

EAST LONDON INQUESTS – COVID-19 POLICY

Introduction

1. The Inquests into the deaths of Anthony Walgate, Gabriel Kovari, Daniel Whitworth and Jack Taylor (the East London Inquests) are scheduled to be held at Barking Town Hall from 7 January 2021.
2. The purpose of this note is to set out the measures the Inquests' administration, with the approval of the Coroner, HHJ Sarah Munro QC, proposes to take to minimise the risk of Covid-19 infection to those attending the inquests.
3. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, which is the responsible authority for the Town Hall, has adopted [a risk assessment for Covid-19](#), which has also been published on this website. The inquests have adopted the policies set out in that risk assessment in full.
4. The measures contained in this note are consistent with the local authority's policies but set out those policies in the context of the specific circumstances of the delivery of the inquests' hearings.
5. Everyone attending the hearings is asked to follow the Government guidance on working safely (www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres)

Minimising the risks of Coronavirus transmission

6. The hearing room, annexes and other accommodation (eg: jury room, offices) used by the inquests, staff or other attendees, have been designed to comply with social distancing guidance. Seating has been arranged to ensure a two-metre distance between attendees and within the hearing room itself, not facing each other but sitting side by side and plastic screens have been installed between seats. The capacity of each room has been limited to assist in compliance with social distancing guidelines.
7. Clear signage will remind people of each room's maximum capacity. Disinfectant wipes will be widely available throughout the areas being used by the Inquests.
8. All areas used by the Inquests will be cleaned thoroughly overnight. If any seating within the hearing room is to be used by more than one person during the course of the day, that seat and adjacent areas (desks, screens etc) will be cleaned before a second or subsequent person is allowed to occupy it. During breaks in hearings, wherever possible, windows will be opened to help ventilate the space.
9. On arrival at the Town Hall, all attendees will be reminded of the symptoms of Covid-19 and asked to confirm that they are not currently exhibiting any of those symptoms and that they are not currently self-isolating due to covid. If they are exhibiting symptoms they will be refused admission to the building and advised to return home and arrange to be tested. Those not exhibiting symptoms and not self-isolating will be admitted and asked to make use of the hand sanitisers provided
10. It will be a requirement for all those admitted to the Town Hall to wear a face covering whilst moving around the building. Face coverings are not mandatory whilst seated. Anyone who is exempt from wearing face coverings should declare that to

security on arrival to avoid challenge later. Please note that in some circumstances, Inquest staff may need to remove face coverings in order to undertake their duties (eg: to give instructions or advice).

11. Though social distancing should be relatively simple to maintain during hearings, as most people will remain seated, it will be more difficult at break times, when many people will be circulating. One-way systems and “keep left” rules will be in operation and signage will assist people to keep safe.
12. Our security staff and ushers will monitor the flow of people at breaks and attendees are asked to follow any instructions they may give to maintain everyone’s safety.
13. Hand sanitiser will be available throughout the area occupied by the inquests and handwashing facilities are available in each toilet area. Attendees are encouraged to make regular use of these facilities.
14. To minimise the numbers attending the Town Hall, there will be a facility for Interested Persons and members of their legal teams to attend proceedings remotely via a video link.

Positive Covid-19 tests

15. All regular attendees (staff, legal teams, jurors) will be asked to provide a telephone number, so that they can be informed quickly should anyone they have been in contact with test positive for Coronavirus.
16. These contact details will be held solely for the purpose of protecting people’s health in the event of a positive test and the information will be destroyed 21 days after the end of the hearings. A list of regular attendees who have provided contact details to the inquests will be kept at the security desk so that a register of daily attendance can be maintained.
17. Anyone attending the hearings and who has not provided contact details will be included on a daily register and asked to provide contact details before being admitted to the building. The daily registers and contact details contained within them will be destroyed after 21 days.
18. If a Covid-19 infection is reported or suspected concerning someone who has attended the hearing, the inquest administration will contact the local Public Health team and if there are two or more suspected cases, i.e, an outbreak, also the Public Health England London Coronavirus Response Cell, who will provide advice as to the appropriate response in all the circumstances. The general advice will include sending the suspected person and their close contacts home immediately to self-isolate, asking those with symptoms to book a test immediately, closing and deep cleaning all the areas where the suspected case has been and contact tracing of close contacts etc. The maintenance of the attendance registers will enable the NHS test and trace service to identify any at-risk person quickly and effectively.
19. Everyone attending the hearings should remember that the Inquests administration have adopted the Government’s 2-metre social distancing guideline and that Inquests staff will enforce this distancing within the building as far as it is possible to do so. But everyone attending the hearings is asked to adopt a cautious approach in order to minimise any risk to themselves.

/Concluding Remarks

Concluding remarks

20. In order for the inquest hearings to proceed safely under current circumstances, all attendees are asked to follow the guidelines set out in this note and to maintain social distancing at all times whilst within the Town Hall premises.
21. Attendees are also asked to maintain high standards of hygiene, including wearing face coverings at all times when moving around the building and making regular use of hand washing and sanitising facilities.
22. This note and the advice contained within it is based on the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham [risk assessment for Covid-19](#). This note and advice will be reviewed and updated as necessary should that risk assessment be amended or should Government guidance on managing Covid-19 be changed.

Lee Hughes

Secretary to the Inquests

10 December 2020