

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CORPORATE SERVICES
CABINET MEMBER**

REGISTRATION SERVICE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To report on developments in the Registration Service.
- 1.2 To seek approval for an increase in fees for ceremonies in Approved Premises
- 1.3 To seek approval for an increase in fees for other Non Statutory ceremonies

2.1 REGISTRATION ONLINE (RON)

The General Register Office (GRO) computerised system, Registration On-line (RON) for the registration of births and deaths has been the subject of review after the initial failure of the system in 2007. A national phased programme of return is now underway. There has been dialogue between North Lincolnshire IT section and GRO and alternative internet links have now been installed in case of main council internet failure. The Superintendent Registrar and representatives from IT are meeting technical experts from GRO on 4 March with a view to confirming the system is ready for a return to RON. Once this is approved, staff will attend refresher training prior to the re-launch.

2.2 ACCOUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Registration staff became local authority employees on 1 December 2008. The change had certain impacts on the methods of accounting.

Up to that date, the Superintendent Registrar and Registrars maintained a manual daily cash book and submitted an annual account to the Registrar General. Now the staff transfer has taken place, the responsibility for accounting is that of the local authority.

The Superintendent Registrar has developed and implemented an electronic method of accounting using spreadsheets. This was examined extensively during the audit in December 2008. A stock recording system has also been developed along with a weekly and monthly reconciliation of certificates issued against income.

The audit found no significant problems with the new system.

2.3 NATIONALITY CHECKING SERVICE

Further to Minute 173 of 29 September 2008 when approval was given for the start up of the Nationality Checking System the application for a licence from the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) has now been granted. Three staff have passed the relevant tests and are approved as Level 1 Immigration Advisors with capacity to deliver the checking service. The service has been extensively publicised and the first customer has been received.

2.4 ON-LINE CERTIFICATE SERVICE

The on-line search and order facility has been operational since November 2007 and is proving a success. Staff have now finished adding all previous years death indexes on to the system and the public are now able to search all birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837 to 2008. This is a huge achievement and the council is believed to be one of the first in the country to offer full access to all indexes.

2.5 TELL US ONCE

A Steering Group has been formed to look into the feasibility of providing a "Tell us Once" service for all those registering deaths within North Lincolnshire. The group has been initiated by the Registration Service and comprises members from several other services.

Once a death has been registered, it is then up to the relatives to contact every single council department which may have been involved with the deceased person. There is currently a national Tell us Once cross government programme being developed. This is exploring whether information can be passed securely to other relevant departments in central and local government, such as Department of Work and Pensions, Passport Agency, DVLA etc. and there are a number of pilot schemes in operation.

The lessons learned from the various pilots are being incorporated into the development of an integrated service model, which is intended to be implemented as a pathfinder. This will then undergo further evaluation and the findings used to present a business case.

Offering a North Lincolnshire Council Tell us Once service would help relatives and reassure them that all relevant council departments have received notification of the death. Being able to notify one single council point would appear to be a simpler process, offering benefits to the relatives.

There are a number of legal issues being currently resolved but as the registration of a death is a legal formality, informants have to attend the register office in person and this would be the optimum time for taking details. Staff are specifically trained in bereavement issues and already deal with customers at this difficult, confusing and emotional time with a high degree of care and sensitivity.

Work is also being carried out by the Steering Group to try to identify every possible service within North Lincolnshire Council which may need to be notified of a death.

2.6 BEREAVEMENT CONFERENCE

The registration service is a member of the Le Henry regional training group. The service is arranging a Bereavement conference on behalf of Le Henry to be held on 7th May 2009 in the Council Chamber at Pittwood House from approximately 10.30am to 4pm.

2.7 STATUTORY AND NON STATUTORY FEES

The Superintendent Registrar is part of a national fees review working group formed by the Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS). The group was formed after the Registration Service Policy Forum (RSPF) raised the issue. Statutory fees are not set at a level to recover the full cost of delivering the service but by a complex formula based upon returns submitted by Local Authorities to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It has become clear over recent years that despite rising costs in local government, this formula is not resulting in fee increases and does not cover the cost of running the service. The last increase in statutory fees was in April 2003.

When the Identity and Passport Service subsumed GRO, LACORS received confirmation that they were willing to undertake a review of the methodology for calculating statutory fees. This resulted in the formation of the National Fees Review working group and it is hoped that the results will be used to reset statutory fees.

Locally, each Local Authority is responsible for the setting of fees for weddings/civil partnerships in Approved Premises and also for setting fees for non-statutory ceremonies.

There has been no increase in fees since 2005/6.

It is therefore proposed that the current marriage/civil partnership fees for ceremonies carried out in Approved Premises are amended. The fees for other non-statutory services have also been reviewed and the following fees have been calculated following guidance from the Value for Money team and reflect the true cost of providing the service. It is proposed that the increases take effect from 1 April 2009.

APPROVED PREMISES CEREMONIES

(Weddings and Civil Partnership formations)

Monday - Thursday

Current Fee £200 Proposed Fee £260

Friday

Current Fee £240 Proposed Fee £270

Saturday

Current Fee £250 Proposed Fee £275

Sunday/Bank Holiday - Current Fee £320 Proposed Fee £355

NON STATUTORY CEREMONIES IN REGISTER OFFICE

(Baby Naming and Renewal of Vows)

Monday - Thursday

Current Fee £70 Proposed Fee £95

Friday

Current Fee £90 Proposed Fee £110

Saturday

Current Fee £120 Proposed Fee £160

Sunday/Bank Holiday

Current Fee £165 Proposed Fee £200

NON STATUTORY CEREMONIES IN APPROVED PREMISES

(Baby Naming and Renewal of Vows)

Monday - Thursday

Current Fee £110 Proposed Fee £190

Friday

Current Fee £120 Proposed Fee £200

Saturday

Current Fee £150 Proposed Fee £210

Sunday/Bank Holiday

Current Fee £165 Proposed Fee £250

ADMINISTRATION CHARGE FOR CERTIFICATE APPLICATIONS

£2.55 to include first class postage

£3.00 for overseas applications

3 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Most of the report is an update on issues affecting the Registration Service. However the issue of fees will require a decision to either accept reject or modify.

4 ANALYSIS FOR OPTIONS

4.1 An increase in fees would represent the costs in providing the service being recovered and so assist in helping to balance next year's budget which has come under pressure in the current year through a shortfall in income recovery.

4.2 If fees are held at present rates other measures would need to be considered to offset the current subsidy.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

The fee increases are likely to lead to an increase in income which should cover the cost of providing the service

5.2 Staffing

There are no direct staffing implications

6 OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 The proposals are within the council's statutory powers.

6.2 Any increase in fees will be levied uniformly.

7 OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 All staff are fully engaged in the service issues.

7.2 The proposed fees have been discussed with Finance and the VFM Team.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the above developments are noted.

8.2 That approval is given to the proposed fees.

SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC

Pittwood House
Ashby Road
SCUNTHORPE
North Lincolnshire
DN16 1AB
Author: Alison Prestwood/Mike Wood
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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - None