

South London Coroner's Court

Policy for dealing with Compliments, Comments and Complaints

1. Background and Context

1.1 The role of the Coroner

The role of the Coroner is to conduct an investigation or an inquest into a death where there is reason to suspect that the person has died a violent or unnatural death, where the cause of their death is unknown or where they have died in custody or otherwise in state detention. Deaths at work may also be subject to such enquiry.

The purpose of an inquest is to determine the answers to the following four questions:

Who was the person who has died?

When did they die?

Where did they die?

How, and by what means did they die?

On some occasions the Coroner will also explore the circumstances in which the death occurred.

An inquest is an inquisitorial investigation designed to establish facts, not to apportion blame.

Like any other judge, a Coroner is an independent judicial office holder. They are not employed by the Local Authority that meets all the costs of the service and they are completely independent of the Local Authority and Central Government. They act in line with legislation, the primary sources being The Coroners and Justice Act 2009, The Coroners (Investigation) Regulations 2013 and The Coroners (Inquest) Rules 2013.

In the South London jurisdiction, the coroner service is led by the Senior Coroner, Miss Sarah Ormond-Walshe who is supported by several Assistant Coroners. The Coroner's Courts are based in Croydon.

1.2 The role of the Local Authority – London Borough of Croydon (LB Croydon)

LB Croydon meets all the costs of the coroner service in the South London jurisdiction. These are then shared with the other three London boroughs that make up the jurisdiction, Bromley, Bexley and Sutton. This is because the provision of the coroner service is a statutory function of the Local Authority. It must provide the appropriate resources, funding and support to enable the coroners to carry out their statutory role and responsibilities. Because the Coroners are independent judicial office holders, LB Croydon cannot review their performance, invoke disciplinary procedures or enforce policy or practice in respect of them.

LB Croydon is also responsible for providing administrative and other support staff including court ushers. These employees are subject to LB Croydon's policies and procedures, although they are directed in their coronial work by the Senior and Assistant Coroners.

1.3 The role of Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

The Coroners are supported in their investigation and inquest work by Coroner's Officers who are employed by the MPS. These employees are subject to the MPS policies and procedures although they are directed in their coronial work by the Senior and Assistant Coroners.

2. Service Feedback

2.1 Comments, Suggestions and Compliments

In the South London jurisdiction, the Coroners, the MPS and LB Croydon are all committed to providing a service which meets the needs of bereaved families, interested persons and service users. They welcome any constructive feedback which helps them to identify where the service is working well, or where improvements could be made. If someone would like to comment on, or compliment, the service they have received, they should write, email or speak to a member of the coroner's office team. This feedback will be recorded and used to inform service delivery. The contact channels are set out at the foot of this policy.

2.2 Complaints

2.1 Complaints about the Coroner's Service fall into three broad categories, each of which has a slightly different process:

- the quality of service received
- complaints about a Coroner's decision or conclusion
- a Coroner's personal conduct

2.2 Complaints about the quality of service received

The South London Coroner's Service is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and objectively and will reach evidenced based conclusions to learn from individual experiences and to improve the service it provides to bereaved families, interested persons and service users. To achieve this, there is a two stage complaints process:

Stage 1: Investigation and findings

Any complaint about the South London Coroner Service should be made using one of the contact channels set out at the foot of this policy. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, ideally at first point of contact.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, the service would expect any complaints to be made within 3 months of the person becoming aware of the issue about which they wish to complain.

When a complaint is received, unless it is resolved at the first point of contact, it will be acknowledged as soon as possible and within no later than five working days.

All complaint outcomes will be recorded.

If an immediate resolution is not possible, then a manager will be nominated to investigate the complaint and to respond. For complaints involving the Coroners Officers the complaint will be managed and investigated by the Coroner's Officer Manager employed by the MPS including complaints about their personal conduct and behaviour. For complaints about the administrative and support staff and ushers, these will be investigated by the LB Croydon Head of Coroner Service. If the complaint is about either one of these two managers, the other will carry out the investigation.

The investigation of the complaint will be prioritised, and a response will be issued normally within 10 working days. If it takes longer than this, the complainant will be kept updated, advised of the reason for the delay and given a revised timescale for resolution.

