

STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK

Bereavement Services

Option I – Recombine the operational element with administrative/technical role i.e. transfer Bereavement Services to CFYA

Bereavement Service & CFYA Feedback

Advantages:

Officers felt there could be opportunities for budget savings and an improved internal communication network. They also felt the overall service delivery could feel more joined-up.

Disadvantages:

Officers were concerned at the potential loss of professionalism and loss of customer care and focus on the needs of customers. All felt CFYA was predominantly a specialist 'operational' service, which was not best placed to deal with sensitive and political issues surrounding bereavement.

Agreed there was a potential for specialist knowledge to be diluted and performance standards and quality of service to decrease. They raised concerns about the loss of an independent officer to assess and investigate complaints/mistakes in a sensitive way for bereaved families.

Officers also commented that currently service provision is high performing with few complaints and felt this option may have the potential to reduce performance levels and increase complaints.

Due to other EIT reviews, which has seen a reduction of posts in CFYA and duties distributed amongst staff working alongside Bereavement Services, there is no capacity to take on any further duties.

Partners/Clients Views

Throughout the consultation exercise it was felt partners and clients had no real opinion on where Registration & Bereavement sit with the Authority, but felt the importance was having specialist areas that are able to work closely and efficiently. The following comments were made:

- Dissolving the current set-up would be a backward step, particularly given the recent integration of the Mortuary Team, Bereavement Officers and Registration Service with North Tees.
- It works well at the moment and with the introduction of Tell Us Once it will be even better.
- The current set-up with registrars and bereavement services works really well, particularly with the close links to Coroners and Mortuary Staff.
- Funeral services are happy with current system and have no issues with the service and no problems with the grave digging team.
- Happy with current set-up and staff are very helpful – any issues or problems that do arise are easily rectified and staff are approachable.

- Current set-up works well and everything is in one place for families.
- Current systems are fine and all staff are polite and efficient. The building is warm, friendly and peaceful.
- Don't try and fix it if it's not broken.
- Strongly support the current set-up – wish other authorities would adopt the same model as Stockton. The process is seamless for families.
- Having both services under one roof is much easier for families.
- Have total confidence in the service – never worry about sending a client to Stockton's service and I know they will be well looked after.

Option II – Commission burial service to external provider

Bereavement Service & CFYA Feedback

Officers were aware of the possibility of independent services running the cemeteries provision, however, stated such companies tended to focus on those authorities with a crematorium and burial provision.

Advantages:

Officers felt there would be an opportunity for budget savings.

Disadvantages:

Main concern expressed was that in-house service is currently high performing and offers VFM – Officers stated that should service levels reduce an external provider could be considered.

Other concerns raised were the loss of control on the type/standard of service offered and all felt the service would become commercial rather than concentrating on the needs and demands of customers.

Fixed management fee may cost same/more.

Any future fee increase would be retained by the provider not the Council

Partners/Clients Views

No comments were made regarding this option from any of the stakeholders consulted – their focus and comments tended to be around options I & IV.

Option III – Deliver burial service in conjunction with neighbouring authorities

Bereavement Service & CFYA Feedback

Advantages:

Officers felt there could be a potential for budget savings.

Disadvantages:

Concerns expressed were similar to those voiced in Option II i.e. in-house service is currently high performing and offers VFM.

Officers felt there was a potential to lose current quality standards and good practice – those variations to safe codes of working practice may lead to mistakes. Officers also felt working in partnership may dilute local knowledge, depersonalise the customer service and service could be seen as remote.

Partners/Clients Views

No comments were made regarding this option from any of the stakeholders consulted – their focus and comments tended to be around options I & IV.

Option IV – Review existing structure with a view to further improvements

Bereavement Service & CFYA Feedback

Officers agreed there was a strong to further improve communication to create a stronger link between R&BS and CFYA – Team agreed this could be done by:

- a) Re-defining the role of Bereavement Services Officer
- b) Agree clear responsibilities to alleviate confusion/duplication
- c) Agree clear communication protocols/methods

Advantages:

Officers felt reviewing existing structure would create an opportunity to improve service delivery, whilst maintaining three specialist service areas, which are currently performing to a high standard and retain the high levels of professionalism and technical knowledge.

Retaining the current service would maintain an independent officer to assess complaints, issues and problems. It would also retain the enforcement and operational element under a separate unit, allowing Bereavement Staff to work for and on behalf of bereaved families.

Officers felt there was a strong need to maintain the natural link with the Registration Service, particularly for customers registering a death and requiring a burial.

Officers also felt this option would maintain/increase customer satisfaction levels.

Disadvantages:

Increase in fees for customers.

