

Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Programme

Gateway Review of:
Registration & Bereavement Services

Recommendations Report
to Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

4 January 2012

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Officer Lead Gateway Review of these front-line services is being undertaken to identify options for future strategy, policy and service provision that will provide a dignified, efficient and professional Registration and Bereavement Service for the residents of Stockton.

The review is being overseen by the Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee. The Committee agreed the project scope on the 15th June 2011 and the Baseline information was presented and reviewed on the 13th July 2011. Preferred options were considered by the Committee at its' meeting on 1st December 2011.

The purpose of this document is to set out final options/recommendations for improvements and efficiencies to be considered by the Committee prior to seeking Cabinet approval on 9th February 2012.

Aim of the Review

The primary aim of the review is to identify the potential to deliver transformational changes and efficiencies, with due regard to statute.

In identifying options for future service provision, consideration has also been given to working towards a minimum target of 15% savings, whilst recognising that the combined cost to the Authority is only **£30k** per annum.

Preferred Option

In undertaking the options appraisal, consideration was given to the future aims and objective of both services areas whilst respecting Members' concerns regarding any significant change due to the highly sensitive nature of the services provided.

Given that the combined net cost to the authority is just under £30k per annum, with the services under consideration predominately funded via income generation, the review has focussed upon service transformation / improvement to:

- Provide a dignified, efficient and professional front-line customer focussed service
- Meet the changing needs of customers through extending choice
- Improving performance and customer satisfaction levels
- Adoption of the 'Tell Us Once' service
- Preparations for forthcoming legislative changes
- Continued professional relationship with the General Register Office (GRO)

It is therefore proposed that option 4 be adopted for both Service areas as follows:

Bereavement Services

Option 4 - Efficiencies through improved working practices including:

- Review of current fees & charges to bring in line with neighbouring authorities
- Review of current opening hours
- Maintains specialist service areas, high levels of professionalism and technical knowledge.
- Maintains an independent officer to assess complaints, issues and problems.
- Retains the enforcement and operational element under a separate unit.
- Maintains natural links with the Registration Service
- Ensures the balance of public benefit against cost

- Maintains current high performance levels.
- Opportunity to improve service delivery
- Improved customer & stakeholder satisfaction levels
- Continued professional/technical advice for stakeholders
- Arrangements for out of hours service for Muslim burials will continue

Recommendations

1. An average 5% increase in burial fees and charges to apply from 1 April 2012 to achieve estimated additional income of £13,000 per annum
2. In conjunction with HR consultation commences with staff to allow Bereavement Services to be open Monday to Saturday for the booking of interments and general enquiries, proposing that staff work 5 over 6 days per week on a rota basis.
3. The Registration team will assume the responsibility for the marketing and delivery of civil funeral ceremonies with a view to increasing business, utilising casual 'as and when' funeral celebrants
4. Officers explore the feasibility on an on-line booking facility for funeral directors to take advantage.

Registration Services

Option 4 - Efficiencies through improved working practices:

- Scheme change in consultation with HR & General Register Office (GRO)
- Decommissioning of current statutory marriage room to meet efficiency savings
- Provide improved marriage venue, with extended and bespoke ceremonies
- Opening service all-day Saturday
- Continuation of satellite office at North Tees General Hospital
- Improved (extended) customer choice
- Implementation of Tell Us Once Service
- Service improvements through TUO enrichment
- Child Benefit verification,
- Additional marriage venue option,
- Public toilet facilities and extended reception area.
- Improved customer satisfaction levels
- Potential to increase business
- Maintains natural links with Bereavement Services, NHS Trust, Coroner's Office & the DWP's Tell Us Once programme
- Sign up to GRO New Governance arrangements
- Continue to offer non-statutory services (see option 3) for extended customer choice

Recommendations

1. Decommission current statutory marriage room from 1 April 2012 to provide additional income of £17,000 per annum.
2. Provide alternative, more intimate statutory marriage room for the set statutory fee (£43.50).
3. The new marriage suite at Nightingale House be decorated and updated, and ceremony times be extended from 30 to 45 minutes, with the production of bespoke scripts to broaden the choice and reflect the wishes of the customer. In addition public toilet facilities will be provided for customers on the ground floor.

