed through plans for future mortuary provision in the north east.

Improving Staff Experience –

This report highlights the limitations of the public mortuary in terms of staff facilities and a future report will outline how these will be addressed through plans for future mortuary provision in the north east.

Improving our use of Resources –

This report outlines the existing partnership approach to using public resources to provide public mortuary services in the north east. It is likely that partnerships will be relied upon for continued provision in the future.

Corporate -

Local Outcome Improvement Plan: Investment in Infrastructure

Strategic Infrastructure Plan: A better image for the City

The development of a new facility would offer opportunities for joint working with partner organisations.

Public –

This report is likely to be of interest to the public in the light of recent publicity about mortuary facilities and Scottish Government's pronouncement about a review of mortuary services.

This report provides information about a council facility but, as yet, no changes to existing procedures and practices, and so does not require an Equality and Human Rights impact assessment or a privacy impact assessment at this time.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The forthcoming review of mortuary services by Scottish Government, uncertainty about the future of the building as part of the City Centre Master Plan, and the increasing demand for the service due to population growth present a medium risk to the Council, and partner local authorities, in terms of their ability to meet their statutory duty to provide storage and post mortem facilities for the dead. Discussions are already underway with partners and stakeholders with a view to providing a replacement facility in the coming years.

It is likely that, in the absence of any other standard, the existing facility will be audited against Scottish Government standards for NHS mortuaries. Due to the constraints of the existing building, there is little that can be done to improve the mortuary and so this will impact on the reputational risk of the council.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Parliamentary debate 27 October 2016:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10582>

Scottish Health Planning Note 20 – facilities for Mortuary and Post-Mortem Room Services design and briefing guidance

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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