Partners/Clients Views

Stakeholders' views were predominantly the same as noted against 'Option I' with the emphasis being on retaining the current structure.

The additional views were with regards to '*Saturday All-day Opening*' and '*On-line Booking System*' were as follows:

- The opening of Registration & Bereavement Services all-day Saturday would be beneficial to families, particularly those who suffer a bereavement on a Friday, as they would then be able to register the death on a Saturday, rather than having to wait until Monday.
- Would welcome being able to book an interment booking on a Saturday and for families to be able to register the death.
- Opening the North Tees registration office would be most beneficial to families.
- Consideration for an on-line booking system outside of normal working hours/weekends would be an excellent facility, as this would give families peace of mind that the burial day/time was booked.

- Not being able to book after hours on a Friday until service re-opens on a Monday morning can mean missing press notice deadlines.
- On-line booking facility would not be beneficial – funeral bookings should be completed with dignity and booked with someone in person not via an on-line booking system – personal touch, with peace of mind the details were received, not relying on an IT system.
- This would be beneficial from a logistics/diary planning perspective when arranging large numbers of funerals and wanting to confirm arrangements with families in a timely manner.
- If there was an on-line booking system and the service was open on a Saturday this would speed up the process greatly.
- An on-line system would reduce the number of phone calls needed to book an interment.

Registration Service

Option I – Consider shared services & joined-up working arrangements

Registration Staff Feedback

Advantages:

Team felt there would be a potential for budget savings and the possibility of a reduction in time for the completion of birth declarations for Hartlepool residents, who give birth in North Tees, but register by declaration at Hartlepool Register Office. The option of having cover in the event of staff sickness/holidays could also be explored under this option.

Disadvantages:

The majority of the concerns expressed focussed around the actual logistics of delivery. The team also raised concerns with regards to:

- Having no clear lines of management/lines of communication being confused
- Customer satisfaction levels dropping
- Performance levels decreasing
- SBC is high performing/forward-thinking – concerns raised that service could be held-back and not developed
- There is no appetite for joined-up working
- Service would become remote
- Could risk the reputation of the service/Council

Partners/Clients Views

Guidance offered during the consultation meeting with General Register Office referred the Authority to the following:

The Local Government Act 1972 provides for certain functions to be discharged by one local authority on behalf of another. However, the delivery of statutory registration services is not considered by General Register Office (GRO) to be a local authority function, registration duties being conferred on registrars and superintendent registrars and not directly on the local authority. GRO have indicated that they are not saying that it is not permissible for local authorities to enter into a joint arrangement for overseeing or managing the service or to progress other options for sharing resources.

Section 101(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 can be applied to the appointment of registration officers i.e. it being a local authority function. However, whilst it is therefore possible for a local authority to discharge the function of appointing registration staff, it

remains a requirement of the Registration Service Act 1953 (RSA) that registrars and superintendent registrars are officers of the council which appoints them.

A potential solution could be that registration staff employed by one Council are deemed to be officers of the other for the purposes of RSA.

Partners/Clients Views Cont.

No real comments were made regarding this option from any of the other stakeholders consulted – their focus and comments tended to be around options II & IV.

Option II – Transfer service to Customer Contact Centre

Registration Staff Feedback

Advantages:

Team felt there could be a potential for budget savings.

Team also felt it could be an opportunity for staff to develop and grow in knowledge, they also felt there may be a number of customer contact staff who would have the right skills to register births & deaths.

Disadvantages:

As with option I, staff expressed concerns regarding the logistics of registering 'events' within a contact centre environment. They also raised the following comments:

- Service would lose its 'one-stop' shop element – all key life changes would no longer be dealt with under one specialist section.
- Devalue the service – would no longer be a sensitive front-line service.
- Specialist knowledge would be lost or diluted.
- Potential to reduce high performance levels
- Potential to increase complaints
- Would lose natural link with Bereavement Services
- Service could be seen as impersonal and less sensitive being part of a busy contact centre

Partners/Clients Views

Feedback predominately was against the option of transferring Registration Services into a contact centre environment. The only advantage raised was with regards to easy access. The following comments were made:

- Dissolving the current set-up would be a backward step, particularly given the recent integration of the Mortuary Team & Bereavement Officers at North Tees with the Registration Service.
- Current set-up means the Mortuary Team and families have direct access to the Registration Service without going through a third-party.
- Contact Centre environments could be seen as an insensitive and disrespectful experience for customers, particularly for informants of deaths and stillbirths.
- To change current set-up would be a step too far and in the wrong direction.
- We all go out of our way for customers to make it as easy as possible – how would changing what works make it easier for them?
- We should focus on things that make it easier and more comfortable for the bereaved.
- Feedback is all good from customers – it's all about providing a caring service.

