

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Chief Executive

Date: 3 September 2020

Subject: Pan-London Mortuary Management Funding

Report of: Director of Resources – Rhian Davies

Report author: Kayode Adewumi – Head of Coroner’s and Mortuary Services

Summary

This report seeks urgent approval to sign an inter-authority legal agreement which commits London local authorities to fund the temporary mortuary provision up to March 2021 and to pay the Council’s proportion of the Pan London mortality management costs into the London Borough of Camden’s sinking fund by close of business on Friday, 4 September 2020.

Recommendations

1. Appendix 1 to this report is not for publication on the basis that it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as set out in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).
 2. That approval be granted to sign an inter-authority legal agreement which commits all London local authorities to fund the temporary mortuary provision up to March 2021.
 3. That the Council’s proportion of the Pan London mortality management costs as set out in Appendix 1 be paid into the London Borough of Camden’s sinking fund by close of business on Friday, 4 September 2020.
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Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Creating a compassionate council	A coordinated Pan London mortality management approach will ensure a respectful and dignified laying to rest of the deceased.

Financial Impact

The cost to London local authorities is set out in Appendix 1. This covers the period through to March 2021. The data on which costs have been calculated is based on the government's realistic worst-case scenario for a second surge of COVID-19 in London.

When the mortality management function is no longer required, any funds not used in the sinking fund (plus any interest) will be reimbursed back to London local authorities on the same basis on which payments were made into the sinking fund.

If pan-London mortality management is required for a period beyond March 2021, then another upfront investment by January 2021 prior to the extension of the contract will be required for Westminster City Council to continue its stewardship of mortality management. In the event this occurs, the further funds will be requested from London authorities.

The Council is recording all additional spend decisions and will monitor lost income to make full use of any government funding. To date a national COVID-19 unringfenced emergency funding package of £3.7 billion has been announced of which the Hammersmith and Fulham share is £13.507m. The government has also indicated that it will fund administrative costs of other government measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic through new burdens funding for business rate changes, business rates grants and the Hardship fund.

Should government funding be insufficient, and no further grant be awarded, then costs will fall to be met:

- from savings in other council budgets
- use of contingency sums, the 2020/21 unallocated contingency is £3m.
- by use of reserves and balances.

This potential impact on the Council's future financial resilience will continue to be monitored and will inform future financial planning.

Legal Implications

The Council is being asked to participate in an inter-authority legal agreement for mortuary provision during the COVID 19 pandemic. The proposal is for Westminster

City Council to undertake the mortality management function whilst the London Borough of Camden will take on the responsibility for ensuring finances are secured.

The Chief Executive has delegated authority to approve this proposal and commit the Council to this expenditure. The terms of the agreement have been reviewed and are appropriate in the circumstances.

Implications verified by Janette Mullins Chief Solicitor (litigation) 020 8753 2744

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Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report – none

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Proposals and Analysis of Options

1. An agreement has been reached between the 33 Leaders and Chief Executives to fund the provision of temporary mortuary facilities and the mortality management function on a pan-London basis during the pandemic.
2. The decision to agree this approach has been based on the current modelling assumptions for a second surge of COVID-19 deaths. The modelling estimates excess death levels and indicates that additional temporary mortuary capacity is required.
3. Each local authority has been requested to sign an inter-authority legal agreement which commits London local authorities to fund the temporary mortuary provision up to March 2021. A deposit of their proportion of mortality

management costs, in full, must be paid into the London Borough of Camden's sinking fund by close of business on Friday, 4 September 2020.

New Governance Arrangements

4. Under the new governance arrangements:
 - Westminster City Council will enter into the necessary contractual arrangements for pan-London temporary mortuary provision and undertake the mortality management function.
 - London Borough of Camden will take on the responsibility for ensuring finances are secured.
 - Expenditure will be vetted by a Finance Oversight Cell which has now been established as part of the transition management arrangements. These costs will be reported to the Leaders and Chief Executives of all London local authorities on a monthly basis.

Reasons for Decision

5. The Council has been requested to sign an inter-authority legal agreement which commits London local authorities to fund the temporary mortuary provision up to March 2021. Our allocation of the mortality management costs must be paid into the London Borough of Camden's sinking fund by close of business on Friday, 4 September 2020.

Equality Implications

6. The equalities implications of this decision have been considered to be neutral.

Implications *verified by: Fawad Bhatti, Social Inclusion Policy Manager, tel 07500 103617*

Risk Management Implications

7. Covid planning in advance of winter is essential to manage predicted excess death levels in the event of a second surge of infections and sadly, deaths. The report proposes a coordinated Pan London mortality management approach in line with council priorities. Responsibility for secure management of the funds will rest with the London Borough of Camden and as outline in the governance arrangements. Measures are consistent and proportionate with the emergency and to be noted in the Council's Covid-19 risk log.

Implications *verified by: Michael Sloniowski, Risk Manager, 020 8753 2587*

List of Appendices:

Exempt Appendix 1 - Additional financial implications