

21st April 2015**Agenda Item: 8****REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR ACCESS AND PUBLIC
PROTECTION****UPDATE ON TEMPORARY POSTS IN THE REGISTRATION SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

To provide an update on the use of current temporary registrar posts within Registration and Celebratory Services and to seek approval to establish these posts on a permanent basis.

Information and AdviceBackground

1. The registration service has progressed to meet its objective of becoming financially cost neutral. This has been achieved by cost-efficient completion of statutory duties and the promotion of income generating services. At the same time, the service is delivering the 'Tell Us Once' (TUO) service on behalf of the County Council, which generates significant savings for other departments but is a financial burden for the Registration Service.
2. In February 2013, the Community Safety Committee approved an increase in the establishment of the Registration Service by four FTE registrar posts, on a temporary basis, to create the capacity for further service development to generate income and improve customer service. Specifically, the increase enabled the service to:
 - Sustain the 'Tell Us Once' service
 - Offer the benefit of a local Nationality Checking Service
 - Respond fully to increased public demand for income-generating services
3. The temporary appointments have also contributed to the capacity of the service to fulfil public demand for wedding and civil partnerships, and to offer new income generation services, such as 'Living Eulogies' and Civil Funerals.
4. The committee agreed that the posts were to be initially on a 12 month basis with a view to making them permanent if they enabled additional income generation and customer service improvements. In January 2014 the Committee agreed to extend these appointments until 31st March 2015 to enable further evaluation of their value. This report provides an update on how this work has developed in the past 12 months and the continuing need for these posts.

Recruitment to the temporary posts

5. The completed recruitment process for these posts resulted in one full-time and seven part-time appointments as shown by the following table, and which total 146.5 hours per week (approximately 3.9 FTE):

Appointment number	Registration Area	No of Hours	Start Date	Current end date
Appointment 1	South	15	03.06.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 2	South	13	05.06.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 3	Central	15	01.07.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 4	Central	22	03.07.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 5	Central	22	02.09.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 6	North	37	08.09.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 7	Central	15	11.09.2013	31.06.15
Appointment 8	South	7.5	03.06.2013	31.06.15

6. All but one of the temporary posts has been occupied continuously by the same individual since the positions were established. The postholders have all received specialist training in a range of registration functions, and all have now gained a wealth of experience. Their knowledge of the service now enables them to contribute positively to the marketing and delivery of income generating services.
7. The 3.9 FTE temporary registrar posts are Grade 4 positions, SCP 19 – 23 (£18,376 - £20,849). Therefore, the theoretical maximum total annual cost of the four together (including on-costs such as National Insurance and Superannuation) is £102k.

Overall financial information

8. The gross annual expenditure of the Registration Service is approximately £1.5m per annum, and the service has been tasked with income generation sufficient to become cost neutral overall. The starting point for this process was the financial year 2009 / 2010 when the service had an annual budget of £428k. The current position is that the service has a comparative net budget this year of zero, given the allocation of £68k for additional costs that have arisen since the start of the process, in particular regarding acquisition of the Gilstrap Centre in Newark.
9. Income generation to date this year has exceeded that of last year. As at Period 11 of the 2014 / 2015 financial year, total income reached £1.59m compared with £1.52m by the same stage in 2013 / 2014, with the highest growth being seen in marriage income from £1.134m compared to £1.032m over the same period. This has enabled the service to forecast a balanced budget for the year as a whole on the basis that the very small forecast possible underachievement of income is very much more offset by the Vacancy Level Turnover (VLT) figure for the service. A VLT figure is included in the budgets of all County Council services in anticipation that savings will be made during the year due to vacancies arising.
10. The achievement of a balanced budget in 2014 – 2015 has been made in spite of various detrimental factors including the national reduction in demand for Nationality Checking (see paragraph 19 below), and the negative effect on income from citizenship

applications arising from Home Office diversion of staff to the passport office to deal with the backlog in processing passport applications during the spring and summer of 2014.

11. Looking ahead, the prospect for income in the next financial year is very healthy indeed as total marriage ceremony bookings were already at 1,855 by the end of February 2015. This provides confidence that the number of ceremonies in 2015 – 2016 will far exceed the 2,370 marriage and civil partnerships in 2013 – 2014 and the 2,532 seen in 2014 – 2015. Consequently, it is important to maintain staffing levels in the service overall, and to make flexible use of Ceremony Officers, to ensure there is capacity to fulfil public demand for registration services.

The 'Tell Us Once' (TUO) Service

12. In 2010 the County Council decided to embrace the national 'Tell Us Once' scheme, and the Registration Service was charged with delivery of the service. An important reason for seeking an increased establishment was to accommodate public demand for the TUO service. TUO is a national initiative led by the Department for Work and Pensions that enables a citizen, when registering a birth or death, to inform central and local government departments through a single appointment. The service provides significant financial savings for central and local government departments, but increases the time required for the birth and death appointments. As previously reported to the committee, this represents a cost to the registration service of approximately £30K per year.
13. A recent addition to this service has been the verification of child benefit application forms which removes the need for parents to post birth certificates away, and thereby shortens the time for their claims to be processed. This and other changes to the TUO process mean that the TUO component can now take longer to complete than the registration itself, and represents a further increase in the unfunded financial burden on the service.
14. DWP figures indicate that the benefits TUO bring to other County Council departments amount to an average saving of approximately £50 per appointment. Not all customers choose to have TUO, but assuming a take up of 75% for an annual total of 15,000 appointments, then the TUO service will benefit the County Council by more than £500k annually. Therefore, whilst TUO brings no financial benefit to the registration service, every effort is made to offer and deliver this service.

