

Berkshire Coroners Service

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Introduction/Background

- Reading Borough Council host the coroner's service on behalf of the Berkshire authorities of: Bracknell Forest Council, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire Council, Wokingham Borough Council and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- Operate under a Joint Arrangement
- Located at the Town Hall, Reading
- 2 Courts, Jury Room, office facilities
- Service Structure – Senior Coroner, Area Coroner, Assistant Coroners, Coroners Officers, Court Officers

Role of the Coroner

17 The coroner service in England and Wales is a small but important part of the justice system. Its primary purpose is to investigate deaths that are violent, unnatural, unexplained or that have occurred in custody or otherwise in state detention.

HHJ Thomas Teague KC

Chief Coroner

Role of the Coroner

- providing bereaved families with answers as to how their loved ones died with the assurance that an independent judicial process has investigated any relevant concerns
- contributing to the accurate registration of deaths, thereby enabling more secure analysis of trends in public health
- 8 • carrying out an enhanced investigation where the state's responsibilities under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights ('ECHR') (the right to life) are engaged
- considering whether any circumstances revealed by an investigation give rise to a risk of future deaths and alerting those who might be able to mitigate or eliminate such risks
- investigating treasure finds, allowing museums to acquire treasure and appropriate rewards to be paid

Role of the local authority

- Coroners and Justice Act 2009
- Responsibility for appointing coroners and for funding the service
- S24 of the Act states:
 - it is the duty of the relevant local authority for each coroner area to secure the provision of whatever officers and other staff are needed by the coroners for that area to carry out their functions
 - to provide, or secure the provision of, accommodation that is appropriate to the needs of those coroners in carrying out their functions; and
 - to maintain, or secure the maintenance of, such accommodation.

