

Finance and Resources Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 5 March 2020

Provision of Registrar Services Update

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| Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments | Executive All |
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Finance and Resources Committee:
- 1.1.1 notes the review undertaken of Registration Services at both Leith and South Queensferry Registrar offices;
 - 1.1.2 approves a change to the opening hours at the Leith Registrar office, reducing service operations to three days per week recording registration events only. It is proposed that opening days for Leith office will be Monday, Thursday and Friday noting that adjustments may need to be made due to public holidays; and
 - 1.1.3 approves a change to the opening hours at South Queensferry Registrar office to four days per week for recording registration events and also conducting civil ceremonies. It is proposed that opening days will be Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday with the option, depending on customer demand, for opening on Saturday and/or Sunday for ceremonies.

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Report

Provision of Registrar Services Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report presents an update on the provision of Registrar Services in Edinburgh and outlines the number of registration events that take place at Leith and South Queensferry Registrar offices.
- 2.2 The number of marriage suite options in Edinburgh has been increased from three to five with standard fee, enhanced accommodation and with larger seating capacity at higher fee rates.
- 2.3 Following a review of registration events and also taking account of the request from Leith Theatre Trust (LTT) for access to Thomas Morton Hall (TMH) it is recommended that the number of days of operation of both the Leith and South Queensferry offices be reduced in aggregate by 30% and the Council withdraw from provision of civil marriage ceremonies at TMH. This will facilitate improved community access to Leith Theatre, reduce potential for staff wellbeing issues and maintain wider community access to Registration Services.

3. Background

- 3.1 A report on Provision of Registrar Services was submitted to Finance and Resources Committee on [12 June 2018](#). Councillor Hutchison requested that a further review and report be prepared.
- 3.2 The Council still has significant budget savings to achieve in the current and future years. As part of that process the Registration Service has reviewed its service delivery and office footprint to contribute to council wide savings targets and improve efficiency.
- 3.3 The Council had three marriage ceremony suites available in 2019.
- 3.4 TMH is part of the Leith Theatre complex and LTT are seeking to gain greater unrestricted access to TMH which is currently used by the Registration Service to conduct civil ceremonies.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The provision of Registration Services is a statutory requirement for the Council, but the arrangements for doing so are at the discretion of the Council.
- 4.2 A review of utilisation of Registration Services across Scotland has led to the number of places available for registering births, marriages and deaths being reduced. In Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow only one registration office is now provided, however in Edinburgh, three Registration offices continue to be available:
- 4.2.1 City Chambers;
- 4.2.2 Leith; and
- 4.2.3 South Queensferry.
- 4.3 A recent review of registration services identified:
- 4.3.1 LTT are keen to facilitate improved community access to the TMH;
- 4.3.2 Staff wellbeing issues have been identified due to there being insufficient staff for three offices;
- 4.3.3 the importance of maintaining wider community access to Registration Services; and
- 4.3.4 the need to improve civil marriage ceremony suites to maximise income.

Customer Analysis

- 4.4 National Records of Scotland were asked to carry out an analysis of the home address of customers using the services at both Leith and South Queensferry offices. The table below details the registrar events (births, deaths and marriage ceremonies) recorded during calendar year 2018 for both EH6 and EH30 postcodes which were used as proxies for the geographic areas of Leith and South Queensferry. As part of informal consultation, it was requested that EH5 and EH7 postcodes be included for Leith.

| Leith Office | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Registration Event | Number | EH6 | EH5 | EH7 | Total EH5&7 | Total Other |
| Civil Partnership or Marriage | 282 | 18% | 8% | 10% | 18% | 64% |
| Births | 1,886 | 23% | 12% | 12% | 24% | 53% |
| Deaths | 1,409 | 13% | 11% | 10% | 21% | 66% |
| Total | 3,577 | 19% | 11% | 11% | 22% | 59% |

| South Queensferry Office | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Registration Event | Number | EH30 | Total Other |
| Civil Partnership or Marriage | 295 | 3% | 97% |
| Births | 628 | 19% | 81% |
| Deaths | 287 | 22% | 78% |
| Total | 1,210 | 16% | 84% |

- 4.5 The data in the above table for the Leith office shows that 81% of registration events at Leith are from out with the EH6 post code area (59% are out with if EH5 and EH7 post codes are included). The table above for the South Queensferry office shows that 84% of registration events here are from out with the EH30 post code area. On this basis it is clear that the majority of Registration Services are being carried out for people who live outwith the local area and therefore consideration could be given to consolidating services in the City Chambers office.

Civil Ceremony Suites

- 4.6 The standard fee (£125) for civil ceremonies is charged at both Leith (TMH) and South Queensferry offices. The City Chambers provides enhanced accommodation civil ceremonies within the Alexander Suite for a higher fee, as does the office at South Queensferry.

