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**JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE
FOR CORONERS
MANAGEMENT SIDE**

To: Chief Executives (London Boroughs, Metropolitan Districts, County Councils and Unitary Councils in England and Wales)

09 July 2026

Dear colleague,

In our last circular issued on [12 June](#) we gave a further update on the Coroner's pay bargaining situation and also outlined the key findings from a recent survey conducted on local authorities' attitudes to Coroners pay.

Since then, the Ministry of Justice has shared with us correspondence between the CSEW and the Lord Chancellor, David Lammy MP. With their permission we share that correspondence with you as an appendix to this circular. In summary they state:

From the Lord Chancellor

The Lord Chancellor recognises the strength of feeling across the coronial service but emphasises that responsibility for coroner remuneration rests locally between coroners and their funding authorities. He points out that while legislative change could alter this position, the Government is not currently considering this, and it would not offer a timely solution in any case. He highlights the importance of the JNC in supporting consistency and strongly encourages both sides to work towards its reinstatement. He proposes that the CSEW and LGA jointly commission an independent evaluation of coroner roles and has offered one-off funding to support this.

In relation to the risk of multiple claims to the Lord Chancellor to intervene on individual disputes on pay he says 'I do not consider it will be necessarily appropriate for any determination to be made at this stage should an application be received; such a determination may well be far better informed by an up-to-date evaluation of the coroner role, particularly given the statutory requirement for me to take full account of the nature and extent of an individual's functions, alongside all the circumstances of the case'.

He ends by acknowledging the potential for Coroners to recuse themselves (in cases where there is a dispute) but points to the Chief Coroner's Guidance on recusal which states that *"Coroners should not be quick to recuse themselves from a case. The bar is high and it should be a rare occurrence."*

Overall, the message is that progress will need to be sector-led with the MoJ supporting a jointly agreed evidence base rather than intervening.

From the CSEW

In his letter Richard Travers thanks the Lord Chancellor for his offer to fund an evaluation of the coroner roles but he also raises the issue (which he describes as a potential blocker) of the CSEW's opposition to any evaluation/benchmarking against non-judicial roles (such as Chief Officer). He also raises concerns that the LGA will not agree to what they want, which is comparisons with judicial roles only, with assistance from the MoJ.

Next steps

The management side of the JNC (as was) have now met to consider this correspondence, as well as the survey results, with a view to deciding how best to move this forward and continue to offer support to local authorities on coronial pay.

It was agreed to support the Lord Chancellor's recommendation that an independent evaluation of Coronial roles takes place and they stand ready to take this forward jointly with the CSEW should they agree. However, they remain of the view that any such evaluation should include benchmarking against other roles in both the public and private sectors at a similar level of seniority (as was the case in the original [Korn Ferry Hay report](#) in 2017) alongside those in judicial roles.

Pay recommendation for 1 April 2026

The management side also discussed making a recommendation for pay for 2026 (given that 62% of respondents to the survey said that such a recommendation would be helpful). In considering all relevant factors, including what local authorities have budgeted for Coroner pay, their views on what a fair pay offer might look like, other public sector pay awards and the rate of inflation, it was agreed that if the JNC was still sitting, they would have set a remit at 3.50 per cent.

Therefore, while this is entirely a matter for local determination, 3.50 per cent is the figure they would recommend local authorities give consideration to, for Coroners' pay for 2026/27.

As the JNC no longer exists, this is advice only, and we acknowledge that some local authorities may have already made a local offer to their Coroners.

In addition, the management side discussed and agreed that the advice for 2025/2026 remains as previously agreed, a 3.20% increase to pay from April 2025, and that would not be revisited.

If you are able to keep us informed of any local developments or progress made, please email us at coroners.queries@local.gov.uk. Equally, if you have any questions about this circular then please contact us at the same address.

Best wishes

Sarah Ward
Management Side Secretary
JNC for Coroners



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
David Lammy MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor & Secretary
of State for Justice

RICHARD TRAVERS

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MoJ Ref: ADR134862

12 June 2026

Dear Richard,

CORONER REMUNERATION

Thank you for your letter of 12 February 2026, following your earlier correspondence with my predecessor, now the Home Secretary, relating to current issues around coroner remuneration.

I am grateful for the clarity with which you have set out the concerns of the Coroners' Society of England and Wales (CSEW) in this regard, and I recognise the strength of feeling within the coronial service on these issues. I also appreciate your reflections on the impact that the resulting uncertainty around pay is having on coroners' morale and wellbeing, as well as the potential consequences for bereaved families who rely on a stable and effective inquest system. I am therefore very keen to support the CSEW and the Local Government Association (LGA) in identifying and agreeing an appropriate solution.