4. That the Registration Service absorb the additional costs of providing the Tell us Once scheme – providing non-cashable savings of £13,000, with other benefits being realised elsewhere in the Authority through reductions in over payments and avoidable contact.
5. That structures are considered in consultation with General Register Office (GRO) and HR to
 - Create a dedicated ceremonies team
 - Enter into GRO's 'New Governance' arrangements, including adoption of service delivery and good practice standards
 - Work with GRO and staff to provide a scheme change, working towards a one statutory Superintendent Registrar and one statutory Registrar of births and deaths model.
 - All day opening on Saturdays
6. The service continues to offer non-statutory services such as naming ceremonies, renewal of vows, etc to meet the needs of customers

Financial Implications

Bereavement Services Indicative Savings	Efficiency Saving	Non-cashable efficiencies
Increase in burial fees & charges (based on 2010/11 income + 5%)	£13k	
Registration Services Indicative Savings		
Decommissioning Marriage Room (Based on 2010/11 Register Office Marriages/Civil Partnerships)	£17k	
Tell Us Once Administration costs absorbed within current team		£13k
Reduction in current payments for Saturday morning	£3k	
Total	£33,000	£13,000

Consultation Summary

Communication and consultation briefings have been on-going with all Registration and Bereavement Services staff since May 2011. Stakeholder consultation, which included meetings with funeral directors, the University Hospital of North Tees, neighbouring authorities (including visit to Hartlepool Connect - Customer Contact Centre), CFYA and on-line customers' comments on current opening hours concluded 18 October 2011.

Feedback from stakeholders strongly suggests to dissolve the current set-up of Registration and Bereavement Services would be a backward step, particularly given the recent introduction of a satellite office within the University Hospital of North Tees, which closely links the Registrar with the hospitals' Mortuary Team, Bereavement Officers and Coroner's Service.

Stakeholders were in favour of retaining the current service with the introduction of opening the service all day Saturday, particularly for death registrations, the booking of funerals and the giving of Notices of Marriage/Civil Partnership. Funeral Directors were also keen for us to explore the feasibility of an on-line out-of-hours funeral booking service.

No real concerns were raised by GRO or key stakeholders regarding a scheme change within the Registration Service providing the current performance levels were maintained or further improved.

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) gateway review of Registration and Bereavement Services.
2. The review formed part of a three-year programme of EIT reviews covering all services provided by the Council.

Aim of the Review

3. The aim of the review was “To identify options for future strategy, policy and service provision that will provide a dignified, efficient and professional Registration and Bereavement Service for SBC residents”.
4. In identifying options for future service provision, consideration has also been given to working towards a minimum target of 15% cost savings [i.e. 18K for Registration and 26K for Bereavement Services] whilst recognising that the combined cost to the Authority is only **£30k**.

Baseline Information

5. Registration and Bereavement Services are front-line customer focussed services based at The Register Office, Nightingale House. The service also has a satellite office at the University Hospital of North Tees and work closely with the hospital’s Mortuary Team, Bereavement Officers and the Coroner’s Service.
6. The Committee considered baseline information relating to the current service provision for Bereavement Services – including:
 - Administration service for the arrangement of all burials and exhumations within the Borough’s cemeteries
 - Information service/point of contact for bereaved families and funeral organisers
 - Granting, exercising & transferring the Exclusive Right of Burial and Right to Erect a Memorial
 - Approval of memorial applications in-line with cemetery regulations
 - Technical and legal advice on the law of burial and exhumation
 - Cemetery developments and improvements
7. Registration Services – including:
 - Statutory registration of Births, Still-Births, Deaths, Marriages & Civil Partnerships
 - Attesting, entering and publishing of Notices of Marriage & Civil Partnerships
 - Solemnisation of marriages & registering the formation of civil partnerships at the register office, approved premise venues, registered buildings (non-conformist churches) and the residence of housebound and detained persons (HM Prison Holme House)
 - Re-registration of a child’s birth following the natural parents’ marriage/adding the natural father’s details
 - Statutory Citizenship Ceremonies
 - Non-statutory ceremonies i.e. naming, renewal of vows and civil funeral ceremonies
 - Certificate issue from current and historic records
 - Collection and transmission of statistical information to Office for National Statistics (ONS)
 - Family history research
 - The adoption of the ‘Tell us Once’ service with effect from 31 October 2011.

Resources

8. Registration and Bereavement staffing consist: 1 F/T Service Manager, 10 F/T Staff, 3 P/T Staff and 1 Apprentice. The Registration Team is also supported by 8 casual 'as and when' marriage registrars. Budget provision for the services is shown below:

Bereavement Services ¹		Registration Service	
Employees – direct	120,868	Employees – direct	277,651
Employees – indirect	5,866	Employees – indirect	6,329
Transport	948	Transport	1,878
Supplies & Services	17,487	Supplies & Services	17,722
Premises	29,304		
Total Expenditure	174,473	Total Expenditure	303,580
Income	264,905	Income	183,316
Net Cost	(90,432)	Net Cost	120,264

9. As seen in the table above, the services are mainly income generators with the net cost to authority being **under £30,000** per annum.

