

Subject:	Life Events proposed fees and charges for 2019/20	
Date of Meeting:	Policy Resources and Growth Committee 24 January 2019	
Report of:	Executive Lead for Strategy, Governance & Law (Monitoring Officer)	
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Ward(s) affected:	(All Wards);	

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

3. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2019/20 for Registration Services in Life Events within the Strategy Governance & Law (SGL) directorate. Proposals are based on benchmarking information with near neighbours and similar sized other Local Authorities, and account for full unit costs of provision of services. Thought has been given to service costs remaining competitive with near neighbour service providers.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members are requested to approve the proposed fees and charges for Registration Services in Life Events for 2019/20, including increases to and freezing of selected fees and charges as set out in Appendix 1.

5. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5.1 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.

6. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 For Registration Services in Life Events, the proposals for 2019/20 take account of the local market in relation to current business levels, as well as projected future demand for services based on current information. They also take account of neighbouring Local Authorities' pricing structures.
- 6.2 Analysis suggests there is an opportunity to review certain charges based on current benchmarking information held for neighbouring local authorities and other service providers, whilst ensuring pricing remains competitive.
- 6.3 An exercise has been undertaken to assess all non-statutory fees and charges to ensure they can demonstrate cost and overhead recovery and where possible maximise income for the services offered while remaining competitive. Note however that it is not within the council's power to increase statutory fees in any Life Events services.
- 6.4 The government have however notified all Local Authority Registration services of significant increases to some statutory fees. These increases recognise realistic administrative costs to Local Authorities for providing statutory services, and should generate significant additional income that will contribute toward costs and overheads. However, the increases may have some impact on demand and therefore increases to income are not straightforward to predict and will need to be carefully monitored.
- 6.5 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 in relation to the services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy in 2008 which provides the framework within which fees and charges should be developed.
- 6.6 These proposals will potentially generate additional income of up to £16,500 for non-statutory services offered by our Registration Services team. The additional income projections are based on levels of business remaining similar to current levels, across both service areas. A further review of fees and charges may be required during the financial year 2019/20 subject to the impact of the proposals on the demand for services.
- 6.7 Fees and charges in Registration Services have been increased by inflation over the last few years. For 2019/20, it is proposed to freeze the fees and charges for all non-statutory ceremonies. This will ensure the service remains competitive with a pricing structure against other near neighbour service providers who would be most likely to be an alternative for a customer if they choose not to use the B&HCC Registration Service offer. Whilst this proposal will not generate additional income, it should provide an opportunity for the service to protect current business levels.

- 6.8 A winter fee reduction, approved as a trial to try to generate more business at quieter times has proven to be unsuccessful and the service has not achieved significant increased business demand through offering the lower fee. It is therefore proposed to revert to one fee level for services throughout the year, with effect from 1 April 2019. The fee will vary according to a scale of fees set previously against times of the day, and days of the week. Reverting to one fee, with no winter fee reduction will result in an additional £14,000 income with current levels of business maintained.
- 6.9 There are changes to statutory fees that come into effect from February 2019 which must be introduced as directed by the General Register Office, but the minimum statutory charge of £46.00 will remain for a basic Register Office marriage service.
- 6.10 As part of the review, the service has identified business development opportunities for the Register Office to maximise income generation. A project will be undertaken to look at introducing a marketing strategy to make all non-statutory ceremonies more attractive, with the intention of increasing income generation in the future.
- 6.11 As well as the additional £14,000 projected from removal of the reduced winter fee, a review of postage costs to ensure consistency across the service will potentially generate a further saving of £1,250 and the service should also be able to generate another £1,250 through administering the new European Passport Return Service (EPRS).
- 6.12 The proposals above should generate an overall saving of £16,500. Statutory fee increases may generate significant additional income toward administrative costs, assuming demand levels are not adversely impacted. This requires further analysis and if confirmed will result in additional resources that will also be reflected in the Strategy, Governance & Law Integrated Service & Financial Plans as part of the overall budget proposals.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Registration Services continue to work with customers and Community groups, including multi-faith groups. Additional engagement with the General Register Office, alongside benchmarking information, enables these realistic proposals to be put before members.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 A full assessment of services provided, along with unit costings for every service and product, has ensured these proposals cover costs, whilst remaining competitive, and also keep fees and charges in line with other service providers.

9. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

- 9.1 Financial Implications:

After taking into account changes in costs and overheads, the non-statutory fees and charges proposals in this report will provide £0.017m resources to support

the 2019/20 budget. This is reflected in the Strategy, Governance & Law Integrated Service & Financial Plans as part of the 2019/20 budget proposals.

Changes to statutory fees and charges by the GRO may generate significant additional income toward meeting costs and overheads dependent upon any impact on demand. If confirmed, this could reduce the General Fund budget requirement and may contribute to closing the current General Fund budget gap of approximately £1.15m. The position will be reflected in the final budget proposals to Policy, Resources & Growth Committee and Budget Council in February.

Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis

Date: dd/mm/yy

9.2 Legal Implications:

Where non statutory services are provided, the Council has power to charge for these services at a rate determined by the Council, having regard to any Corporate Charging Policy that is in place. Where the level of fee is discretionary, it is required by law to be set at a level to recover the cost of the service but not make profit.

Lawyer Consulted:

Elizabeth Culbert

Date: dd/mm/yy

9.3 Equalities Implications:

Life Events budget change full Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The assessment has highlighted that no specific minority group is disproportionately affected by increases.

9.4 Sustainability Implications:

None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Registration Services proposed fees and charges for 2019/20, inclusive of benchmarking information

Documents in Members' Rooms

None.

Background Documents

See appendices 1.