



André J. A. Rebello, O.B.E.
Senior Coroner for the City of Liverpool & Wirral
Hon. Secretary of the Coroners' Society of England and Wales

Monday, 09 January 2017

Senior Coroner Maria E. Voisin
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Dear Maria,

Coroners Pay

You will be aware of the longstanding negotiations between the LGA and the Coroners' Society concerning pay. Clearly as judges, the judicial qualities, skills and abilities of coroners are not reflected in the pay evaluations scheme used by local authorities. There has been undoubtedly a disproportionate use of time and effort in this regard and whether there can be any fair expedient resolution remains unknown but what I do know is that the time and effort being expended in such matters would be much better spent serving the public.

It was clear to me that given the judicial hierarchy it was unlikely that coroners could earn more than senior circuit judges notwithstanding the more onerous time demands of coronial office. There is also little doubt that the complexity of the law we encounter and the judicially directed inquisitorial jurisdiction is such that intellectual and administrative demands of coronial office equate to those in the judiciary involved in senior leadership roles.

High Court Judges currently earn £179,768 pa plus a judicial pension (after 20 years with or without contribution depending upon appointment)

Senior Circuit Judges currently earn £144,172 pa plus a judicial pension (after 20 years with or without contribution depending upon appointment)

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Circuit Judges currently earn £133,506 pa plus a judicial pension (after 20 years with or without contribution depending upon appointment)

District Judges currently earn £107,100 pa plus a judicial pension (after 20 years with or without contribution depending upon appointment)

There is a scale for a senior coroner in Northern Ireland evaluated at £117,810 pa plus a judicial pension (after 20 years with or without contribution depending upon appointment) – however the Senior Coroner in Northern Ireland is more of a judge in court than a Coroner in England and Wales and is supported by lawyers and a medical advisor and by the Court Service of Northern Ireland (which was a Ministry of Justice Court Service until devolution.) the salary is 110% of the evaluated coroner's pay.

It is difficult to calculate the worth of a judicial pension particularly a non-contributory pension. Equally it is difficult to evaluate coroners on local authority criteria. The legal profession is geared to paying off investment in professional set up costs for the first half of one's career and then making pension provision in later years. It is therefore difficult for a coroner to leave practise at 40 -50 years of age and to still have a realistic pension by the age of 70. In 2006 when coroner's pay was looked in comparison to judicial pay there was an advantage to being on the judicial pension scheme of between £8000 to £12000.

In 2014 Liverpool and the Wirral merged making the characteristics of my new area very similar to Avon. The Merseyside City Region and the Bristol City Region have much more in common than history and the sea. The infrastructure, culture, challenges and people have so many parallel ties. In 2015 there were 4436 reported deaths in Avon and 4191 in Liverpool and Wirral. You had 943 inquests and I had 851 inquests. We both have Universities, Prisons, urban and rural communities and TWO cathedrals.

We both have responsible relevant councils who have provided modern premises for the public to access the coroner service at what is undoubtedly a most challenging time in their family life. This insight and empathy has grown the two services into national models of excellence.

I know quite a lot about the Avon coroner area have advised the appointing panel when you were appointed in 2010 after some very difficult times for Avon Coronial service.

Upon merger of the Liverpool and Wirral Coroner area it was agreed that, I, the senior Coroner would be paid the independently evaluated salary for the Senior coroner in Northern Ireland. This was a SSRB evaluation of scale 7 judicial salaries scale at £115,489 x 110% = £127,038 However that salary did not take into consideration the 20-year non-contributory judicial pension and so we added the 5.5% pension supplement giving a total salary of £134,025. (This is more or less the same as a circuit judge but without the pension add-on) Within the merger business case given the NI and employer's pension contributions this went in as a cost of £157,057 (subject to annual review based upon scale 7 as adjusted) – (the judicial salary scales do not include the MOJ's costs of national insurance and pension contribution).

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I have been provided with an area Coroner with an agreed salary of £90,000 which with the 5.5% pension supplement is £94,950 payable but of course we also have NI and employers pension contributions to add to this. This salary is important because fee paid judges earn 1/220th of whole-time pay so we pay £400 per day which is 1/220th of the area Coroner's pay.

We are aware that in other areas the Local authority have accepted the same senior coroner pay solution but are reimbursing the full 11.5% pension contribution so instead of the senior coroner having £134,025 the coroner receives £142,029. I consider the settlement that I have is fair and reasonable.

In other areas such as Greater Manchester coroners also receive an out of hours' allowance however and earn above the Liverpool and Wirral senior coroner. I feel that the duties of office require out of hours work and therefore working hours' directives are of no effective use – death certainly does not respect them.

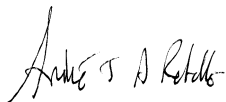
There are also many part-time coroners who claim long inquest payments with no cap on what they earn - with the ability to earn more than whole-time office holder_ one was reported to earn last year over £165,000 for a work load of just over 150 inquests and just over 1600 deaths reported.

The relationship between Coroners and public authorities is invaluable to the service we render to the public we serve. This applies to the police but more so to our relevant council, our funding authority, the provider of our court infrastructure. I believe within the ambit of our judicial independence there is scope to reflect the mission and ethos of the elected representatives of the people we serve. In coronial terms it is not long ago that coroners were elected judges – now appointed by elected representatives we still have that connection with the public. Thomas Wakely the founder of the Lancet and the elected west –Middlesex coroner in 1839 was known as “the people's judge” – and so we all are.

It is important not to be haggling over salary and to get on with service delivery in partnership with our funding councils.

If you need to share these thoughts with your authority, please feel free to do so.

Yours sincerely,



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