¹ The actual cost of providing a burial service would need to include Cemetery (grave digging) costs of £331,063 and Memorial Inspection £100,000 and a percentage of Horticultural Services, grounds maintenance budget. These services were reviewed as part of the recent CFYA EIT review.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

OPTIONS APPRAISAL: BEREAVEMENT SERVICES	
<p><u>Description of the current service</u></p> <p>Bereavement Services provides a caring and professional customer and administration service for the arrangement of all burials and exhumations within the Borough's cemeteries. They provide information and advice to bereaved families, funeral organisers and Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>The team produce the Deeds of Grant relating to ownership of the Right of Burial and Right to Erect a Memorial for grave spaces. They approve memorial applications and will soon administer the marketing and sale of commemorative memorial wall and tree plaques.</p> <p>The Service is responsible for strategy and the future development of cemeteries and to ensure, wherever possible, the changing needs of the bereaved are met.</p> <p>Bereavement Services operates with a positive contribution to the Council's income which is currently just over £90k per annum.</p>	
<p>Option 1 – Transfer Bereavement Services to CFYA i.e. recombine operational services with administrative and technical/specialist role</p>	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential Budget Saving of £26k (less one-off redundancy costs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist/technical knowledge lost/diluted Service provision is currently high performing with few complaints – potential to reduce performance levels and increase complaints. Reduction in customer satisfaction levels
<p>This option is no longer viable due to a number of EIT reviews affecting CFYA services. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of posts and a redistribution of duties, meaning there is no capacity within the CFYA service to take on further duties.</p>	
<p>Option 2 – Commission burial administration service to an external provider</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential minor budget saving in future years of savings on pay award. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible loss or reduction in the £90k contribution to Council's income. Fixed management fee would be less flexible and would reduce ability for any efficiencies Any future increase in fees would be retained by new provider Management of contract could be difficult and time consuming requiring retention of some in-house capacity at a cost Loss of control on the type of service offered Service could become commercially focused rather than customer focused. In-house service is currently high performing and offers VFM. There may be no appetite from external service providers to take on a burial service that does not have the financial benefits of a crematorium. Risk to Council's reputation

Option 3 - Deliver burial service in conjunction with neighbouring authorities

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential saving of one post equating to approx £26k per annum | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No appetite from Neighbouring Authorities• Possible loss or reduction in the £90k contribution to Council's income• Service could be seen as remote, less flexible, subject to change• Fixed management fee would be less flexible and would reduce ability for any efficiencies• Management of contract could be difficult and time consuming requiring retention of some in-house capacity at a cost• Any future increase in fees would be retained by new provider• Loss of control on the type of service provided• In-house service is currently high performing and offers VFM.• Risk to Council's reputation |
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Option 4 - Efficiencies through improved working practices including:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of current fees & charges to bring in line with neighbouring authorities• Review of current opening hours• Maintains specialist service areas, high levels of professionalism and technical knowledge.• Maintains an independent officer to assess complaints, issues and problems.• Retains the enforcement and operational element under a separate unit.• Maintains natural links with the Registration Service• Ensures the balance of public benefit against cost• Maintains current high performance levels.• Opportunity to improve service delivery• Improved customer & stakeholder satisfaction levels• Continued professional/technical advice for stakeholders• Arrangements for out of hours service for Muslim burials will continue | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Efficiencies met by an increase in fees passed on to the customer |
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Recommended Option/s

Option IV

In considering options the review team had due regard for Stakeholder comments and feedback which is attached at appendix 1.

Option IV will provide efficiencies and improved working practices. It retains specialist/technical service areas, with an independent officer to assess any complaints, issues and problems.

It provides opportunities to adopt smarter communication protocols and more joined-up working with key stakeholders, including the exploration of an on-line 'out-of-hours' funeral booking service to identify any further efficiencies that could be made.

A fees comparison exercise within the Tees Valley and wider Northern Region concluded that there is scope to increase interment fees, whilst still providing a service that is lower than or comparable to our neighbours.

The current out-of-hours service for Muslim funerals would continue.

