

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Director of Legal & Governance Services
Relevant Executive Member:	Mayor
Submitted to:	Single Member Executive – The Mayor
Date:	1 May 2025
Title:	Out of Hours Registrar Offer
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Delivering Best Value
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will have a significant impact in two or more wards
Subject to call in?:	Yes
Why:	Non Urgent decision

Executive summary
<p>This report seeks approval of the minor amendments to the Out of Hours Registrars offer to reflect the needs of the community and to continue to deliver best value.</p> <p>The decision requires Single Member Executive approval as it is a ‘minor variation to an existing policy or procedure’ as per Section 6.38.2(a) of the constitution</p> <p>The Out of Hours Registrars offer, as set out in the Registration & Bereavement Services Charter, currently offers an on-call service of two hours each Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 11am. The cover for this call out is provided by a rota of Registrars. The minor amendment would be to have the on-call service on a Saturday only. It is proposed that this change would take effect from the 1st June 2025.</p> <p>Making this change will bring us in line with other Local Authorities in the area and will not have an impact on the delivery of the service to the community. The response to any need will continue to be within the General Register Office handbook guidelines.</p> <p>Although this reduction would not result in a significant financial saving, it Delivers Best Value as the service is not being used significantly within the community, and would have a benefit for the wellbeing of the Registrars Team.</p>

Consultation has taken place with local funeral directors in regard to the proposed change. No feedback was received.

Other options have been considered but have been discounted, primarily due to not meeting the needs of the community, and/or additional cost.

The updated charter also includes some amendments to provide clarification around the introduction of the Medical Examiner process.

Implications of the recommendation(s) have been considered by the appropriate officers of the Council and are set out in the main body of the report.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval of the minor amendments to the Out of Hours Registrars offer to reflect the needs of the community and to continue to deliver best value.
- 1.2 The decision requires Single Member Executive approval as it is a 'minor variation to an existing policy or procedure' as per Section 6.38.2(a) of the constitution.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Mayor / Executive Member for Legal & Governance Services
 - Approves the changes to the Out of Hours Registrars offer as set out in the Registration & Bereavement Services Charter, namely to remove the offer of an on call service on Sundays and to provide clarification around the introduction of the Medical Examiner process.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

- 3.1 The Out of Hours Registrars offer, as set out in the Registration & Bereavement Services Charter, currently offers an on-call service of two hours each Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 11am. The cover for this call out is provided by a rota of Registrars.
- 3.2 Since the Medical Examiner changes in September 2024, which are set out in Section 4 of this report, the use of this service has been monitored as part of an informal review of its impact. Within that 6 month period, no calls have been received on Sundays.
- 3.3 The proposed change to the offer would bring Middlesbrough in line with other Local Authorities in the region.
- 3.4 Although this reduction would not result in a significant financial saving, it provides Best Value as the service is not being used significantly within the community, and would have a significant benefit for the wellbeing of the Registrars Team.

- 3.5 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which concludes that the amendment to the on-call offer would not negatively impact on any specific groups or individuals.
- 3.6 The duty appointment slot would remain available each weekday and the service would continue to work within the guidance of the General Register Office handbook.
- 3.7 Other options have been considered but have been discounted for the reasons as set out below in Section 5, primarily due to not meeting the needs of the community, and/or additional cost.

4. Background and relevant information

- 4.1. The Out of Hours Registrars offer, as set out in the Registration & Bereavement Services Charter, currently offers an on-call service of two hours each Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 11am. The cover for this call out is provided by a rota of Registrars.
- 4.2. The charter states as follows:

The Registrar will be on call on a Saturday & Sunday morning between the hours of 9:00am and 11:00am (excluding bank holidays & festive holidays) to issue any paperwork for any urgent faith burials / cremations or an 'Out of England Order'. Contact Tel 01642 726050 and ask to be connected to the Registrar on call service.

- 4.3. There are three main circumstances in which the on call service would be required by members of the community:-

Certificate for burial or cremation before registration

Known as a 'green form' this is the certificate issued by the Registrar before the death has been registered which allows the funeral to proceed either through burial or cremation. These are often needed in an urgent basis for faith burials where the burial needs to take place in a short space of time.

