

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Cabinet
Date of Committee 12 October 2006
Report Title **Modernisation of Registration Services: development of service level agreement type relationship with Registrar General.**

Summary Outlines the development of a new relationship with the Registrar General's Office, moving away from a rigid scheme assessment to a service level agreement arrangement with a national Code of Practice. Cabinet is recommended to approve the adoption of this new arrangement at the earliest opportunity after April 2007 and agree to the use of some capital resources to improve the delivery of Registration services to the public in Warwickshire North and East.

For further information please contact:

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?

Background papers Registrar General's Draft Scheme and Code of Practice

Cabinet Report 8th September 2005: Modernisation and development of Registration Services in Warwickshire

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members Cllrs David Booth, George Atkinson and Bob Hicks.
- Cabinet Member Cllr. Peter Fowler

- Chief Executive
- Legal Sarah Duxbury
- Finance Charles Holden, Corp Capital Accountant
- Other Chief Officers David Carter
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Steve Smith

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Cabinet - 12 October 2006

Modernisation of Registration Services

Report of the Director, Performance & Development Directorate

Recommendation

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the acceptance of a new scheme assessment for Registration Services based on the Registrar General's model Scheme and Code of Practice as soon as possible after April
2. Cabinet is asked to approve the inclusion of a move to local pay agreements for Registration Service staff as part of the new scheme, to facilitate the implementation of the County Council's Pay and Conditions Review and a more flexible, multi-skilled workforce.
3. Cabinet is asked to approve the utilisation of capital underspend to the amount of £26,992 from the Stratford Register Office move to support the upgrading of Register Offices at Nuneaton and Rugby.

1. Background

- 1.1 In November 2005, the Registrar General published a consultation paper outlining the next steps in modernising the Registration Service for England and Wales. The outcome of the consultation, published in May 2006, showed that the proposals found favour with the overwhelming majority of consultees, over half of which were local Authorities.
- 1.2 One of the key proposals was to give local Authorities a greater level of responsibility and accountability for providing local registration services, at the same time removing many of the rigid and redundant controls on the current system. Under the new proposals, local Authorities will have more control to decide, within a national standards framework, how best to meet the needs of local people.

2. Registration Services "Scheme"

- 2.1 The current legislative framework for Registration Services shares responsibility between the Registrar General and local Authorities, with local Authorities submitting a "Scheme" for the provision of services to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, via the Registrar General's Office. Changes to the Scheme, once approved, such as a variation in the hours of opening Register Offices, may not be made without permission from the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

2.2 This rigid Scheme format is to be replaced with a more flexible Scheme based on a Code of Practice, supplemented by a Good Practice Guide (available on request), setting out performance standards for the service. The model Scheme proposed by the Registrar General's Office is more like a Service Level Agreement, allowing local decisions about the provision of service within the Code of Practice.

2.3 The key changes are:

- that local Authorities will have the discretion to adjust staffing levels and opening hours of Register Offices and other service points to reflect demand for the service, and
- that Authorities will be required to publish a Customer Charter, detailing the level of service provision delivered to the public
- that the service provided must comply with the minimum standards laid out in the Good Practice Guide.

2.4 The focus of the Registrar General's Inspectorate will shift from inspection of the work of individual Registration officers to the service provision by the local Authority as a whole, through analysis of data returned and local Authority self-assessments.

2.5 Consultation with users on service provision is a key element of the Code of Practice, as is monitoring the satisfaction levels of users with the Service.

3. Implications for Registration Service clients

3.1 The move away from the previous system of a scheme with fixed amounts of Registration hours for births, deaths and marriage registration at each Register Office and outstation in the County will enable the County to be far more responsive to our clients' needs, particularly as these may change over time.

3.2 The Code of Practice includes a requirement to consult with users on the county's service delivery plan, so there will be greater opportunity for clients to influence their access to the service.

3.3 During 2006/7 officers will be conducting a review of the current demand for services of all types, and formulating proposals to improve access to services, which will form the basis of a consultation with users and relevant agencies during 2007/8.

4 Implications for Registration Service staff

4.1 Staff will be consulted on the proposals to improve access to services, and in particular, how this may impact on their current role and deployment in the County.

4.2 The historic division of role between birth and death registration and marriage registration will not serve the more responsive service we aim to provide. Many of Warwickshire's Registration staff are already trained to undertake both roles where the opportunity arises, and we will aim to expand

the number of multi-skilled staff in the service, to ensure that all types of Registration can potentially be provided at all outlets in the County.

- 4.3 Registration staff in the County are currently paid on NJC rates within fixed limits detailed in the scheme. Many Registration authorities in other parts of the country have negotiated local pay arrangements with staff, which make it possible to recognise and reward a greater level of skill and flexibility in roles undertaken by staff. The new scheme enables the County Council to determine pay and conditions based on existing NJC scales and encompassing any local pay and conditions, which will facilitate the greater flexibility above and also enable the outcome of the County's Council's pay and conditions review, under which all Registration roles will be evaluated, to be implemented appropriately.