Customer and stakeholder consultation revealed a desire for the service to be open Monday to Saturday for the booking of interments and general enquiries. Bereavement Staff could, therefore, work 5 days over a 6 day week on a rota basis for Saturday to accommodate this need.

Bereavement Services Indicative Savings	Efficiency Saving	Non-cashable efficiencies
Increase in burial fees & charges (based on 2010/11 income + 5%)	£13k	
Sale of memorial plaques - Additional administration absorbed within current team (Based on 2 Hours @ 9.136 x 25 = £456.50 at conservative forecast of 25 sales per annum)		£500
Note: The income generated from plaque sales will be transferred to CFYA for on-going maintenance of the memorial walls.		
Total	£13,000	£500

Recommendations from option 4

1. An average 5% increase in burial fees and charges to apply from 1 April 2012 to achieve estimated additional income of £13,000 per annum
2. In conjunction with HR consultation commences with staff to allow Bereavement Services to be open Monday to Saturday for the booking of interments and general enquiries, proposing that staff work 5 over 6 days per week on a rota basis.
3. The Registration team will assume the responsibility for the marketing and delivery of civil funeral ceremonies with a view to increasing business, utilising casual 'as and when' funeral celebrants
4. Officers explore the feasibility on an on-line booking facility for funeral directors to take advantage.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL: REGISTRATION SERVICE

Description of the current service

The Registration Service is a statutory service responsible for the registration of births, still-births, deaths, marriages and civil partnership for the District of Stockton.

The service provides marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at the Register Office and a number of approved premise venues throughout the Borough. The team also arrange and perform celebratory ceremonies for customers wishing to have a baby naming ceremony, renew their marriage vows or arrange a civil funeral ceremony based on the wishes, beliefs and values of their loved one.

For residents who make a successful application for British Citizenship the team prepare a citizenship ceremony, where each applicant is required, in the presence of The Mayor, to swear (or affirm) an oath of allegiance to the Crown and pledge to uphold the values and laws of the United Kingdom.

Registration Services also provide copy certificates from their current and historic registers and assist customers with their family history research.

As of the 31st October 2011, Registration now offer the 'Tell Us Once' service on behalf of the DWP for customers wishing to tell us things – like a birth or death – once. The Registrar will make sure that information reaches all the Council, Government Departments and Agencies that need to know.

Option 1 – Consider shared services & joined up working arrangements.²

Advantages

- Potential minor Budget Saving from Managers post – offset by managing contract and fixed management fee

Disadvantages

- Current legislation will not allow statutory elements to be outsourced
- No appetite from Neighbouring Authorities
- Service could be seen as remote
- Fixed management fee would be less flexible and would reduce ability for any efficiencies
- Management of contract could be difficult and time consuming requiring retention of some in-house capacity at a cost
- Any future increase in fees would be retained by new provider
- Loss of control on the type of service provided
- In-house service is currently high performing and offers VFM.
- Risk to Council's reputation

² 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.

Option 2 – Transfer Service to Customer Contact Centre	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Budget Saving of Manager’s post offset by changes in grading of other posts – estimated at approx £10 - 13k 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist/technical knowledge lost/diluted • Service could be seen as impersonal and less sensitive being in busy contact centre • Current service provision is high performing with good customer feedback – potential to reduce performance levels and increase complaints. • Stakeholder feedback suggests this is not a preferred option
Option 3 - Cease provision of non-statutory services i.e. Naming, Renewal of Vows & Civil Funerals Ceremonies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time allocated to non-statutory duties could be utilized on core statutory service provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of income • Needs of customers may not be met • Reduced customer choice • Could lead to increase in customer complaints and a drop in satisfaction levels.
Option 4 - Efficiencies through improved working practices:	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme change in consultation with HR & General Register Office (GRO) • Decommissioning of current statutory marriage room to meet efficiency savings and provide improved facility, with extended and bespoke ceremonies • Opening service all-day Saturday • Continuation of satellite office at North Tees General Hospital • Improved (extended) customer choice • Continued provision of Tell Us Once Service • Service improvements through TUO enrichment, • Child Benefit verification, • Additional marriage venue option, • Public toilet facilities and extended reception area. • Improved customer satisfaction levels • Potential to increase business • Maintains natural links with Bereavement Services, NHS Trust, Coroner’s Office & the DWP’s Tell Us Once programme • Sign up to GRO New Governance arrangements • Continue to offer non-statutory services (see option 3) for extended customer choice 	

Recommended Option/s

Option IV

Option IV would maintain the natural link with Bereavement Services and other key stakeholders. The introduction of a scheme change, working towards a one statutory Superintendent Registrar and one statutory Registrar of Births & Deaths model with LEAN working methods and maintaining current robust security stock control systems will allow for greater flexibility and more deputies focussed on the core service i.e. the registration of births and deaths and Tell Us Once enrichment.

