

# Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 13th July, 2011.

**Present:** Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Eileen Johnson(Vice Chairman), Cllr Mark Chatburn, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Ray McCall, Cllr Mick Womphrey

**Officers:** Sue Daniels, Jayne Robins(DNS), Sarah Whaley, Judith Trainer(LD)

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** None

**1 Evacuation Procedure**

Noted.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**3 Minutes from the meetings which were held on the 9th February and 16th March 2011.**

AGREED that the minutes of the above mentioned meetings be signed as a correct record.

**4 Draft Minutes - 15th June 2011**

Consideration was given to the draft minutes from the meeting which was held on the 15th June 2011.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

**5 EIT Review of Registration and Bereavement Services**

Consideration was given to the Baseline information for the officer led EIT Review of Registration and Bereavement Services.

The Head of Performance and Business Services informed the Committee that although the Registration and Bereavement Services merged in 2003, they provided separate and distinct roles.

The main issues discussed in relation to Bereavement Services were as follows:

a) Key responsibilities.

b) Current staffing levels.

c) Decrease in the number of people choosing burials and favouring cremation.

d) Increasing demand for civil funerals which were performed by the Registration service.

e) The number of cemeteries available within Stockton Borough including their lifespan and those which had the option to extend in the future. The Head of Performance and Business Services also pointed out that the cemetery situated at Egglecliffe was now closed to new plot applications as all plots were now fully allocated.

f) Burial plots in Stockton were available to anyone outside of the Borough however the fees were set at a higher level than that for Stockton residents.

g) Future pressure on burial space.

- h) The highly sensitive nature of the service.
- i) Emphasis on face to face contact for the service.
- j) High customer satisfaction with very few complaints.
- k) Stockton's fees were the lowest within the Tees Valley and had not seen an increase for 2 years therefore there was potential scope to increase these in the future.
- l) The service made a contribution to the General Fund.
- m) The Committee were informed that once a church graveyard had reached its limit and was considered full, the maintenance of the graveyard became the responsibility of the local authority. Stockton Borough Council had recently received funding for cemetery improvements, however these funds were already allocated and would be exhausted by the end of this year.
- n) The need for communication with Funeral Directors.
- o) Working closely with Land and Property to identify future burial space.
- p) Possibility of a crematorium in Stockton

The main issues discussed in relation to Registration Services were as follows:

- a) Statutory Service for births, marriages, deaths and citizenship.
- b) Non Statutory Services for naming and funeral ceremonies.
- c) Marriage fees were set at a statutory level but Councils could charge an additional fee for approved premises.
- d) Non profit making service.
- e) Potential for closer joint working with neighbouring authorities and partners, however this was subject to guidance by the General Register Office(GRO). Closer working could also deliver improved customer service.
- f) 'Tell us Once' initiative which was due to go live Early September 2011. Members heard that although this service would be free it would create efficiency savings.

Members asked for the following additional information:

- a) Research possibility of whether or not graveyards which are currently the responsibility of Parish Councils can be unexpectedly passed over to the local authority.
- b) The Head of Performance and Business Services to bring update of possible future crematorium in Stockton.
- c) Feedback from the 'Tell us once' initiative once up and running.

The Head of Performance and Business Services highlighted that the following areas within the Bereavement and Registration Service had been identified for change and efficiencies and options would be brought back to this Committee in November 2011:

- a) Examining staff roles / responsibilities.
- b) Changes to structures / working patterns.
- c) Reduction in inefficient / complex processes.
- d) Potential to increase fees.

AGREED that:

- 1) The information be noted.
- 2) Further information be provided as requested.

## **6 Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Team Leader informed Members that the options for the EIT Review of Registration and Bereavement Services would be brought back to this Committee in November. The final report would be presented at the January meeting prior to Cabinet.

The Committee heard the next review would be the EIT Gateway Review of Children's Social Care Management and Childrens and Young Peoples Assessment/Fieldwork which was due to be presented to the Committee in the Autumn.

AGREED that the information be noted.

## **7 Chair's Update**

None.