



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Registration Services
Date:	19 November 2010
Reporting Officer:	Ciaran Quigley, Town Solicitor & Assistant Chief Executive – Ext 6038
Contact Officer:	Sean McCarthy, Departmental Business Manager – Ext 6053

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	As part of the Review of the Centre the functions within Registration Services (also known as the Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships Service), were transferred from the former Corporate Services Department to the Chief Executive's Department.
1.2	The purpose of this report is to: - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inform Members on revised resource requirements as directed by the General Register Office (GRO)• inform Members on registration fee increases proposed by the General Register Office• propose an increase in charges levied by Belfast City Council for use of the ceremony room in City Hall• propose an increase in charges for the attendance of the Registrar at ceremonies in approved venues.
1.3	The General Register Office is part of the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which is an agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel ("the Department") and is responsible for the administration and control of civil registration of births, adoptions, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.
1.4	The registration function is regulated and governed by three pieces of legislation, namely: The Births and Death Registration (NI) Order 1976 The Marriage (NI) Order 2003, and The Civil Partnership Act 2004
1.5	The legislation provides that each local government district shall be a registration district. In the exercise of the functions conferred on it as a local registration authority, Belfast City Council acts as an agent for the Department and in accordance with such directions as the Department may give to the Council.

1.6	Expenditure incurred in the exercise of these functions is reimbursed by the Department, subject to the approval of the Registrar General. The majority of costs relate to employees and, whilst all staff within Registration Services are employed directly by Belfast City Council, the staffing complement of the Service is determined by the GRO and all salaries and associated costs are recouped by quarterly invoice to GRO.
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2	Key Issues
	Staffing Complement for Registration Services
2.1	GRO has, over the last couple of months, been involved in an exercise to explore ways of reducing expenditure both within the GRO and in relation to the provision of the Registration Services in all district council areas, this being in the light of the present climate of financial challenge
2.2	GRO commissioned consultants (KPMG) to examine the resources required for each District Registration Office and in 2006 KPMG developed a series of timings and formulae for measuring resource requirements. On 29 October 2010, the GRO wrote to Belfast City Council advising that it had applied the KPMG timings and formulae in its current annual review of resource requirements, and that as a result of this methodology, financial approval would not be given for costs exceeding a staffing complement of 7.76 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for Belfast City Council. This is in the context where the present approved establishment is 9.7 FTE, although the position at present is that the current complement is 8.41 FTE (the difference being due to one unfilled post and changing work patterns).
2.3	As previously noted, district councils can only act as agents for the Department in relation to registration functions, and must also act in accordance with such directions as the Department (through GRO) gives. The effect of the latest correspondence received from GRO is that the Council only has approval to maintain a staffing complement of 7.76 FTE with effect from 1 January 2011, and this therefore puts the Council in the position of having to manage the required reduction in establishment from 9.7 to 7.76 FTE.
2.4	Fortunately, the Unit (Registration Services) has one currently unfilled post, while anticipated changes in the staffing complement will reduce further in April, bringing staff and posts to 7.41 FTE, and which will thereby more than satisfy the direction from GRO in relation to reduction of staffing. However, between 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2011 the Council has no immediate proposals on how to remove the excess staff complement of 0.65 FTE. The cost of this excess staff complement for that period will amount to £4,529.03.
2.5	In light of these developments Registration Services has requested a deferral of or a “phasing in” of the reduction in financial approval for the period between 1 January 2011 to 31 March 2011. This would allow the Council to sustain the excess staff complement for a short period to allow normal staff attrition to resolve the matter on 1 April 2011.
	Registration Fee Increases
2.6	GRO has released a schedule of proposed fee increases effective from 1 January 2011, the Registration Bulletin No 48/10 is included as Appendix 2. These fees will be passed directly to the public and will not impact on BCC. The proposed increases have yet to be endorsed by the Assembly. e.g. in the proposal current fees payable to GRO for a marriage registration will increase from £55 to £73.

2.7	<p>Proposed Increase in Ceremony Room Hire</p> <p>Members will be aware the Council provides a ceremony room which can be hired for marriages and civil partnerships. This is an arrangement outside the authority of GRO and the Council can generate fee income to subsidise the registration service.</p> <p>The current hire charge is £75 per ceremony which has generated income of almost £12,000 for the first half of the year to 30/09/10.</p> <p>Benchmark information shows that venues such as Ormeau Baths, Belfast Castle and Malone House charge room hire ranging from £226 - £400.</p> <p>Based on the average number of wedding ceremonies held in City Hall a £25 increase in the room hire rate would net an additional £8,875 income for the Council, while a £50 increase would give an additional £17,750.</p> <p>Members are asked to consider making the following increases in fees charged by Registration Services which would yield an additional £5,000 per quarter in fee income for the Council.</p>																		
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3	Resource Implications		
3.1	Additional cost to the Council of £4,529 unless this is deferred by GRO, (representing 0.65 of a Deputy Registrar post for three months).		
3.2	An increase in fees charged by the Council would yield additional income in excess of £5,000 per quarter as detailed above.		
4	Equality Implications		
	None as charges for ceremony room hire or registrar attendance at approved venues would apply to all applicants.		
5	Recommendations		
5.1	To note the revised staffing establishment as advised by GRO, effective from 1 January 2011 although discussions are on-going.		
5.2	Note the proposed increase in fees charged by GRO		
5.3	Approve the proposed increase in fees charged to the public by Registration Services.		
6	Decision Tracking		
	ACX to progress.		
7	Key to Abbreviations		
GRO	General Register Office	NISRA	NI Statistics and Research Agency
RCM	Registration and Certificate Modernisation	FTE	Full time Equivalent

	Documents Attached
	App1 – KPMG Matrix
	App2 – Registration Bulletin outlining proposed fee increases