



Policy Development Panel on Registration

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ on Friday, 2 December 2016

Present:

William Trite (Chairman)
Beryl Ezzard and Kate Wheller

Officers Attending: Paul Leivers (Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services), Vivienne Robson (Deputy Registration Service Manager), Tony Elliott (Accountant - Financial Services) and Lee Gallagher (Democratic Services Manager).

Apologies for Absence

14 An apology for absence was received from Steve Butler.

Notes of Previous Meeting

15 The notes of the meeting held on 8 September 2016 were confirmed, and the informal notes of the meeting held on 31 October 2016 were received subject to three minor amendments.

Matter Arising

Note 13 – Future Registration Service Proposals

In relation to a perceived 20 minute access criteria, it was clarified that the travel time was considered as a working indicator in research terms for reasonableness of access to services and this was not a set criteria or performance standard.

Future Registration Service Proposals

16 The Panel considered a joint report by the Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services and the Acting Registration Service Manager which provided recommendations for the future delivery of the Registration Service in preparation for future anticipated changes in marriage legislation which could adversely impact upon service income. It was noted that the recommendations would be considered by the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2017.

The Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services provided an extensive summary of the history of the Panel which included a description of the original terms of reference to consider the impact of legislative change to allow more independent people to conduct ceremonies which had a provisional budgetary impact of £430k, and a drive to develop the service to become more customer focussed through a different model of administration and registration which would impact on office provision. Since the Panel was formed it was clarified that the legislative changes were likely to be delayed and come into force in approximately five years' time.

Members acknowledged the consultation that was undertaken to establish proposals regarding future service delivery, and that consideration had developed members' understanding of the registration needs across the County through the use of office premises, ceremony venues, and officer time and travel. Local community factors were also considered in relation to the needs of localities, access, population and deprivation. This work had investigated the possible extension of office provision to Weymouth and to provide an outreach service to Gillingham, Sherborne and Swanage (subject to formal financial support from each Town Council which had been secured for all except for Swanage so far).

In relation to office use and administration, Cllr Hall as the local member for Sherborne, raised concern that the Clerk of Sherborne Town Council is concerned that the registrar hours are being reduced from two half day sessions to one. The Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services undertook to meet with the Clerk if appropriate to clarify that the reduction to one session was due to the impact of the new service model which would see less office need as registrars would manage the marriages that they were responsible for, therefore reducing the need for as much office provision. It was noted that the level of service demand would be met and would not diminish.

The Panel considered in detail the locations and provision of ceremony rooms across the County and it was felt that the seven identified venues were appropriate. A further consideration was the development of a full cost recovery model for ceremony charges, and being mindful of a number of different management approaches across the County depending on whether premises were leased or available sessional hire. The Panel supported the number of ceremony venues and for officers to develop a cost model which would look to recover the costs across the County on a service wide basis and not based on a direct link to particular buildings.

The Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services confirmed that there had been an initial anticipated cost pressure of £25k as a result of cost of premises, which was hoped to reduce to the latest revised estimate of £11k given the additional support from Town Councils. It was hoped that the remaining £11k could be addressed through the recovery of costs and uplift of fees to enable the service to be cost neutral.

It was noted that the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2016 had discussed the Tell Us Once Service for births. The Panel considered that the service in relation to deaths should be retained, but it was not well used for births. Members supported the withdrawal of the service in relation to births.

Following discussion on the proposals above, the Panel agreed unanimously to ask the Cabinet to make all of the changes to the Registration Service from March 2018, which would provide time for restructuring of the service and to further develop cost recovery and service delivery pilots.

Recommended

That the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend the following changes to the Registration Service to the Cabinet for approval (as detailed within the annexure to this minute):

1. That the service provided be developed into a more customer focussed service, through six office locations across Dorset (at Blandford, Bridport, Dorchester, Ferndown, Wareham and Weymouth) and for outreach services to be provided at (Gillingham, Sherborne and Swanage), subject to Town Council support being secured for the outreach services.
2. That the service be based on seven ceremony rooms across the County. (At Blandford, Bridport, Ferndown, Gillingham, Sherborne, Swanage and Weymouth this reflects the present circumstances, however, as property matters emerge in the future it might be appropriate to make changes to these arrangements).
3. That Officers be encouraged to develop a schedule of fees and charges based on a full cost recovery model in relation to ceremonies, and to authorise the Assistant Director - Early Help and Community Services, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Independence, to set the schedule.
4. That the Tell Us Once service for deaths be retained, and the service for births be withdrawn.

Meeting Duration: 1.30 pm - 2.30 pm