Out of England Order

This is the legal document which is required to move a deceased person's body out of England and is issued by the coroner. The registrar would then be required to complete the full death registration rather than just the burial order.

Urgent marriages and civil partnerships

If either party of marriage is critically ill and not expected to recover, a ceremony can take place using a Registrar General's Licence from the Registration district where that person is located.

- 4.4. The most common requirement for the on call service in Middlesbrough is around the green forms.

- 4.5. In September 2024 the process for death registrations was changed by the introduction of the Medical Examiner.
- 4.6. Pre September 2024 the attending doctor who treated the deceased would complete and sign the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). This certificate was then used to register the death, or issue the green form before registration if requested for an urgent burial / cremation.
- 4.7. If the death was sudden, unexplained, or suspicious, it would be referred to a coroner. The coroner would investigate and determine the cause of death, then issue the necessary documentation.
- 4.8. There was no independent review of the cause of death for cases that were not referred to a coroner. This meant that the accuracy and consistency of death certificates relied solely on the attending doctor's assessment.
- 4.9. The Medical Examiner (ME) system was introduced in September 2024. This system meant that MEs signed the MCCDs in those cases that didn't require coroner involvement rather than the attending doctor, and it aimed to provide an independent review as well as improving accuracy, involving families more, and increasing transparency in the death registration process.
- 4.10. As a result of the ME system being introduced, the Registration Service have been monitoring the impact of this change, particularly in terms of lead times between dates of death and registration dates, and looking at the calls into the weekend on call service.
- 4.11. This is on the basis that there is not an on call service for MEs over the weekend, therefore the MCCDs required to register the death, or issue the green form, will not be signed at the weekend, save for some that are done on a 'goodwill' or ad hoc basis. Without the ME signed MCCDs, the green cannot be issued.
- 4.12. Since the introduction of the ME System there has not been any calls to the on-call service on Sundays and only 3 on Saturdays. Data was not kept pre September 2024 in regard to the number of calls for the purpose of comparison, however the number of calls, particularly on Sundays has always been minimal.
- 4.13. As part of this review, we have also considered the offer from other Local Authorities in the area. Stockton Council offers an on call service on Saturday's only, and Redcar & Cleveland offer no on call service at all.
- 4.14. We are therefore proposing that the on call service is reduced and should be offered on a Saturday only, amending the charter, as at Appendix 1, as follows:

The Registrar will be on call on a Saturday morning between the hours of 9:00am and 11:00am (excluding bank holidays & festive holidays) to issue any paperwork for any urgent faith burials / cremations or an 'Out of England Order'. Contact Tel 01642 726050 and ask to be connected to the Registrar on call service.

- 4.15. Making this change will bring us in line with other Local Authorities in the area and will not have an impact on the delivery of the service to the community.
- 4.16. The response to any need will remain within the General Register Office handbook guidelines as follows:

Certificate for burial or cremation before registration

GRO Handbook - No set timeframe however 'to be issued as soon as possible'
The on call service will still be available on Saturdays for any deaths that occur and have the signed MCCD

Any deaths after that time will be picked up on Monday within the duty officer slot, which is 9-11am each week day and means that a registrar will be available to process any urgent requests

Out of England Order

GRO Handbook – 'The body shall not be removed out of England before the expiration of a period of 4 clear days after the day on which notice of intention to remove the body was received by the coroner'.

Any requests for an out of England order that would be required on a Sunday could be dealt with on a Monday within the duty officer slot and still be within this timeframe.

Urgent marriages and civil partnerships

GRO Handbook does not have any timescales included, however due to the nature of the request, we would always prioritise the ceremony to be carried out as soon as possible.

Any requests for urgent ceremony would be unlikely to be carried out on the same day, as necessary paperwork is required to enable a notice of marriage to be given and only one Registrar is on call and two staff are legally required for a ceremony to take place. Therefore any requests on a Sunday could be dealt with on a Monday within the duty officer slot.