You have set out the CSEW's view that coroner salaries should be aligned with an appropriate judicial comparator and uprated in line with the Lord Chancellor's decision on wider judicial salaries and fees, as informed by the annual SSRB assessment. You also argue that the current statutory arrangements as legislated for by Parliament in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 breach the doctrine of the separation of powers.

I fully respect your right, and indeed obligation, as Local Government & Salaries Secretary to make these points on behalf of the CSEW's membership. However, as you know, the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 ('the 2009 Act') establishes a statutory framework for coroner remuneration. This places responsibility for agreement of a Senior or Area Coroner's salary, or an Assistant Coroner's fees, jointly with the funding local authority and the individual coroner. By law, the Lord Chancellor's locus is limited to a discretion to make a determination, on receipt of a request by either a Senior Coroner or Area Coroner on the one hand, or the relevant authority on the other, where agreement on a salary cannot be reached. This framework does not place an obligation on, or provide powers to the Lord Chancellor to set or provide for coroner salaries or fees on a national or overarching basis, or to determine the content, form or operation of any mechanism for local agreement.

The statute reflects Parliament's decision for coroner services, and coroner salaries and fees, to be funded by local authorities; and to provide for a locally negotiated remuneration model (rather than to include coroners in the national judicial pay framework); whilst protecting coroners' salaries from improper influence by enabling individual disputes to be determined by the Lord Chancellor, based on statutory criteria. On a practical level, therefore, any proposal to change or broaden the underlying statutory position, including the Lord Chancellor's powers in relation to coroner pay, would require primary legislation. This is not an avenue which the Government is currently considering, and in any event, could not provide a timely resolution to the current concerns.

I recognise that the ongoing absence of Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) recommendations may, over time, result in a wider variation in salary and fee levels across England and Wales than would otherwise be the case. Whilst it is worth noting that such variation has also occurred at times during the JNC's operation, the JNC clearly helps to facilitate greater consistency through a structured and collaborative negotiating mechanism. The justified concerns about greater salary divergence therefore serve to underline the importance of the CSEW and LGA working to ensure that the JNC is reinstated as soon as possible.

Any agreement to return to the JNC forum rests entirely in the hands of its constituent parties, and I have no powers to direct or facilitate that, or to provide for any alternative national mechanism. However, as set out in previous correspondence, I would strongly encourage the CSEW and LGA, as a first step, to jointly commission a fresh and authoritative independent evaluation of coronial roles. I believe this would provide a robust basis for a refreshed, jointly endorsed and modernised pay framework, which may take in to account wider remuneration frameworks in the public and private sector where both parties agree they are relevant. This could, in turn could help rebuild confidence in the JNC process, thereby creating a sustainable framework for future pay discussions.

To demonstrate my confidence in this as the most effective way forward, I am willing to provide one-off funding to cover the costs of an evaluation commissioned jointly by the CSEW and LGA (with the commissioning, terms of reference and other matters remaining a matter for those parties). I am keen to see this taken forward as quickly as possible and, to that end, my officials stand ready to help facilitate swift progress.

You are concerned that the current situation may give rise to multiple requests for determinations by the Lord Chancellor under Schedule 3 to the 2009 Act. I would only note that Parliament expressly anticipated the possibility of pay dispute in any circumstance and has provided a statutory route for individual resolution. Moreover, these provisions require me to take account of the nature and extent of the individual's functions alongside all the circumstances of the case. As such, I do not consider it will be necessarily appropriate for any determination to be made at this stage should an application be received; such a determination may well be far better informed by an up-to-date evaluation of the coroner role, particularly given the statutory requirement for me to take full account of the nature and extent of an individual's functions, alongside all the circumstances of the case.

Finally, you have identified the potential for any individual pay disputes to incur operational risk, including that of recusal by coroners in specific inquests where they consider the involvement of the local authority as an interested person may give rise to a perception of bias. As you will know, any decision by a coroner to recuse themselves is a serious one, and it is for the coroner alone to apply the appropriate legal tests.

The Chief Coroner has provided Guidance 30, which states that "*Coroners should not be quick to recuse themselves from a case. The bar is high and it should be a rare occurrence.*"

In conclusion, I am keen for a fair and sustainable resolution to these issues to be reached as soon as possible and, as I have set out above, I strongly encourage the CSEW and LGA to work together to achieve this. Thank you again for taking the time to write and for the continued service which you and all CSEW members provide to bereaved families and the coronial system.

I am copying this letter to Sarah Ward at the LGA, the Chief Coroner and the Lady Chief Justice.

