

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD 27th March 2009

The meeting commenced at 3.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Pamela Hargreaves (Performance Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Wally Stagg, Organisational Development Manager
Christine Armstrong, Central Services Manager
Peter Turner, Principal Strategy Development Officer
Jo Wilson, Democratic Services Officer

60. Review of Locally Set Fees in the Registration Service (Assistant Chief Executive)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To request an increase in the locally set fees for services provided by the Register Office.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

There are five distinct groups of fees: marriages and civil partnerships in Approved Premises, including The Willows; alternative civil ceremonies; individual Citizenship ceremonies; Approval of Premises for Civil Marriage and Civil Partnerships and the Nationality Checking Service.

A full list of fees and details of the proposed increases were appended to the report. It was proposed that most fees be increased between 2% & 5%.

The exceptions to this approach are outlined below:-

- ❖ A 3 year phased increase, was agreed at Performance Management Portfolio on 29/01/2007, and subject of an update at Performance Management Portfolio on 26/02/2007, for fees for marriages in the Willows during normal office hours Monday to Friday. The update report and recommendations agreed a phased increase in fees over a 3 year period. The proposed increase of 12.7% for the third year would complete this 3-year phased process. Fees for ceremonies in The Willows were not set to recover the full true cost of the service but

rather achieve a fair and reasonable balance in the market. They would remain below the average of neighbouring authorities. This did not affect the statutory fee for a ceremony in the Register Office.

- ❖ Fees for marriages in the Willows outside office hours and on Saturday mornings up to 11.30am were proposed to increase by 12.3%. This would bring charges to a more realistic level while keeping them below average when compared with neighbouring authorities.
- ❖ The fee for Saturday marriages between 12 and 12.30pm would not increase. This was in order to equalise the fees for all Saturday ceremonies.
- ❖ The market was seeing fee increases on the prime marriage days of Friday and Saturday. However in line with the Portfolio Holder's decision on 2007 no separate fee for Friday had been set. It was recommended that this be reviewed separately from Monday to Thursday fees in 2010/11
- ❖ The advanced ceremony booking fee and express service delivery charge had both been left unchanged as they were for relatively small amounts of money and it was felt small increases would be inconvenient.
- ❖ An increase of 6.7% was recommended for the Nationality Checking Service fee, following a nil increase the previous year. It was felt this would recover the cost of the service while remaining competitive in the region.

The income had reduced in recent years for a variety of reasons including changes to passport regulation, the decrease in marriage numbers and changes to maternity services. Setting the fees at an appropriate level would help maintain income levels and contribute towards addressing the Council's overall budget situation. The Service Delivery Inspection report by the General Register Office had rated the service as Good, highlighting the quality of customer care.

The Portfolio Holder queried the reason for the parity of costings for marriages and civil partnerships on Saturday, specifically the cost of £116.50 proposed for 12-12.30pm only. The Principal Strategy Development Officer advised that this was an historical anomaly which officers were planning to change on a phase basis rather than levy a large increase in the coming year. However the Portfolio Holder felt unable to justify keeping the fee structure as it was simply because it had always been done this way. She requested a review of the fees for marriages and civil partnerships however following discussion asked that the fee for Saturday 12-13pm be dropped to £91.50 thereby keeping it in line with Saturday morning fees. The Saturday afternoon fee could then increase to the suggested £206.50. A full review of the fees could be carried out during the 2009/10 municipal year prior to the April 2010 fee changes.

Decision

- I. That the changes to non statutory fees and financial procedures as outlined in Section 3 and Appendix A be approved subject to the amendment that the fee for marriages and civil partnerships in The Willows on Saturday from 12 noon to 12.30pm be £91.50
- II. That a full review of the pricing structure for marriages and civil ceremonies be undertaken during the 2009/10 municipal year in preparation for the April 2010 fee changes

61. Revised Qualification Based Training Policy *(Chief Personnel Officer)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To seek approval from the Portfolio Holder for the revised Qualification Based Training Policy

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The current Qualification Based Training Guide was approved by the Portfolio Holder in 2007. In February 2009 the Portfolio Holder had requested that the policy be amended to reflect a requirement to refund any sums expended if the employee leaves within 2 years of completing the course. Two agreements now exist for qualification based training, one for in-house training and one for externally provided training and both had been amended accordingly. Both policies were attached as appendices to the report for the Portfolio Holder's attention. The new policy would come into effect on 1st April 2009 for all agreements commencing after this date. Existing agreements would continue under the old arrangement until their expiration.

The Portfolio Holder noted that an appendix appeared not to have been included with the papers and indicated she would prefer to see the document in question before approving the revised policy. The Organisational Development Manager advised he would e-mail it to her as soon as possible. In terms of the specific wording the Portfolio Holder suggested that the words "except for specific/exceptional circumstances" be included to give more flexibility to the Council. Power to determine what was exceptional would be delegated to the Chief Personnel Officer and relevant chief officer, with such decisions being reported back to the Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder asked whether the revisions had been discussed with the Trade Unions. The Organisational Development Manager advised that they had not but Workforce Development had been fully apprised. This practice had in fact

been used before but administrative problems had caused it to be abandoned as the Council had found it difficult to reclaim monies owed. However the forthcoming payroll system should make the process a lot simpler.

