

Title of Report:	Registration Service: Introduction of New Services	Item 13
Report to be considered by:	Executive	
Forward Plan Ref:	EX0780	

Corporate Plan Priority:	None
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Purpose of Report:

To advise Members of new services available to the public which will enhance the Registration Service, particularly in the light of the ongoing Civil Registration Review and to seek authority to develop such celebratory services.

Recommended Action:

- (1) The Proper Officer (Head of Legal & Electoral Services) be given delegated authority to develop and administer arrangements in relation to celebratory and other new services in consultation with the Executive Member.
- (2) The Superintendent Registrar and trained deputies to conduct new ceremonies within the district of West Berkshire.
- (3) Fees for the new services are agreed as set out in para 5.3 of the Report.

Reason for decision to be taken:

To develop the Registration Service in accordance with recent H.M. Inspectorate of Registration recommendations and proposals contained in the "Civil Registration Review: Vital Change", setting fee structures and the delegation of authority to Proper Officer and Registration personnel to carry out the new ceremonies.

List of other options considered:

None

Key background documentation:

- Civil Registration Review: Vital Change
- Local Government Acts 2000 & 2003
- Regulatory Reform Act 2001

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Implications

- Policy:** It is a new proposal and provides enhancement and development of the Registration Service in accordance with the H.M. Inspectorate guidelines and proposals in the Civil Registration Review.
- Financial:** The initial set up costs outlined in the report are likely to be minimal but the Service will have to develop training (in-house) for staff. It is anticipated that the set up costs will be met by income from the new celebratory services within two full financial years.
- Personnel:** Training needs and additional ceremonies will be incorporated within existing arrangements.
- Legal:** Processes to be developed in accordance with GRO and LACORS advice prior to implementation of amended legislation under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001.
- Risk Management:** If approved premises are used in addition to the Register Office, health & safety risks will be at a minimum.

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 In July 2003 the Government published a consultation paper "Civil Registration: Delivering Vital Change" ("The Review") which proposed reform to civil registration in England and Wales. The Government is now, with the General Register Office, seeking to implement various recommendations via the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. The Council commented extensively on the proposals (Individual Decision – 10th October 2003 (IDO653). At the same time the Registration Service underwent a service wide review by the H.M. Inspectorate of Registration, the report being issued on 1st October 2003.
- 1.2 As part of this service wide review and the implications of the national Review, the report also contained views and proposals for future development and enhancement of the service. The Review suggests that local authorities will have an obligation to provide new "celebratory services" directly to the public. These will include baby naming, reaffirmation of vows, civil funerals or sign posting to another service provider.
- 1.3 This report provides Members with proposals relating to the development of celebratory services and how such services may be delivered for the benefit of the community and the service itself.

2. Research

- 2.1 Over the past few months the Registration Service has received several enquiries as to the provision of reaffirmation of vows and baby naming services. One request relates to a proposed service in 2005. To date staff have not been able to respond positively and it has become apparent that neighbouring authorities are offering such celebratory services. Under the provisions of the Review, it will be possible for celebrants from adjoining authorities to carry out services within West Berkshire.
- 2.2 Research has been carried into the practices of neighbouring authorities and is set out in the table below:

Authority	Baby Naming Ceremonies	Re-affirmation of Vows	Civil Funerals	Commitment Ceremonies	Provide Service Themselves	Fees
Hampshire County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	RO Mon-Fri £100 Other venue Mon-Fri £200 Other venue Saturday £260 Other venue Sun/BH £295 Midweek Wellesley Suite £120
Wokingham Council	Yes	Yes	No	No	No-use CCL*	RO £188.00 Approved Premise £162.25
Wiltshire County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No	No-use CCL*	RO Mon-Fri £80 RO Sat £100 Approved Premises Mon-Fri £115 Approved Premises Sat £145 Approved Premises Sun/BH £165
Dorset County Council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No-use CCL at present. Report going to Council	RO Mon-Fri & Sat am £97 RO St pm, Sun/BH £150 Approved Premises Mon-Fri £185 Approved Premises Sun/BH £260
Oxfordshire County Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Civil funerals standard fee £180

						Others RO Mon-Fri £90 RO Sat £145 RO Sun/BH £175 Approved Premises Mon-Fri £115 Approved Premises Sat £145 Approved Premises Sun/BH £175 Holder of Public Safety Cert. Mon-Fri £230 Sat £285 Sun/BH £340
Swindon Borough Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No- CCL Underachieving Council so not allowed to charge	RO Mon-Fri £115 Approved Premise Mon-Fri £90 Approved Premise Weekend £150

CCL =a private company offering celebratory services.