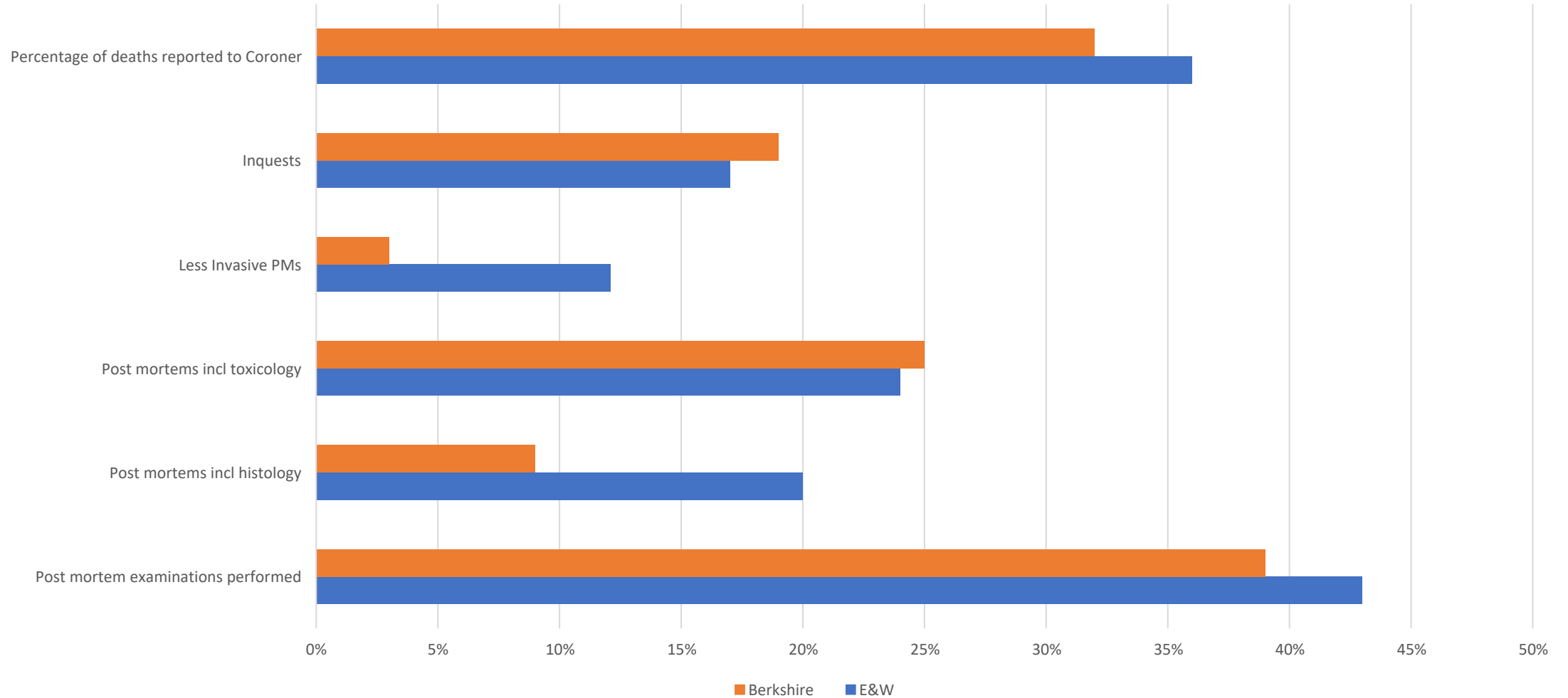
Outputs/KPIs

2022

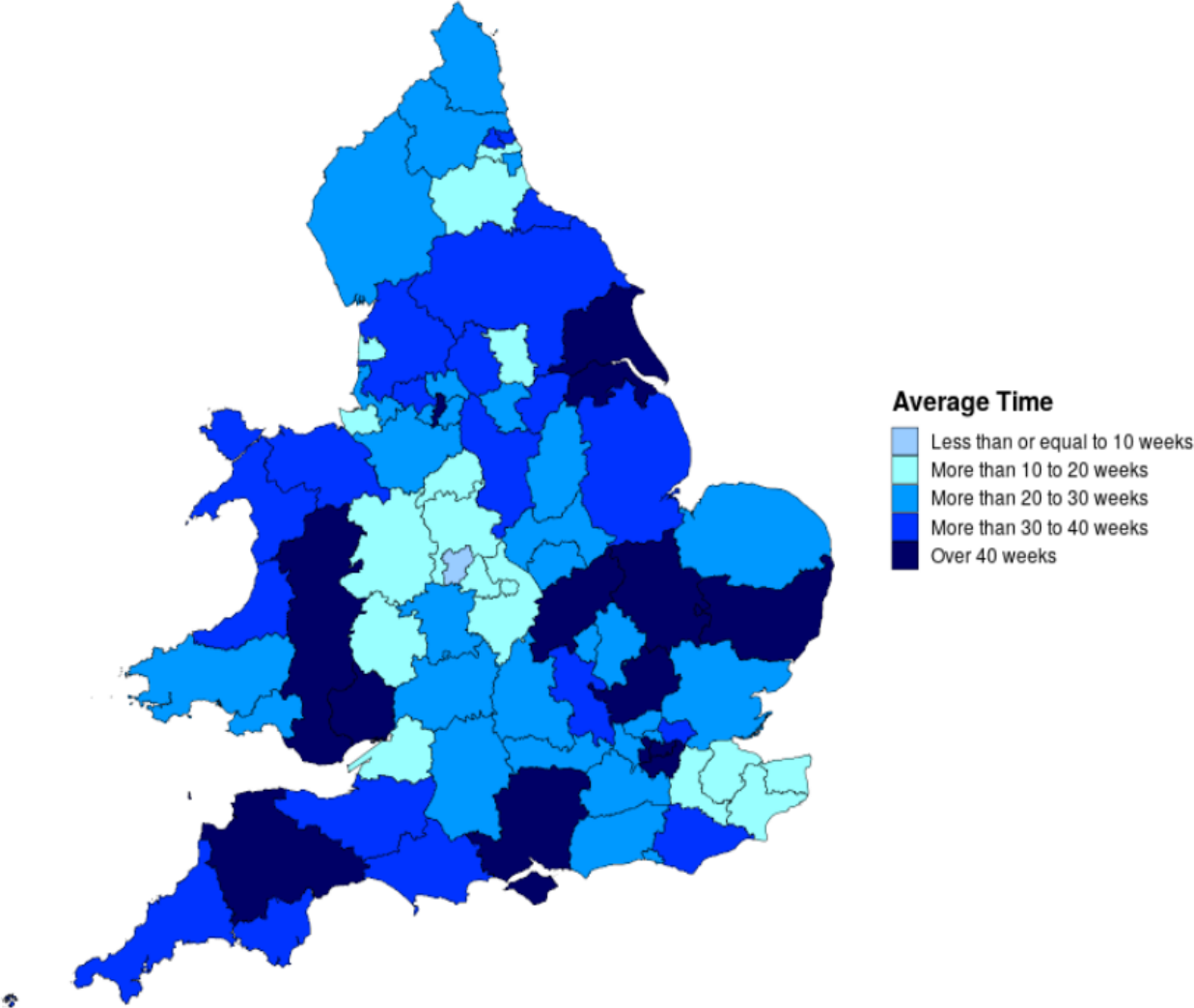
- Total deaths in Berkshire 7096
- Total deaths reported to Coroner 2257
- 20 • Post-Mortems 871
- Histology 75
- Toxicology 222
- Non-invasive (CT scanning) 23
- Inquests 438 (of which 3 were held with a jury)

Comparison with England and Wales

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Map 3: Estimated average time taken to process inquests, England and Wales, 2022



Major Expenditure Areas

Mortuaries

- Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading
- Wexham Park Hospital, Slough
- Contract with Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

Removal and transportation of deceased

- 24/7, 365-day service under contract
- 650 transfers per year

Pathologists

- Conduct post-mortems
- National shortage
- Consultation on review of fees

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- ## Toxicology
- Contract with University Hospital Leicester

Inquests/Legal Costs

2022 Review

Berkshire authorities agreed to additional funding

- Increased number of Coroners Officers from 5 to 7
- Approved the appointment of:

Area Coroner

5x Assistant Coroners

Bereavement Nurse

- Approved additional funding for increased costs of removals

Service Improvements

- Increase resilience for both Coroners and Officers to deal with workloads
- Improve management of complex and high-profile cases
- Reduce time to bring cases to inquest
- More capacity for Senior Coroner to focus on prevention of future deaths for example improving suicide prevention strategies
- Comply with Chief Coroner recommendations – staffing/facilities

Budget

2023/2024 overall budget of £2,740,316

Wokingham Borough Council contribution is forecast to be £474,622 (18%) subject to year-end adjustment.

Future

- Review of Joint Arrangement
- Regional Mortuary
- CT Scanning
- New options for removals
- Medical Examiner Service

Q & A

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