- 4.17. The amendment to the on call service will have a huge impact on the wellbeing of the team. At the moment, whoever is the weekend duty needs to be available for any on calls for both Saturdays and Sundays, which impacts on their free time as they need to be at home in order to be able to access their laptops should a call come in. As the service is not required, as evidenced by the lack of calls, balancing the needs of the community with the wellbeing of the team, the amendment could be made with no impact.
- 4.18. For the avoidance of any doubt, the on call service would continue on Saturdays.
- 4.19. There are also some minor amendments to provide clarification around the introduction of the Medical Examiner process. Highlighted in yellow on the draft amended charter attached at Appendix 1.

4.20. Consultation has taken place with 38 local funeral directors, all of whom were provided with a copy of the amended charter, with the changes outlined, as well as the rationale for the change. Comments were invited to be provided by email by 11th April 2025. There was also an opportunity to attend to an online consultation session on the 10th April 2025 so that comments could be provided in person. No feedback was received.

5. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

5.1 **Remove the out of hours option for both Saturdays and Sundays** – this change would bring Middlesbrough out of line with other Local Authorities in the area and would not best meet the needs of the community in terms of being able to respond to any urgent requests.

5.2 **Offer from another LA** – we have had an offer from Surrey Local Authority who are offering to provide an out of hours burial order service for Registration & Nationality Services across England and Wales.

They are ‘proposing a service that offers specific hours on Saturdays, Sundays, and Bank Holidays, where our dedicated team will be available to process burial orders (also known as “greens”). We’re ready to assist when families need it most and to provide this service seamlessly with minimal disruption’.

The offer is for 4 hours of cover on each Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday in a year with a cost of £6,720.00 per annum.

As the service is not currently being used by the community, this would not deliver best value as an option.

5.3 **Do Nothing** – the on call offer could remain for both Saturdays and Sundays but this does not provide best value as the service is not being used on this day.

6. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	<p>The current on-call hourly rate is £2.53 per hour.</p> <p>The on-call fee for the two hours therefore costs £5.06 for each Sunday, and with an annual cost of £263.12</p> <p>This does not include any overtime fees that would be incurred should any action be required whilst on call. The hourly rate for overtime on a Sunday is time and a half, which would be on average £24.15 per hour, with a minimum of two hours paid.</p>

	Therefore the financial impact of the decision is minimal.
Legal	There are no legal implications – the proposed changes to the offer would still meet the General Register Office Guidance in terms of timescales for registration for both Faith Burials and for Out of England.
Risk	There are no risks which will be impacted by the implementation of this decision.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which concludes that there is no adverse effect for any protected group.</p> <p>The General Register Office Guidance will continue to be complied with and the duty appointment slot would remain available each weekday.</p> <p>The Public Sector Equality Duty contains a duty to ensure community cohesion by fostering good relations between different groups or communities of interest by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.</p> <p>The Register Office Team will continue to work with our partners within the community, including James Cook Hospital and local funeral directors, by way of informing them of any changes and the reasons for any change.</p> <p>We will also continue to review any feedback received.</p>
Climate Change / Environmental	This decision will not impact on Climate Change and/or Environmental
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	The Equality Impact Assessment did not identify any impact on Children or Young People cared for by the Authority and care leavers.
Data Protection	Data Protection will not be impacted by the implementation of this decision as it does change the collation and use of personal data.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Circulate the updated Customer Charter to our partners including James Cook Hospital and local funeral directors	Sarah Teece – Principal Registration Officer	30 th May 2025
Update our website with the updated policy	Rachel May - Principal Business Development and Support Officer	30 th May 2025
Annual Review of Offer	Sarah Teece – Principal Registration Officer	30 th May 2026

Appendices

1	Amended Registration & Bereavement Services Charter
2	Equality Impact Assessment – completed
3	

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
None		

Contact: Ann-Marie Wilson – Head of Legal Services (People)

Email: annmarie_wilson@middlesbrough.gov.uk