5 Resource implications

- 5.1 Registration Services is an income-generating function, raising approximately 73% of its annual costs from fees for registration activities, primarily marriages and civil partnerships at Approved Premises in the County. Fees for these ceremonies are significant, and annually benchmarked with other neighbouring authorities.
- 5.2 Fees at the County's Register Offices, however are set at the statutory minimum (currently £40). While this clearly assists those citizens on a limited budget it is our intention to ensure that the quality of their experience of Registration Services is equal to those who are able to afford some of the best venues in the County. Our Warwick and Stratford Register Offices have recently been refurbished to a very high standard with DDA funds at Warwick (2005/6) and a capital allocation (2006/7) at Stratford.
- 5.3 Our principal Register Offices in the North and East of the County, however, are not in such a good state and the quality of service is consequently less satisfactory.
- 5.4 Nuneaton Register Office has approximately 13,000 visitors a year. The ceremony room at the Register Office, which is in use almost every Saturday of the year, has no air conditioning. Windows and doors have to remain closed during ceremonies because of noise from the park outside, so whenever there are more than 3 weddings or civil partnerships scheduled, the room becomes uncomfortably hot. Clients have repeatedly complained to staff about the temperature of the ceremony room at Nuneaton, despite utilising several fans throughout ceremonies. Staff are particularly concerned about the well-being of clients, particularly the elderly and the very young, who have recently had to sit through temperatures in excess of 29 degrees. Clients attending weddings had to leave the room during the heatwave in July 06, and one lady fainted. Installation of an appropriate airconditioning system is urgently required.
- 5.5 Property Services have advised us that the ceremony room will also need re-decoration following the installation of air-conditioning, as this will need external venting through the wall of the ceremony room.
- 5.6 External aspects of the Rugby Register Office, which receives 5000 visitors a year is in urgent need of upgrading. The Register Office is a County Council premises, used not only for registering births and deaths, but also for marriages and civil partnerships. The exterior of the building, a prefabricated

unit attached to the former Town Council meeting room, is very dated and unattractive. (See Appendix 1). This deters potential customers seeking to hold their ceremony at the Register Office. Work required includes replacement windows with security glass (enabling the existing bars on the inside of the windows to be removed), rendering the brick porch and providing new gutters and soffit boards.

- 5.7 The interior of the ceremony room at Rugby is very dated and we have had several comments from members of the public on this. Registration Services will have to find funds from income earned this year to update redecorate and bring the room up to date, particularly as the variety of ceremonies performed has expanded to include civil partnerships and citizenship ceremonies. The Coroner's service is also interested in using the room for small inquests as appropriate.
- 5.8 Rugby Register Office's central heating boiler is 18 years old and Property Services have advised that this will need to be replaced imminently, at a cost of £4300.
- 5.9 On 7th February 2006, Council approved an allocation of £154,000 capital to support the relocation of the Register Office in Stratford upon Avon as requested in a capital development bid brought forward as part of the 2006/07 budget process. The former Register Office at 7 Rother Street was inaccessible to people with mobility impairment while the new premises were fully accessible.
- 5.10 The allocation of £154,000 was based on an estimate provided by Property Services for an earlier plan of relocating the Register Office from 7 Rother Street, to 8 Rother Street. In the event space at 8 Rother Street was not available and in May 2006 the Register office was successfully moved to Winton House, Church Street, Stratford upon Avon. The refurbishment of Winton House cost considerably less than the original estimate for moving to 8 Rother Street. The total cost was £64,830 including fees, leaving a residue of £89,170 unspent.
- 5.11 It is proposed that part of the capital underspend identified above be used to improve the Register Offices at Nuneaton and Rugby, in order to ensure that the quality of service for those on limited incomes is consistently high across the County.
- 5.12 The costs associated with each of the above improvements is estimated as follows:

a) Improvements at Rugby	£9,400
b) airconditioning and associated work at Nuneaton Register Office	£15,500
c) Property services fees	£2,092
Total:	£26,992

6. Recommendations

4. Cabinet is asked to approve the acceptance of a new scheme assessment for Registration Services based on the Registrar General's model Scheme and Code of Practice as soon as possible after April

5. Cabinet is asked to approve the inclusion of a move to local pay agreements for Registration Service staff as part of the new scheme, to facilitate the implementation of the County Council's Pay and Conditions Review and a more flexible, multi-skilled workforce.
6. Cabinet is asked to approve the utilisation of capital underspend to the amount of £26,992 from the Stratford Register Office move to support the upgrading of Register Offices at Nuneaton and Rugby.

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05 October 2006

Appendix 1: Photographs of the exterior of Rugby Register Office.

CABINET REPORT 12 October 2006

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Rugby Register Office: exterior

