



## Quick reference guide for remote hearings during Covid-19 pandemic in the Birmingham and Solihull Coroners Court

---

This quick reference guide is intended for use by individual witnesses and family members attending remote hearings. Legal representatives are expected to read and familiarise themselves with the 'Protocol for remote hearings during Covid-19 pandemic' for Birmingham and Solihull Coroners Court which is available on the service website.

### 1. Planning and notice for remote hearings

- a) You will have received an invitation by email with a link to attend the hearing on Microsoft Teams along with the 'User Guide' to Microsoft Teams.
- b) Do not forward the invite to others – let us know if others wish to attend.
- c) If you don't have internet access a telephone number has been provided to enable you to ring into the hearing via Microsoft Teams.
- d) If you do not think the hearing should be conducted in this way you must make the Coroner's Investigator aware as soon as possible and within 7 days of the notice of the hearing explaining why and how you wish the hearing to proceed. The Coroner will ask the opinion of the other Interested Parties to the inquest and decide how to proceed.

### 2. Preparations for the remote hearing

- a) If you are an Interested Person to the inquest (e.g. next of kin, close family member or someone involved in the events surrounding the death) you will be sent by email an electronic bundle of documents (evidence). This will not be sent to witnesses who are not Interested Persons, however, where necessary during the hearing witnesses can be shown documents through Microsoft Teams. It is expected that witnesses will have retained, and have access to during the hearing, a copy of any statement written for the inquest.
- b) For a pre-inquest review hearing (planning hearing) Interested Persons will also receive an Agenda of the decisions to be made at the hearing.

### 3. Duration of the hearing

- a) The estimated duration of the hearing is stated on the witness list and witness summonses.



- b) Witnesses maybe released after their evidence is completed but maybe required to stay longer.

#### 4. The hearing

- a) A few minutes before the appointed time click the link in the email for the Microsoft Teams meeting, you will be asked to type your name – please do so accurately.
- b) Initially you will see a message saying that you are in a waiting room/lobby the Court Officer will allow you into the meeting and confirm your details and answer any immediate queries you might have. Others involved in the hearing maybe in the meeting already or join you subsequently. The Coroner will join the meeting last.
- c) You have also been sent an email address and phone number to use if you have problems with joining the hearing or become cut off during it. The Court Officer will attempt to monitor the participants but may not notice if a connection is lost.
- d) The hearing will be recorded by the court. Do **NOT** touch the recording controls within Microsoft Teams. **For the avoidance of doubt, it is a Contempt of Court, punishable by imprisonment, for any person to record, publish and take pictures of the court hearing or any part of it by any means.**
- e) The Court room where the Coroner is located is open to the public and the media observing strict social distancing. **Only witnesses and IPs will be allowed to take part in the hearing.**
- f) Conduct of the hearing:
- i. **Mute**  
When not speaking all participants, except for the Coroner, must be on 'mute'.
  - ii. **Coroners introduction**  
At the start of the hearing the Coroner will check who is participating in the remote hearing and will explain how the hearing is going to proceed.
  - iii. The 'hand up' and 'chat' functions should not be used.
  - iv. **Interruption** of read or oral evidence or when others are addressing the Coroner is **strongly discouraged** as it could make the hearing difficult to manage and may mean the hearing cannot proceed. The Coroner will check in with you regularly and give you the opportunity to ask questions so have **a pen and paper** ready to write your questions.



- v. **If you have to speak when the Coroner hasn't directly spoken to you please begin by saying who you are.**
- vi. Anyone who repeatedly interrupts or will not stop talking when asked maybe put on mute by the Coroner or Court Officer and **may ultimately be removed from the meeting.**

ALTHOUGH YOU ARE NOT PHYSICALLY IN COURT THIS IS A FORMAL COURT HEARING SO:

- Be respectful to the Coroner and all participants.
- Do not use the hearing to try to speak to others on the call apart from the Coroner or when invited to ask questions of witnesses.
- Do not eat or drink (except water), or smoke.
- Turn your telephone off or put it on silent.
- Do not answer the telephone or the front door or carry out other tasks during the hearing.
- The Coroner will take regular comfort breaks: if you need to take a break at any other time please wait for an appropriate time to ask for a break.

