

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 30 October 2008

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|-----------------------|-------------|--|-------------|
| <u>Present:</u> | Councillor | C Meaden (Chair) | |
| | Councillors | A Pritchard | P Gilchrist |
| | | S Quinn | P Hayes |
| | | W Smith | |
| <u>Cabinet Member</u> | Councillor | S Kelly | |
| <u>Deputies</u> | Councillor | W Duffey (in place of Councillor Povall) | |

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in any matters to be considered at the meeting and, if so, to declare them and state what they were. Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any matter to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

21 PROJECTED BUDGET 2009-11

Cabinet at its meeting on 16th October (minute 219 refers) proposed a number of budget savings and asked that these items be referred to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their consideration. There were two proposals which fell within the remit of this Overview & Scrutiny Committee. These were:

- Increased income from Registrars - £47,000
- Student Awards no longer being processed in One Stop Shops - £50,000

In connection with the first of the proposals, the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted two reports which had been considered by Cabinet. The first of these contained a proposal to decommission the marriage room at Birkenhead Town Hall, and introduce a new scale of fees for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at Birkenhead Town Hall and the Round Room at Wallasey Town Hall. It was proposed that Wirral Register Office marriage room would become the Superintendent Registrar's office at Birkenhead Town Hall. Small marriage parties of up to 6 people could use this room for the statutory fee of £43.50.

The current marriage room would be redesignated as an Approved Premise and as such the authority would be able to set a discretionary fee. This would allow a similar charge to be levied for The Round Room in Wallasey which was already an approved premise.

The fees for the ceremony rooms at Birkenhead and Wallasey would be:

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|--------------------------|---------|
| Monday to Thursday | £70.00 |
| Friday | £90.00 |
| Saturday (Mornings only) | £114.00 |

It was anticipated that this would generate an additional income of £14,000.

The second report contained a proposal to introduce a 'priority service' for customers who wished to pay for certificates from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in order to receive their certificates within an hour. It was proposed that customers would be offered a choice of two services:

- For the standard fee of £7 the customer could return to the Register Office the following day or choose to have their certificate posted to them.
- For an additional fee of £18 the certificate would be issued to them within an hour.

This service would be offered to all customers, except requests for family history certificates where a reference was not included due to the research time involved. It was anticipated that this priority service would generate an additional income of £33,750.

The Director responded to a number of comments from Members on each report.

The Director of Finance submitted a report on the 'student awards' proposal. The Government had announced the transfer of the scheme from local authorities to the Student Loans Company, a Non Departmental Public Body based in Darlington, in July 2006. This issue had been reported to Cabinet in March 2007 and March 2008. The agreed transition plan managed the reducing workload, ensuring service standards were maintained whilst planning for staff reductions. These reductions would need to take place with effect from December 2008 as the Authority would deal with approximately 3800 students' applications in 2009/10 with further reductions running through to April 2011. The saving for 2009/10 would be £50,000.

The Head of Benefits, Revenues and Customer Services responded to a number of comments from Members.

The three reports were considered in turn and a vote was taken on each and it was -

Resolved-

(1) (4:2) That, the proposal that the marriage room at Birkenhead Town Hall be decommissioned as set out in the report; and that the revised scale of fees be implemented for those couples giving notice of their intention to marry, or have a civil partnership ceremony at Wallasey or Birkenhead from 1st April 2009, be endorsed.

(2) (4:2) That the proposal to introduce a 'priority service' for the issuing of current and family history certificates (with references) be endorsed.

(3) (4:2) That the proposed budget saving of £50,000 in respect of the ongoing reduction in the processing of Student Awards from 2009/2010 be endorsed.