Yours sincerely,

RT HON DAVID LAMMY MP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE**



HM Coroner for Surrey

From: Mr R Travers
-HM Senior Coroner-

HM Coroner's Court
Station Approach
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Tel: 01483 404530

The Rt Hon David Lammy MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

19^h June 2026

Sent by email only: secofstate@Justice.gov.uk

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter which I received by email on Tuesday of this week.

Like you, on behalf of the CSEW, I am also keen to find a resolution to the current problem and to do so in a timely manner. In that regard, I should also express my gratitude to you for your very generous offer of funding the costs of an evaluation report commissioned jointly by the CSEW and the LGA.

Speaking on behalf of the CSEW, and subject to the matter I raise below, I would be very happy to accept that proposal in the hope that we could then find a way forward and a resolution to the problem. To that end, I would be more than prepared to have some preliminary discussions about your proposed way forward with the LGA.

However, the matter that I wish to raise, is one that I fear may act as a blocker and for that reason it seemed sensible to draw it to your attention so that you are aware of it and have a chance to consider it.

The issue relates to embarking upon an evaluation process that includes within it benchmarking or comparators with non-judicial roles. It has always been the LGA's position that when evaluating the role of coroner, account should be taken, not only of other judicial roles, but also of other local authority, public sector and possibly private sector, non-judicial roles. In that regard, I note that on page two of your letter you make reference to taking into account 'wider remuneration frameworks in the public and private sector'.

My concern, and that of the CSEW, is that, as judges, it is simply not appropriate for us to be evaluated against anyone other than our fellow judges. I hope that you will accept that this is not by reason of intransigence or sheer stubbornness on our part, as I say we are very keen to find a way forward. Rather, it is a matter of an important legal principle. It is right to note that our view in this regard is shared by others. Not least it is shared by the Lady Chief Justice, Baroness Sue Carr, whose letter to me you may have seen before, but as a reminder I cite the following paragraph from her letter:

'Unfortunately, many local authorities lack the expertise to recognise the practical and financial implications of protecting judicial independence. **Any comparison with local**



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authority officers or CEOs reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the judicial nature of the coroner's role. The independence and impartiality of coroners are essential to the proper administration of justice, and this ought to be reflected in how their remuneration is determined.' (my emphasis)

That same view has been shared by the current and past Chief Coroners and is made clear in the Current Chief Coroner's Guidance No. 6, which was re-drafted in January of last year. It reads as follows:

'Once appointed, a Coroner becomes a Judge and is required to make independent judicial decisions. Local Authorities pay the coroner's salary or fees and agree other terms and conditions. But there is no contract of employment between the Local Authority and Coroner. **Coroners should not be equated in financial or other terms with Chief Officers.**' (my emphasis)

It would also risk breaching the doctrine of the separation of powers as is clearly set out at Part II (2) of The Commonwealth Latimer House Principles, re-drafted in 2023.

'Appropriate salaries and benefits, supporting staff, resources and equipment are essential to the proper functioning of the judiciary. **As a matter of principle, judicial salaries and benefits should be set by an independent body and their value should be maintained.**' (my emphasis)

In addition to the above, in a conference we had last week with Leading Counsel, they also endorsed our position, making the point that a Circuit Judge's salary would not be assessed against that of a court manager.

For our part, I would like to make it clear that we do not consider that this issue should act as a blocker to an evaluation process. We would be more than happy to agree to the instruction of an independent company, such as Korn Ferry, to undertake such an evaluation process, provided the benchmarking and comparators were taken from other members of the judiciary.

I should explain though that such a course would require assistance and support from the Ministry of Justice. As background, one difficulty we have had with the 2017 Korn Ferry Hay evaluation report was that the evaluators did not have direct access either to judges or to data relating to the roles of different judges. This has led to some local authorities being unwilling to accept the report's assessment that the appropriate comparator for a senior coroner was a circuit judge. That being so, the nature of the support that we have in mind would be to allow the evaluators to have access, either to other judges, or to data relating to their roles that is almost certainly already held by the SSRB. Armed with this information the evaluators' report would be better informed and would, therefore, have greater credibility.

However, the real concern that we have is that the LGA will not agree to such a proposed course and our fear, based upon previous experience and past correspondence, is that they will be inflexible in their position. That being said, if they are not, we would be very happy to enter into discussions with them.



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The other issue that would also need to be resolved is finding a method of dealing with future annual reviews. On a positive note, following our meeting with LGA Members in March of this year, we would be hopeful that between us, the CSEW and the LGA, we should be able to find a way forward in that regard.

As I said at the start of the letter, I am very grateful to you for your thoughts and your kind offer and if you were able to assist in finding a way forward with the LGA that too would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely,

Richard

**Richard Travers
HM Senior Coroner Surrey
Local Government & Salaries Secretary of the Coroners' Society of England and Wales**