

Subject:	Life Events Fees and Charges review for Registration Services 2021/2022		
Date of Meeting:	21 January 2021.		
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer for Strategy Governance & Law		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2021/2022 for Registration Services within Life Events, in Strategy Governance & Law.(SGL)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 Members are requested to approve the various fees and charges increases to non-statutory services by varying amounts above the annual inflationary uplift as set out in Appendix One. The proposals take account of the current pandemic conditions that the service is working in.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy in 2008. The main aims of the policy were to ensure that:

- Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually including consideration of potential new sources of income;
- Fees and charges are set after comparing with 'statistical nearest neighbours' (or other relevant comparator groups) and taking into account market, legal and other contextual information;
- Unless set by a statute, fees and charges are set to recover full costs, including central overheads and capital financing, to ensure that services maximise potential for income generation from the services offered.
- Subsidies and concessions are not applied unless approved by members;
- The impact on financial inclusion is considered when setting fee levels.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Due to the current pandemic, for Registration Services, this year's proposals take account of significant changes to the service offer including restrictions on no's allowed to attend ceremonies due to government directives. Changes have also

included suspension of all ceremonies when deemed necessary by the government, based on the local situation in relation to the pandemic. Thought is always given to service costs remaining competitive with near neighbour service providers, where we have been able to obtain reliable information.

- 4.2 The aim is to maximise potential of Brighton & Hove's unique reputation as a city by the sea and fully embrace the scope of a modern Registration Service. Proposals acknowledge the local market in relation to business levels both prior to the pandemic, as well as projected future demand for services based on this current situation, which is heavily influenced by working in a safe Covid19 environment. Prior to the pandemic, there was a drop in demand for notices of marriage and civil partnerships. There has also been a pandemic influenced pressure on provision of the statutory elements of the service, with legislative changes to death registration processes, which can now be offered over the telephone, Birth Registrations have been subject to suspensions at different times, resulting in a backlog for the service to manage. Income levels for statutory certificates also continue to reduce, where the government have increased certificate costs, resulting in a large drop in the purchasing of birth and death certificates, at the time of a registration.
- 4.3 Despite the drops in demand for services, analysis does suggest there is an opportunity to increase certain non-statutory charges, having reviewed latest benchmarking information held for neighbouring local authority registration service providers, whilst remaining competitive.
- 4.4 All non – statutory fees and charges have been reviewed, and the proposals ensure we continue to maintain full cost recovery for the services offered. It is however, not within our power to increase statutory fees, where budget pressures have arisen.
- 4.5 Consultation with the General Register Office (GRO) has previously established there is not a legal obligation to consult with members of the public about non-statutory fees, as the Local Authority should have its own policies for fee setting against services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Charges and Fees setting policy in 2008.
- 4.6 A further review of fees and charges may be carried out during the financial year 2021/22.
- 4.7 Where fees and charges increases are proposed, the additional income generated will continue to be offset against the significant drop in income from statutory fees. The drop has been a national trend over the last 2 years, since the government increased the cost of a birth certificate and a death certificate, from £4.00 to £11.00 per certificate. The proposals look to ensure Registration Service customers are protected from increases to main fees until it can return to a form of normality, as and when the pandemic vaccine enables the relaxation of government service restrictions. No budget savings targets have been proposed for the Registration Service for 2021/22.
- 4.8 Appendix 1 contains a table of the main fees, and shows where fees are proposed to be frozen, as well as changes that are proposed over and above the standard annual inflationary uplift.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Registration Services continues to work with customers and community groups, including multi-faith groups. Engagement with the General Register Office, alongside benchmarking information from other service providers, enables these realistic proposals to be put before members.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A full assessment of services provided, along with unit costings for every service and product, has ensured these proposals cover costs and are set realistically, and competitively against other service providers, and have some flexibility for customers who choose the Brighton & Hove Registration service. This is achieved, whilst protecting customers from the impacts of the pandemic, to the various elements of the service.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 In a normal year the proposed fees and charges increases outlined in the appendix would be expected to generate an extra £0.012m. However due to Covid-19 and other pressures outlined in section 4 of the report, the service has indicated that a 52% drop in business might be expected in 21/22, giving a potential pressure of £0.317m.
- 7.2 To help mitigate some of these pressures, no budget savings have been proposed for the Registrars Service, and pressure funding has been requested as part of the 21/22 budget setting process.
- 7.3 For context, the current income target for fees and charges for the Registration Service is £0.892m, and shortfall in the region of £0.323m (before government income pressure funding) has been projected.

Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis Date: 17/12/2020

Legal Implications:

- 7.4 This report relates to non-statutory fees and charges. The proposes changes in fees comply with legal requirements, including the need to ensure they are set based on cost recovery and having regard to national legislation.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date: 22/12/2020

Equalities Implications:

- 7.5 An Equalities Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken. The screening has highlighted that no specific minority group is disproportionately affected by increases.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.6 There are no sustainability impacts from this review of fees and charges.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.7 The review of fees and charges has been undertaken in line with the Corporate Fees and Charges policy.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Fees schedule and Benchmarking

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None