

# Registrars - Proposed reduction in opening hours and on call requirements

## Business Case

### 1 Description and rationale

The Register Office currently offers an 'out of hours' service for anyone who needs to make urgent burial arrangements or requires documentation to remove a body out of England. This weekend service is currently covered by one member of staff per week, being on an on call one weekend in every four weeks.

The service propose to reduce weekend on call hours from 8 hrs (8am-4pm) per day to 2 hours (9am-11am) per day

- 1 There is currently a disparity in the on call hours on a Sunday between Registrars and Crematorium staff who provide on call support to cover mainly religious deaths/burials that seek to be buried as soon as possible after death. However, the service is used very infrequently with the on call service only being utilised 7 times (5 burial orders being issued and 2 death registrations to facilitate out of England orders being issued by the Coroner) in 52 weeks. The on call hours therefore seem disproportionate to the need.

Also advice from the General Register Office is that the Registration Service should refrain from issuing 'Out of England Orders' for approx.. 4/5 days in order to ensure that all legalities are adhered to before repatriation of the body – this would also safeguard the risk of any problems arising that the Coroner's Office may face after repatriation.

- 2 There is also a proposal to reduce the opening hours on a Tuesday night, from 6pm to 4.00 pm. Whilst the service does have relatively good take up of the allotted time slots (65%) by the public, it is not felt that the time of the appointment is the main draw to use the service, but more a matter of that's when the appointments are available for the public to attend.

This would also allow the service to streamline with that of the Coroners service which currently operates at the hours that are proposed for the registration staff. At present we are unable to offer death appointments after 4pm as there is no access to the coroner's officers for consultation.

At the moment, the Register Office opening hours to the public are as follows;

Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri – 9am – 4pm and Tues 10 – 6pm

The proposal is to open as follows;

Mon – Friday – 9:00am to 4:00pm

Other local authorities of an 'out of hours' service, the time varies from 1 hour to 8 hours cover

If the Head of Service agrees it is proposed the to implement the new opening and on call times from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018.

## 2 HR Implications

- 1 The proposal is to reduce the on call hours for Registration staff from 8 hrs to 2 hrs which would harmonise the hours with crematorium staff. As the service is a 6 day week service, being on call on a Sunday can affect the staff's quality time with their families – these proposals aim to reduce the on call hours to improve the work / life balance of staff.
- 2 This proposal would change the working patterns of staff i.e. to reduce staff daily lunch breaks from 1 hour to 30 minutes. This would come in line with the operational hours of the Coroners service. Discussions with staff by the Principal Registrar shows that the majority of staff are in favour of the proposed changes.

Staff and union consultation has taken place. All staff agreed with the proposals identified in this business case and also agreed the waiving of the need for 45 days consultation.

## 3 Service Implications / Benefits

1. Changes may attract some negative publicity.
2. This would allow more appointments to be offered during normal working hours, especially over the lunch period when demand for service is high and would possibly increase income as more express certificates (£25 each) could be issued

Accessibility would also be increased for all service users during weekdays. More appointments would be available during the core working hours when demand for service is high (12-2pm) and the ability to issue more certificates, answer telephone queries would be increased.

However, it is also recognised that the reduction may negatively impact on a small number people who cannot access the service between 9:00am – 4:00pm

## 4 Cost Implications / benefits

1. Staff are currently paid £2 per hour to be on call, reducing the hours will save the service a small sum of approximately £880, however it would greatly improve staff work life balance
2. The service may see an increase in income due to more fee paying (notice of marriage, birth & death registration, certificate issue) appointments being made available at times more suitable to service users.

## 5 Policy Implications

None

- 1 Consultation was undertaken with the Imam of the mosque, who raised concerns on the reduction of on call hours
- 2 A survey was undertaken on the proposed reduction in hours through the council consultation portal - see attached – the response was very poor (1)
3. All undertakers in the local area were consulted and no objections were received
4. The Executive Member for Finance and Governance was consulted

## 6 Customer Consultation

## 7 Equality Analysis

1. This decision may impact on certain religious groups within the community where a person must be buried as soon as possible after death.

We consulted local mosques and there were concerns at the loss of on call hours from the local imam. However, it is felt that the given consistently low use of the service that the impact would be minimal and that as the service would still be available on Saturday, Sunday and Monday mornings this would still enable any need to obtain a death certificate and allow a person to be buried within 24 hours were necessary.

The crematorium staff also need a 4 hour lead in window in order to prepare the ground etc., and therefore certificates would need to be issued on the am in any case.

2. Because of the above the impact on equality issues would be negligible.

## Head of Legal and Democratic Services

1. I authorise to the changes in on call hours for Registrars
2. I agree to the reduction in opening hours on Tuesdays from 10:00 – 18:00 to 9:00 – 16:00

Signature ..... Date .....