
Decision Session - Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing

21 September 2010

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

Application for a New Governance scheme for the local registration service

Summary

1. This report seeks the Executive Members endorsement of an application for new governance for the councils' registration service and the future application for Customer Service Excellence.

Background

2. Civil registration plays a vital role in securing and protecting basic human rights, and in supporting community well being and social inclusion. The statistical information derived from civil registration is important to policy making and in allocating national and local resources. Information from death registration is essential to the monitoring of the health of the nation.
3. Overall responsibility for civil registration in England and Wales rests with the Home Secretary. The administration of the service is shared between the Registrar General (RG) and local government. The General Register Office (GRO) oversees the quality of registration information, and monitors the technical delivery of the service. The GRO is part of the Identity and Passport Service (IPS). Local Authorities have responsibility for the operational delivery of the local service.
4. The City of York registration service is delivered from the Register Office 56 Bootham. In addition the registration of births is carried out at 4 SureStart centres around the city. Marriages and Civil partnerships are conducted in 23 approved venues and the service will resume the registration of deaths at York Hospital (formerly named York District Hospital) when the new bereavement suite is completed.
5. The staffing profile comprises of the Registration Services Manager, a deputy manager/registration officer, 12 registration officers(one full time the remainder part-time giving an equivalent of 7.2fte) and a further 6 casual members of staff. Together they register around 3,500 births, 2800 deaths and conduct 825 marriages or civil partnerships. In addition to this core work they provide ceremonies for baby naming, marriage vow renewals, citizenship applications and conduct civil funerals.

6. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 each local registration authority is required to appoint a 'Proper Officer' to manage the registration service, have overall responsibility for the delivery and administration of the service and be accountable to the General Register Office. In the case of this authority the Executive appointed the Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods and Community Safety to fulfil this role.
7. Under current arrangements of governance, which date back to 1953, the operation of the local service is overseen by the GRO through a prescriptive scheme. This scheme details where the service is delivered from, the staffing structure and operational requirements. Compliance with the scheme is subject to a regular and structured inspection regime. The scheme is very rigid and means that if a local authority wishes to make changes to the way it delivers its services by say including new delivery sites or changing its staff structure then approval would have to be sought by the Proper Officer from the GRO and the scheme formally amended. There is no local discretion.

GRO Service Delivery Inspection April 2009

8. As part of the governance arrangements and the Civil Registration modernisation agenda the GRO conducted a service delivery inspection of the service in April 2009. The inspection looked at the service in respect of :
 - Compliance with the Good Practice Guide
 - Technical ability of staff
 - Provision for customers
9. As a result of the inspection the GRO rated the service as "Good" just 3% off being considered as 'Excellent'. It was reported that "*...the service is generally well organised; underpinned by good systems and processes.....the level of attainment against the national Good Practice Guide was good*". The report highlighted some minor recommendations with regard to the establishment of audit trails to evidence performance levels within the service.
10. The inspection team suggested, on the basis of the inspection, that York's service was of a sufficiently high quality that it might consider a move to 'New Governance' arrangements.

New Governance

11. In line with many regulatory regimes there is a shift in towards greater freedom and self-regulation in local registration services. Local authorities can now apply for new governance schemes.
12. The following benefits accrue from New Governance:
 - Greater freedom and flexibility to tailor the delivery of the local registration service:
 - Development of a more customer focused approach:
 - Proper officer to have more responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the local registration service;

- New “light touch” inspection and compliance regime;
 - Lays foundation of the future delivery of local registration services;
 - Local registration service is more integrated with the rest of council services.
13. In submitting an application for New Governance an authority must satisfy the GRO that it meets certain criteria which are set out in the Good Practice Guide, it must provide a service delivery plan, satisfy monitoring and reporting arrangements and involve staff in consultation.
 14. By moving to ‘New Governance’ the local registration service will be in a better position to respond more effectively to local service demands and will allow for the Proper Officer to exercise more discretion in responding to local needs. The Proper Officer commenced the application procedure on 28 April 2010.
 15. This involved the submission to the GRO of numerous documents including the service delivery plan, procedures for business continuity, and arrangements for the monitoring and reporting of performance. Following close scrutiny of the application by, and further consultation with GRO, the council was advised on the 6 July that the application had been successful and the ‘New Governance’ arrangements would commence on 1 October 2010.

Customer Service Excellence

16. The award of ‘New governance’ status by GRO is clearly a recognition of the fact that the Registration service is very well run. However, following the adoption of ‘New Governance’ in October, it is proposed to further enhance the service by applying for ‘Customer Service Excellence’ status in 2011. This is a government standard for public services. It comprises of 5 criteria against which services are externally assessed: customer insight, organisational culture, information and access, service delivery and timeliness and quality of service. The Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Licensing, and Bereavement services functions all currently have this award. It is a national standard against which excellence in public services are judged.

Consultation

17. In accordance with the requirements for New Governance the staff at the Registry office were consulted and raised no objections to the application being submitted.

Options

18. Option 1: Endorse the application to the GRO for a New Governance scheme and apply for Customer Service Excellence status in 2011.
19. Option 2: Endorse the application to the GRO for a New Governance scheme but do not pursue the Customer Service Excellence Award.

Analysis

20. Analysis has been included under background in this report.

Corporate Strategy

21. The greater freedoms ensuing from New Governance will make it easier for us to respond to customer needs and make the council a more effective organisation.

Implications

22. **Financial:** There are no financial implications for the council in relation to this report. Any costs relating to the application for New Governance or Customer Service Excellence can be met from existing service budgets.
23. **Human Resources (HR):** None.
24. **Equalities:** None
25. **Legal:** None
26. **Crime and Disorder:** None.
27. **Information Technology (IT):** None.
28. **Property:** None.
29. **Other:** None.

Risk Management

30. There is no risk to the council in making this application.

Recommendations

31. The Executive Member is recommended to:

Approve Option 1 to endorse the application to the General Register Office for a New Governance scheme for the City of York and invite officers to make application for Customer Service Excellence status in 2011.

Reason: To provide more local responsibility and accountability for the registration service and enhance the quality of service to the customer.

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report:**

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Community Safety)
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Report Approved



Date 18/08/2010

Specialist Implications Officers: None

Wards Affected:

ALL

For further information please contact the author of the report.

Background Papers: GRO inspection Report April 2009

Annexes: None