

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**9 FEBRUARY 2012**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **CABINET DECISION**

**Access & Communities – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor David Coleman**  
**Environment – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor David Rose**

#### **EFFICIENCY, IMPROVEMENT, AND TRANSFORMATION (EIT) GATEWAY REVIEW OF REGISTRATION & BEREAVEMENT SERVICES**

##### 1. Summary

The EIT review of Registration & Bereavement Services has been undertaken to identify ways in which these front-line services can be carried out more effectively and efficiently, having due regard for statute. The review has been carried out as a “Gateway” review under the scrutiny of the Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee. This report presents the recommendations of the review.

The review examined a variety of services that are delivered by Registration & Bereavement services to both residents and non-residents of the Borough. These included the statutory registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, conducting of ceremonies for weddings and civil partnerships, the administration of all burials and exhumations within the Borough’s cemeteries, approval of memorial applications and the non-statutory services such as naming ceremonies, renewal of vows, family history research and technical and legal advice on the law of burial and exhumation.

Evidence from statutory key performance indicators showed that customer satisfaction levels have remained above the national standard of 90%, with formal complaints maintaining a below average standard against a national figure of 0.5%.

Feedback from stakeholder consultation was strongly in favour of retaining the current set-up of Registration & Bereavement Services, maintaining the satellite office within the University of North Tees Hospital, but indicated a real need to open both service areas all-day Saturday, particularly for death registrations and the giving of Notices of Marriage & Civil Partnership.

In identifying recommendations, Members were aware that the services were low cost, with the combined total to the authority being £30,000 per annum, and due to the highly sensitive nature of the services the review focussed upon service transformation/improvement thereby ensuring that both service performance and customer satisfaction levels remain high.

##### 2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. 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.

2. 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.
3. Officers explore the feasibility on an on-line booking facility for funeral directors, whilst maintaining the current 'out-of-hours' arrangements for Muslim Burials and Registrar General's Licence (Death-Bed Weddings).
4. Officers to review burial fees and charges to bring in-line with other Tees Valley Authorities with effect from 1 April 2012.
5. In order to provide an improved level of service and extended choice for customers –
  - a. An alternative, more intimate statutory marriage room be provided for the set statutory fee (£43.50).
  - b. The current statutory marriage room be decommissioned and named the 'Nightingale Suite' from February 2012 to provide additional income of £17,000 per annum.
  - c. The new Nightingale Suite 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.
  - d. In addition, DDA compliant public toilet facilities be provided for customers on the ground floor.
6. That the Registration Service absorb the additional costs of providing the Tell Us Once service – providing non-cashable savings of £13,000, with other benefits being realised elsewhere in the Authority through reductions in over-payments and avoidable contact.
7. 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.
  - Provide all-day opening on Saturdays
8. The service continues to offer non-statutory services such as naming ceremonies, renewal of vows, etc to meet the needs of customers.

### 3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To produce efficiencies and service improvement in the delivery of Registration & Bereavement Services as part of the Council's EIT Programme, whilst sustaining/improving high quality outcomes for SBC residents.

### 4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with

knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

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Summary

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In identifying recommendations, Members were aware the services were low cost, with the combined total to the authority being £30,000 per annum, and due to the highly sensitive nature of the services the review focussed upon service transformation/improvement thereby ensuring that both service performance and customer satisfaction levels remain high.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

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## **BACKGROUND**

1. 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. Current service provision includes:

### **Bereavement Services**

- 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

## Registration Services

- 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.

## **DETAIL**

2. The attached report presents Cabinet with the findings of the EIT Gateway Review of Registration & Bereavement Services which was overseen by the Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee.
3. The review forms part of a three year programme of EIT (Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation) reviews covering all services provided by the Council. The programme aims to ensure that all services are reviewed in a systematic way to ensure that they are provided in the most efficient manner, provide value for money and identify opportunities for service improvements and transformation.
4. In identifying future service provision, consideration was given to working towards a target efficiency saving of 15%. 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)

## Views of the Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee

5. The review was overseen by the Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee who provided independent challenge to the review. The Committee received the scope of the review on 15 June 2011, baseline information on 13 July 2011 and considered reports on options on 1 December 2011 and 4 January 2012.
6. The Committee recognised the highly sensitive nature of the services provided and supported the proposed options which would deliver efficiencies through improved working practices thereby providing an improved service for customers. In particular, Members welcomed improvements which would be delivered through the Tell Us Once service, improvements to the marriage venue and the proposal to retain the satellite registration office at North Tees General Hospital. The Committee acknowledged that as the combined cost to the Authority for registration and bereavement services was £30,000, the estimated efficiency saving of £33,000 would mean the services would be cost neutral to the Authority.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7. It is estimated that the recommendations will save the Authority £33,000 per annum, together with non-cashable efficiencies of £13,000 as detailed in the table below:

<b>Bereavement Services Indicative Savings</b>	<b>Efficiency Saving</b>	<b>Non-cashable efficiencies</b>
Increase in burial fees & charges (based on 2010/11 income + 5%)	£13k	
<b>Registration Services Indicative Savings</b>		
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

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst the services are heavily regulated, there are no specific legal implications emanating from the review at this stage.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

This report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

This review impacts upon the core themes of Stronger Communities and Environment & Housing.

## EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment and has been judged to have a neutral impact (score of 76).

## CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

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.

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Education related

No

Background Papers

None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific.

Property

Improvements to Nightingale House, including ground floor customer/disabled toilet facilities.