- 2.3 It is apparent from this research that there is a demand for celebratory services and in the new era being brought in by the Review it is considered appropriate for the service to begin to develop this market so as to ensure that it is established and recognised once changes commence in 2005. The only alternative would be for a reduced service to the community in West Berkshire and for the service simply to act as a sign post referring enquiries to neighbouring authorities or the new “independent” celebrants.

3. New arrangements

- 3.1 The following services are proposed and will contribute to the future development of the service as a whole.
- 3.1.1 Reaffirmation of vows
 - 3.1.2 Baby naming service
 - 3.1.3 Civil Funerals
- 3.2 For all types of ceremonies time will be spent with parties to agree a format appropriate to their needs and requirements. They will be secular and non-religious. There is no legal restriction on the content.
- 3.3 The above arrangements are in line with the Review and also recommendations made in the H.M. Inspectorate Review. They link with the developing marketing strategy of the service, which it is anticipated will be enhanced and developed by the beginning of 2005 to coincide with the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order amendments to legislation for civil registration as a whole.

4. Delegations

- 4.1 In order to proceed with the development of these services, it is proposed that the arrangements themselves are developed by the Superintendent Registrar and her staff in consultation with the Proper Officer and the Executive Member, as was the case with citizenship ceremonies considered earlier this year. The Proper Officer (Head of Legal & Electoral Services) be given delegated authority to administer arrangements in relation to celebratory services and that the Superintendent Registrar and trained deputies are authorised to conduct the ceremonies in the district of West Berkshire.

5. Staffing / Resources

- 5.1 In the light of the Review, there will be changes in the workload in particular employment patterns of members of the Registration Service. At present it is difficult to predict the uptake of such ceremonies,

but it is likely that they will be programmed in with current workload, marriages taking precedent. Peake House will be used for ceremonies or as an alternative, "approved premises", where the Council is satisfied with health and safety and other arrangements, may be used.

5.2 New documentation and records will be needed at local level initially but this may later feed into the national database in due course once revised arrangements of births, marriages and deaths are formally concluded. Local Registers will be used initially.

5.3 Financial and fee income cannot be accurately estimated at present, but Members are asked to approve the following fees:

- Reaffirmation of vows – At the Register Office, Newbury:

and baby naming	Monday to Friday	£100
	Saturday	£150
	At approved premises:	
	Friday	£150
	Saturday	£175
	Sunday	£225

- Civil funerals will carry a standard fee of £175.
These fees are based upon comparisons with neighbouring authorities

5.4 Set up costs for the new ceremonies will largely relate to staff training, the development of Registers and data bases and improvement of the website to advertise the new services to be provided. It is anticipated that these costs will be recoverable within the first two years of operation.

5.5 From an administrative point of view, it is proposed that ceremonies will only take place at the Register Office (Peake House) and in approved premises within the district. This will ensure that health & safety and other risks are kept to a minimum. It is not proposed that these new services will be offered in private dwellings and that as far as possible they will not conflict with statutory services (e.g. marriages).

6. Conclusion

6.1 The new celebratory services are likely to grow in popularity when the marketing strategy is developed. It will establish the service as progressive in the area and prepare it for future developments which will be brought in as part of the National Review of Civil Registration.

Appendices

None

Consultation Responses

Local Stakeholders: N/a

Officers Consulted: Nick Carter, Superintendent Registrar, Deputy Registrars, Phil Runacres, Caroline Gray

Trade Union: N/a