

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR COURTS

CORONERS' COURTS

23 NOVEMBER 2020

Coroners have recommenced hearing inquests albeit in a slower timeframe to comply with the Executive and Public Health Agency guidance. Courts continue to undertake as much business as possible remotely or in the form of a hybrid hearing where the Coroner directs. Members of the public and legal representatives should not attend court unless specifically required. Where it is necessary for people to come to court in person such hearings can only take place where it is safe to do so. It is essential that court office managers are aware of the numbers who are attending on a given day to allow them to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas of the court building.

Inquests which had been listed before 23 March 2020 but adjourned due to Covid-19 will now start to be re-listed. The Coroners Service and the Legacy Inquest Unit will be in contact with the next of kin, their legal representatives (if any), properly interested parties and witnesses to inform a new listing date.

Where appropriate, preliminary issues may be dealt with on the papers or by way of a remote hearing if the Coroner determines this is required. Where a remote hearing is to take place representatives and properly interested parties will be notified by the Coroners Service or the Legacy Inquest Unit and provided with details of how to log into the hearing. Inquests may take the form of a physical, remote or hybrid hearing to be determined by the Coroner.

In the event that a party requires a physical hearing they should contact the Coroners Service or the Legacy Inquest Unit, as appropriate, providing a written explanation for the request. The Coroner will consider the application and determine if the case should be listed and, if so, who should, if anyone, be present in court.

Coroners (via the Legacy Inquest Unit) will continue to case manage the legacy inquests listed for Year 1. Exchanges will be by way of email or telephone conferencing.