The scheme would allow for a dedicated ceremonies team to focus on delivering and marketing both statutory and non-statutory ceremonies (including civil funerals). The ceremonies team would continue to be supported by seasonal 'as and when' casual staff.

The introduction of a smaller, more intimate statutory marriage room, priced at the statutory fee of £43.50 (including marriage certificate) and decommissioning of the current statutory marriage room, which would include decorative improvements, extended ceremony time from 30-minutes to 45-minutes, production of bespoke scripts and an affordable pricing structure, which reflects VFM, would extend customer choice, option availability and generate additional income.

The Tell Us Once service now provided within Registration, maintains the - tell us 'once' ethos and offers customers a seamless process following birth/death registration. Efficiencies are being made by absorbing the costs of implementing and delivering the service, with additional benefits being realised elsewhere within the Authority.³

Customer and stakeholder consultation revealed a real need to open the service all-day Saturday, particularly for the giving of Marriage and Civil Partnerships Notices and the option of holding a ceremony after 1:00pm. Funeral directors and the NHS Trust felt opening all-day Saturday would be extremely 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. Registration Staff could work 5 days of a 6 day period on a rota basis.

Registration Services Indicative Savings	Efficiency Savings	Non-cashable efficiencies
Decommissioning Marriage Room (Based on 2010/11 Register Office Marriages/Civil Partnerships)	£17k	
Tell Us Once Administration costs absorbed within current team (Based on 10.365 rate/15 minute appointment £2.59 x 4927 registrations in 2010/11 = £12,760)		£13k
Reduction in current payments for Saturday morning (Based on SR payment of £12.35 and Marriage Registrar payment of £9.02 – approved premise x 2.5/register office x actual time)	£3k	
Total	£20,000	£13,000

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Tell Us Once Notification Area	Savings Per Annum
Housing Benefits	£20.5K
Reduction in avoidable contact	£21.5K
Blue Badge Scheme	£10K
Adult and Children's Services	£37.5K

Recommendations from option 4

1. Decommission current statutory marriage room from 1 April 2012 to provide additional income of £17,000 per annum.
2. Provide alternative, more intimate statutory marriage room for the set statutory fee (£43.50).
3. The new marriage suite at Nightingale House be decorated and updated, and ceremony times be extended from 30 to 45 minutes, with the production of bespoke scripts to broaden the choice and reflect the wishes of the customer. In addition public toilet facilities will be provided for customers on the ground floor.
4. That the Registration Service absorb the additional costs of providing the Tell us Once scheme – providing non-cashable savings of £13,000, with other benefits being realised elsewhere in the Authority through reductions in over payments and avoidable contact.
5. That structures are considered in consultation with General Register Office (GRO) and HR to
 - Create a dedicated ceremonies team
 - Enter into GRO's 'New Governance' arrangements, including adoption of service delivery and good practice standards
 - Work with GRO and staff to provide a scheme change, working towards a one statutory Superintendent Registrar and one statutory Registrar of births and deaths model
 - All day opening on Saturdays
6. The service continues to offer non-statutory services such as naming ceremonies, renewal of vows, etc to meet the needs of customers

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

10. Feedback from stakeholders strongly suggests to dissolve the current set-up of Registration and Bereavement Services would be a backward step, particularly given the recent introduction of a satellite office within the University Hospital of North Tees, which closely links the Registrar with the hospitals' Mortuary Team, Bereavement Officers and Coroner's Service.
11. Stakeholders were in favour of retaining the current service with the introduction of opening the service all day Saturday, particularly for death registrations, the booking of funerals and the giving of Notices of Marriage/Civil Partnership. Funeral Directors were also keen for us to explore the feasibility of an on-line out-of-hours funeral booking service.
12. Communication and consultation briefings have been on-going with all Registration and Bereavement Services staff since May 2011. Stakeholder consultation, which included meetings with funeral directors, the University Hospital of North Tees, neighbouring authorities (including visit to Hartlepool Connect - Customer Contact Centre), CFYA and on-line customers' comments on current opening hours concluded 18 October 2011.
13. No real concerns were raised by GRO or key stakeholders regarding a scheme change within the Registration Service providing the current performance levels were maintained or further improved.