The Service will share with the MPS and LB Croydon any findings which reveal the need to address:

- the conduct and behaviour of individual employees
- individual or service-wide training needs
- changes to administrative processes and procedures

Complainants will normally be contacted by email unless they inform the Service of an alternative preferred option.

The Service will take reasonable steps to cover the points of concern raised by the complainant, identify whether any fault was found and, where relevant, explain what actions are being taken to prevent a similar situation happening again. The draft response will be shared with the Senior Coroner for review and agreement.

Stage 2: Review

If the complainant is not happy with the response they receive from the Coroner's Service about a service complaint, they can contact either the MPS where the complaint involves an MPS employee, or LB Croydon where the complaint involves a LB Croydon employee. The MPS and LB Croydon will engage with the Coroner's Service to determine whether there are any outstanding issues that the Service could address.

If the Coroner considers that the complaint, or parts of the complaint, are linked to the judicial process or judicial conduct; neither of which the MPS or LB Croydon has jurisdiction over, the Coroner will ensure the complainant is appropriately signposted to an appropriate alternative remedial option.

If it is considered that the complaint relates to matters that the MPS or LB Croydon is responsible for, then they will work with the Coroner's Service to undertake a review of the complaint, and a response will normally be issued within 20 working days. If it will take longer than this, then the complainant will be kept updated, advised of the reason for the delay and given a revised timescale.

The draft response will be shared with the Senior Coroner for review and agreement.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If a person remains unhappy following the Council's response to their complaint, they can contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO cannot consider complaints about judicial decisions, which include the outcome of an inquest, or complaints about the personal conduct of a Coroner. However, if a person's complaint is

about maladministration or service issues, then they can ask the LGSCO to review their complaint.

The LGSCO would normally expect a person to have completed the Council's complaint's procedure first. Complaints to the LGSCO should normally be made within 12 months of a person becoming aware of the matter being complained about and the person would be expected to have been directly affected i.e. have experienced personal injustice. The LGSCO is the final stage for complaints about councils.

Further information can be found on the LGSCO's website: www.lgo.org.uk

Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)

If a person remains unhappy following the MPS response to their complaint, they can contact the IOPC. The IOPC cannot consider complaints about judicial decisions, which include the outcome of an inquest, or complaints about the personal conduct of a Coroner. However, if a person's complaint is about maladministration or service issues, then they can ask the IOPC to review their complaint.

Further information can be found on the IOPC website: www.policeconduct.gov.uk

2.3 Complaints About a Coroner's Decision or Conclusion

Any challenge to a Coroner's decision or to the conclusion of an inquest must be made to the Divisional Court by way of a Judicial Review of the decision or conclusion complained of. This should be done as soon as possible and, in any event, within three months of the end of the inquest.

It is also possible for a person to make an application to the Attorney General for permission to apply to the High Court, either for an inquest to be undertaken, if at that stage there has been no inquest, or for there to be a fresh inquest if, for example, new evidence has come to light since the hearing of the first inquest. Unlike a Judicial Review, there is no time limit for this type of application.

It is recommended that, prior to doing so, individuals wishing to make either of these applications seek independent legal advice from a lawyer with expertise in this area of the law.

2.4 A Coroner's Personal Conduct

If someone wishes to complain about a Coroner's personal conduct, then they should raise this in the first instance with the Senior Coroner.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive from the Senior Coroner they may make a complaint to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO).

The JCIO is an independent office, which supports the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice in considering complaints about the personal conduct of judicial office holders. It cannot deal with complaints about judicial decisions made by a Coroner, which include the Coroner's findings and conclusion at the end of an inquest.

A complaint to the JCIO must be made within three months of the matter complained of. This timescale can only be extended in exceptional circumstances.

More information can be found on the JCIO website:

www.complaints.judicialconduct.gov.uk

3. Contact details

Address

South London Coroner's Court and Offices, Davis House, Robert Street, Croydon, CRO
1QQ

Email: admin.coroner@croydon.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 8313 1883

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9am-4pm

Website: www.southlondoncoroner.org

Version Control V3 FINAL June 2025