Introduction of the Nationality Checking Service

15. As intended, the temporary registrar posts created capacity for experienced registrars to undertake training for delivery of the income generating Nationality Checking Service (NCS). This aims to help prospective British Citizenship applicants to make a good quality and complete application, which the Home Office Nationality Group will be able to process quickly. Planning and preparation for introduction of an NCS service for Nottinghamshire took place in the latter part of 2013. This included ensuring that appropriate equipment was in place at service points and synchronisation with the print replacement strategy, Ways of Working (WoW) planned property moves and the ICT replacement programme. Twenty experienced registration staff (including some managers) were given training and a Communications Plan was created including preparation of website information and marketing materials. The system went live for

bookings at the end of October 2013, and the first appointments took place in November 2013. Appointments have been offered from the registration offices in Newark, Retford, Carlton, Mansfield and Kings Mill Hospital.

16. Due to changes to the Home Office process for nationality applications, the launch of the Nottinghamshire services coincided with an unusually slack period for applications right across the UK which has maintained ever since, with only slight increases detected. The Home Office had anticipated that activity would have picked up during 2014, but this has not occurred and figures have continued to be significantly lower than previously forecast. From April to February in the current financial year, a total of 168 applications have been processed yielding an income of £9.2k. At this rate of take up it is estimated that total income for the year will be approximately £9.9k, compared with the previously anticipated income of £45k per year.
17. Over the past year training has been extended to equip more colleagues with the knowledge and resources to undertake NCS appointments at more locations, particularly at offices closest to the City of Nottingham, to meet possible future demand from customers.

Current vacancies

18. When any vacancy arises, managers will consider if it is possible to hold the position vacant in order to achieve in-year savings. However, it is not always possible to do this within the Registration Service due to the need to maintain public service and to generate income. Current vacancies are:
 - Central Area – 22.5 registrar hours per week (following a retirement)
 - Central Area – 37 registrar hours per week (temporary only while the post holder is covering the maternity leave of a Team Leader)
 - South Area – 22.5 registrar hours per week (following a retirement)
 - Service Development – 15 hours per week Training Officer (following an ill-health retirement)
19. These posts are still required in the establishment, and Managers will continue to exercise discipline in managing these to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet public demand for services and to ensure income generation is not compromised for lack of personnel.

Discussion

20. The currently temporary posts in the registration service have made a significant beneficial contribution to the objective of enabling the service to become self-sufficient financially. The posts have enabled the service to accommodate the delivery of TUO for the convenience of the public and for the financial benefit of other public services in central and local government. Taken as a whole, the current registration staffing establishment (including temporary appointments) is sufficient to satisfy public demand for services, and Managers continue to maintain sufficient staff to meet public demand for statutory and income generating services.

21. Bringing the current temporary posts into the establishment of the service will provide continuity of service and enable managers to manage services at optimum efficiency.

Other Options Considered

22. The option of discontinuing these temporary posts has been considered. This is not recommended as it would involve the loss of trained and experienced registrars and significantly reduce the capacity of the service to maintain income generating services. The option would necessitate a measured reduction in the offer of TUO appointments to ensure capacity to maintain statutory functions and although this would reduce costs to the registration service there would be a disproportionate reduction in savings elsewhere in the County Council and for other public services.
23. Another option would be to extend the temporary contracts on the basis of charging other departments in order to gain reimbursement of TUO costs. This is done in some other county councils but is discounted here on the basis of the 'One Council' principle operated in Nottinghamshire.
24. Notwithstanding the benefits of TUO to customers and councils, some local authorities have opted not to offer TUO with birth registrations, as these generate less benefit than those for death registrations. This course of action is not recommended as it will reduce customer satisfaction with the service offered by the County Council and would risk incurring customer complaints.

Reasons for Recommendations

25. The reason for recommending that these posts be brought into the agreed establishment of the service is that their existence has fulfilled the purpose for which they were introduced. The posts created capacity for service development to generate income and improve customer service. Specifically, the increase enabled the service to:
- Sustain the 'Tell Us Once' service
 - Offer the benefit of a local Nationality Checking Service
 - Respond fully to increased public demand for income-generating services

The need for this capacity remains and will continue.

26. When the temporary posts were first created the Committee agreed that the posts were to be initially on temporary basis with a view to making them permanent if they enabled additional income generation and customer service improvements. This has been demonstrated as the service has now achieved a cost neutral position. The posts continue to be needed to maintain services as currently operating.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such

implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

28. As detailed in the body of the report, the cost of these posts is covered entirely by income as part of the overall cost-neutral position the service has now achieved. This includes the approximate £30k unfunded costs required to deliver the TUO service, which yields significant savings elsewhere within the County Council.

29. The inclusion of these within the agreed establishment for Registration and Celebratory Services will ensure the continued cost neutrality of the service.

Human Resources Implications

30. All Human Resources implications are contained in the body of the report.

Implications for Service Users

31. Continuation of these posts will enable continuity of service for customers, particularly in respect of the 'Tell Us Once' service and nationally checking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

32. It is recommended that the Committee approves :

1. The establishment of 4 FTE registrar posts, Grade 4 positions, SCP 19 – 23 (£18,376 to £20,849) on a permanent basis to replace the current temporary posts with effect from 1st May 2015 (these posts carry an authorised car user status).

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Constitutional Comments (SLB 23/03/15)

33. Community Safety Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. The Council's Employment Procedure Rules require any change to staffing establishment to be subject to HR advice and consultation with the recognised trade unions

Financial Comments (KAS 26/03/15)

34. The financial implications are contained within paragraphs 28 and 29 of the report.

Trade Union Comments (PW, UNISON Convenor, 16/03/15)

35. UNISON is in support of this recommendation as it creates permanent posts.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All