- We must consider the human elements when managing these sensitive services.
- It works well at the moment and with the introduction of Tell Us Once it will be even better.
- Delivering registrations from a contact centre is not appropriate – too sensitive – families are too raw to be cared for in an area where other customers may be coming into complain, pay council tax, etc.
- Could consideration not be given to moving the Registration Service into the same building, rather than being part of the Contact Centre.
- Will depersonalise the service
- Perhaps consider for birth registrations.
- Customer Contact Centres, by their very nature are impersonal and bereaved families will be able to hear other customers' conversations/concerns/complaints.
- Would you not be devaluing the service and the customer experience?
- Customers traditionally expect to register in a separate building, with professional registrars.
- Changes in culture are inevitable and the next generation may welcome and expect to register on-line and receive a less personal service. These changes are too soon to consider, should be an aspiration to accommodate the needs of the next generation.
- Additional expense on training staff to be multi-skilled and bringing staff up to an acceptable standard may out-weigh benefits.
- The registration of births and deaths should take place in an official register office – a legal duty should be carried out in an appropriate designated buildings.
- Operating from a contact centre type environment is too public.

Option III – Cease provision of non-statutory services i.e. Naming, Renewal of Vows & Civil Funeral Ceremonies

Registration Staff Feedback

Advantages:

Team felt the time allocated to non-statutory functions may be best being utilized on core statutory service provision. The team felt more marketing was required in order to increase numbers, but recognised there was a cost involved with promotion/marketing.

Disadvantages:

The team recognised that although numbers were low, to cease the service would reduce income as well as reducing customer choice and a customer service.

Team felt strongly that the needs of customers who were looking for a non-religious service option would not be met, particularly as Stockton are the only LA in the North East offering these services. Given that non-statutory ceremonies can cross boundaries, the team felt they have a greater target audience and should be looking to build on the service not cease it.

Partners/Clients Views

Feedback on non-statutory ceremonies was received from funeral directors, therefore, it is in relation to civil funeral ceremonies only.

The following comments were received:

- Stopping civil funerals would not be a positive move – accept income generated will be quite low, but service is beneficial to families and feedback is extremely positive.
- If service is to continue SBC would need to ensure they have enough casual staff to meet customer demand.

- Good option and service to have available for families.

Option IV – Efficiencies through improved working practices i.e. scheme change in consultation with HR & General Register Office, the decommissioning of the statutory marriage room, implementation of Tell Us Once Service and opening service all-day Saturday.

Registration Staff Feedback

Staff understood and expressed positive comments regarding the decommissioning of the current statutory marriage room and creation of a smaller, more intimate statutory room and the ability to charge different fees to accommodate the difference needs/choices of customers. They had clearly already bought into the TUO service and the advantages to customers and understood the rationale and need for opening all-day Saturday, with their preference being to work on a rota system.

All staff felt that by looking for efficiencies through improved working practices could:

- Increase income/create budget savings
- Extend and improve customer choice
- Potential to increase business
- Maintain the natural links with Bereavement Service, NHS Trust, Coroner's Service and the DWP (Tell Us Once Programme)

The team also explored the feasibility and benefits of a scheme change and looked at the advantages/disadvantages of the one Statutory Superintendent Registrar and one Statutory Registrar of Births & Deaths model.

Advantages:

- One RBD with more deputies would mean more cover for registering births and deaths.
- One set of registers, rather than 3 sets, plus additional marriage register.
- Ability to streamline accounting for stock – better control measures
- Would create a separate birth & death registration team.
- Only need two form of accounts i.e. SR & RBD not five.
- Current system is antiquated
- Service could be more flexible
- Creating a separate marriage team with more casuals would make sense and would give more back-up service.
- Interrupting appointments, if you are working in one of three registers, would stop – stock would just be allocated to deputies.

Disadvantages:

- Would lose variety in job – some skills and knowledge would no longer be needed.
- May not be enough cover during holidays/sickness
- May not create any monetary savings in salaries
- May cause disruption and unrest to staff

Partners/Clients Views

Comments from stakeholders were predominantly the reverse of the concerns raised for option II, but also offered the following comments:

- Strongly support the current set-up (merger of Registration & Bereavement) and having the office at the hospital.
- Process is seamless for families

- Having both services under one roof is much easier for families
- Information provided by the service areas should be praised
- Total confidence in the current service
- Service works well – everything is in one place for families
- Have received no complaints or negative feedback from families about Registration & Bereavement Services
- Current systems are fine – all staff are polite and efficient
- Current set-up works really well, particularly with the close links with Coroners and the Mortuary Staff – Staff are very helpful and thorough.
- No issues or problems