Thomas Morton Hall

- 4.7 The opportunity to conduct civil ceremonies in TMH is restricted by the events planned by LTT. They have indicated strongly that they would like greater unrestricted access to host additional events which would in turn help to create a sustainable future for the theatre. The ceremony suite in TMH is in a poor state of repair and being on the first floor has no disabled access. Therefore, some ceremonies are held in the foyer/crush area of the theatre which is unsatisfactory due to noise intrusion.
- 4.8 LTT have stated they will continue to offer couples, as they currently do, the opportunity to have their ceremony within the TMH by booking direct with the Theatre and using the services of a Civil Celebrant (this could include using the Council's service if the couple prefer).

South Queensferry

- 4.9 South Queensferry ceremony suite has spectacular views across the River Forth including all three bridges. The original ceremony room was upgraded in late 2019/ early 2020 and is now being used as an enhanced ceremony suite while an additional room has also been transformed into a standard civil ceremony suite for a small number of guests. The available options for couples has been expanded to include Saturday with very good interest so far with 16 bookings taken already for 2020 without publicity.

City Chambers

- 4.10 The investment made in the Alexander Suite in the City Chambers now means that there is enhanced and enhanced with higher seating capacity suites in the City Chambers. In 2020, it is proposed that a standard fee ceremony will be offered in the Alexander Suite signing room for a small number of guests and the refreshed European Room will be offered as an enhanced venue with higher seating capacity. Customers will also be offered the opportunity to host, for a fee, baby naming ceremonies or renewal of vows ceremonies.
- 4.11 Recently, the Council's catering and registration services have been working together to offer after ceremony catering in the City Chambers. This has been done

to increase income which is consistent with Council policy of maximising income generation.

Conclusion

- 4.12 Based on the review findings it is proposed that Leith Registrar office provide a reduced service, operating three days per week recording registration events only. The proposed opening days for this office will be Monday, Thursday and Friday however adjustments will be made for public holidays.
- 4.13 It is also proposed that TMH is no longer used to conduct civil marriage or partnership ceremonies (except those booked directly with Leith Theatre). This will provide unrestricted access to LTT to develop a programme of events which can sustain the theatre operation for future years.
- 4.14 Further, a reduction in opening hours at South Queensferry Registrar office is proposed. The office would be opened four days per week for both recording registration events and conducting ceremonies. The proposed opening days will be Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The office will also be open for ceremonies only on Saturday and/or Sunday dependant on customer demand.
- 4.15 Overall this will lead to a reduction of 30% of the ten available standard working days across both sites and will facilitate a 1FTE reduction in staff.
- 4.16 A room will be set aside at both City Chambers and South Queensferry office for standard civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies to take account of upcoming legislative changes which will allow mixed sex couples to enter a civil partnership rather than marriage the same as same sex couples.
- 4.17 These changes reduce potential for staff wellbeing issues to be experienced as there would be sufficient staff available to work across the three offices on the days proposed for opening.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If Committee approve the proposals outlined above, plans will be put in place to reduce the opening days for both Leith and South Queensferry Registrar offices effective from 31 March 2020, with arrangements as follows:
 - 5.1.1 The Leith office will be open Monday, Thursday, and Friday (closed on Tuesday and Wednesday);
 - 5.1.2 the South Queensferry office will be closed on Wednesday;
 - 5.1.3 Civil ceremonies will be provided at TMH in Leith until 31 July 2020; and
 - 5.1.4 Council civil celebrants will continue to provide civil ceremonies for couples at a venue of their choosing in Leith and elsewhere.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Reducing the opening days for both Leith and South Queensferry Registrar offices will release 1.0 FTE Grade 5 post which equates to a saving of £33,000 inclusive of employer pension and national insurance charges. It is anticipated this post will be released by deletion of a post currently vacant through retirement.
- 6.2 The investment in the quality of civil ceremony suites means that additional income can be achieved for the Council, as does the offer of catering services for ceremonies taking place in the City Chambers.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 There has been no direct consultation with the community. A number of positive discussions have taken place with LLT who are seeking greater unhindered access to TMH. Elected members in the Almond, Leith and Leith Walk wards were also consulted on these proposals.
- 7.2 There are no equalities, health and safety, governance, compliance or regulatory implications arising from these proposals. However, the improvements at City Chambers and South Queensferry and the proposal to not include TMH as a Council suite for civil ceremonies has actually improved the offer for people with disabilities to be married at Council registration offices.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 A report Provision of Registrar Services was submitted to Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2018 which contains further detail about service provision in the recent past.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.