Decision

That, subject to Portfolio Holder inspection of the external QBT agreement form and the inclusion of the additional wording, the revised policy be approved.

62. Members' ICT Project (*Chief Personnel Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on the current position and to set out proposals for the roll-out of Phase 2 of the Members' ICT project.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In July 2007 Cabinet approved a phase roll-out of Members' ICT Provision with the agreement that Phase 1 would include a Cabinet member, a Scrutiny Chair, a Group Leader and the Chair or Vice-Chair of Council. Phase 1 was now nearing completion with 13 members successfully using ICT. These members had agreed that they would no longer receive hard copies of correspondence including meeting papers from 1st July 2009. The roll out of Phase 2 was now imminent and it was proposed that the Chairs of the Neighbourhood Forums and Chairs and Vice-Chairs of any Committee be invited to participate at this stage, a further 12 members. In addition it was proposed that members who did not fall into the above category but actively used email be offered fobs to enable remote access. These members could then be included in the Phase 3 roll-out.

Details were also given of the financial impact this would have. If all members identified agreed to participate in Phase 2 this would make a total potential expenditure of £33,360.53 in 2009/10. However it was known that some Phase 2 members did not wish to participate fully which might result in a reduction in estimated costs. Work was also continuing to encourage members to remove the 'bounce' from their e-mail. Any 'bounce' arrangements still in place would automatically be removed on 27th March 2009 and it was felt that this might increase the take up of the use of the applications available to Members in Phases 2 and 3.

With regard to the removal of paper copies from members the Portfolio Holder asked if this would be expanded to include officers. The Central Services Manager indicated this had not been discussed however wireless connectivity

was included in all meeting rooms so theoretically it could be done. The Portfolio Holder asked how successful the current 13 members had been in their take-up but was advised that although Northgate could calculate the number of log-ons they were unable to ascertain whether these log-ons were from their personal equipment or remotely. Information regarding usage of fobs would be available at a later date. The Portfolio Holder suggested that member usage of fobs be reviewed to determine whether fobs could be given to other members.

The Portfolio Holder moved on the analysis of expenditure appended to the report. The Central Services Manager advised that costs for the fob, router and magic box were all one-off costs. Average costs for 3G broadband were £300 per month however these were subject to fluctuation depending upon members' individual needs. The Portfolio Holder noted that the costs per year for laptop/tablet seemed high but was advised that this included a support charge whereby faulty equipment was immediately replaced.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the roll-out was the right commitment for the Council to make however she would like to see more clarification on what was included in 'extras'. The costs within the table should be recalculated and some of them appeared to be erroneous. She also asked that a full review of member usage be conducted.

Decision

- I. That the phasing of the programme be continued as this is key to ensuring that the roll-out of ICT to elected members be implemented efficiently and effectively. Phasing would ensure that any problems are identified as early in the process as possible and are promptly resolved thereby avoiding repetition of further occurrences.
- II. That, in accordance with Cabinet minute 40, the Chief Personnel Officer and Assistant Chief Executive review the Phase 1 process and agree further implementation phases with the Performance Portfolio Holder.
- III. That consideration be given to carry forward unspent monies from 2008/09 to underpin the potential budget shortfall in 2009/10.
- IV. That the Members' Services Team continues to organise appropriate equipment and on-going support to Members in the provision of ICT.
- V. That the Chief Personnel Officer and Assistant Chief Executive review the Phase 2 process and agree further implementation phases with the Performance Portfolio Holder
- VI. That a full review of ICT by those members currently involved in the Members' ICT project be conducted to ensure efficient use of resources.

63. Equality Mark Level 3 Assessment (*Chief Personnel Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the successful assessment by the Centre for Local Policy Studies, Edge Hill University, which has resulted in the Council being awarded the Equality Mark Certificate and having the previously declared Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government externally validated.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In March 2008 the Council declared itself as having achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard in 2007/8. Declarations at Level 3 have to be externally validated therefore in December 2008 the Council underwent an external assessment and validation. The assessment report had subsequently been received with the assessors recommending Hartlepool Borough Council should receive the Equality Mark Certificate for Level 3 achievement with a score of 62.5% good performance. A number of recommendations for improvement had been made by the assessors and these would be incorporated into the Corporate Diversity Steering Group action plan. The Council had been invited to attend the Awards Ceremony in June for a formal presentation of the Equality Mark certificate. This achievement would be publicised through Hartlepool Mail and Hartbeat.

In response to queries from the Portfolio Holder the Organisational Development Manager confirmed that news of this success had already been noted by the Corporate Management Team and Departmental Teams.

Decision

That the report be noted

The meeting concluded at 3.50 pm

PETER DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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