

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Cabinet Member Decision

Date: 14/03/2023

Subject: Proposed Registration and Mortuary Service Fees and Charges For 2023/24

Report of: Councillor Sharon Holder - Cabinet Member for Public Realm

Report author: Kayode Adewumi - Assistant Director – Democratic, Registration and Coroner's Services

Responsible Director: David Tatlow – Strategic Director for Corporate Services

SUMMARY

This report is proposing changes to fees and charges and introducing new services within the registration and mortuary services. It is recommending that the Cabinet Member agrees to the introduction of new service charge categories and the proposed uplifted fees and charges from 1 April 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To approve the proposed Registration and Mortuary Services fees and charges from 1 April 2023 as set out in Appendix 1.

Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	Any additional income generated by the service will be used by the Council to provide essential services to our residents.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Providing more self-service opportunities and improving our web offer will give our residents a better experience when booking services they want.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The registration fees and charges have not been reviewed for a while. The Benchmark data shows that we are charging less for most of our services compared to our neighbouring boroughs.

Financial Impact

1. The proposals to uplift fees and charges and introduce new service charge categories is expected to enable the affected services to achieve an outturn in line with budget for 2023/24.
2. On 23rd February 2023 Full Council approved for non-statutory fees and charges to be reviewed on an ongoing basis in response to market conditions and varied up and down as appropriate, with appropriate authorisations according to the council Constitution, and a standard uplift of 10% is applied for other non-commercial and non-parking fees.
3. The three types of change proposed in this paper are:
 - a. A 10% increase to fees and charges from 1 April 2023 in line with Full Council's recommendation.
 - b. Higher than 10% increase in some of the commercial fees following benchmarking against neighbouring boroughs.
 - c. The introduction of some new fees within the Registration service.
4. The income budget for the Registration service is £622,300. For 2022/23 income is expected to match budget. The proposals outlined in this report estimate an additional £29,800 income in 2023/24.
5. No change to the income budget is recommended at this stage as registrar income is volatile and can be affected by a number of demand and demographic factors.
6. Fulham Mortuary provides body storage and postmortem services for LB Hounslow under a contract. It occasionally provides high risk mortuary services to Uxbridge mortuary and Kingston Hospital. The charges for these services will be increased in line with the Council's general fees and charges uplift (inflation).
7. Any increase in overall income may be offset by increased costs. Income and expenditure will be tracked during 2023/24 and income and expenditure budget adjustments made where required.
8. The net impact of the price changes and new service charge categories will be tracked through the revenue monitoring process with variance against budget reported via the corporate revenue monitoring report.

Alex Pygram, Head of Finance, Corporate Services ,28th February 2023

Verified by Andre Mark, Head of Strategic Planning and Investment, 1st March 2023.

Legal Implications

Regulation 12(6) of the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 provides that “The Superintendent Registrar... shall be entitled to receive... a fee of an amount determined by the Authority as reasonably representing all the costs to it of providing a Registrar and Superintendent Registrar to attend at a solemnization”.

Section 198 of the Public Health Act 1936 (PHA) contains a discretionary power for the Council to provide a mortuary for the reception of dead bodies before interment and may make charges for the use.

If the Council is required by statute to provide a certain service then we must do so. If that service has a set statutory fee or charge, then we must charge only that fee or charge for the service.

Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 sets out the power to charge for discretionary services where the person has agreed to its provision. There must be no power from elsewhere to charge for the provision of the service, nor an express prohibition to charge for it.

Section 93(3) requires that the power to charge is subject to a duty to secure that the income from charges does not exceed the costs of provision. Under s.93(5), an authority may set charges as it thinks fit and may, in particular, charge only some persons for providing a service, or charge different persons different amounts for the provision of a service.

Where a local authority is planning on charging for a discretionary service under s.93 LGA 2003, the legislation restricts the amount that can be charged, to the effect that (taking one financial year with another) income should not exceed the cost of provision. The approach of s.93 allows local authorities greater flexibility to balance their accounts over a period of time, and recognises the practical difficulties for a local authority in estimating the charges for a discretionary service at the outset.

The Local Government Association Guide suggests Councils should be prepared to explain the context of the charges, how they have been assessed and the basis upon which they are calculated. They should also explain the context in which the new (or additional) charges are being considered.

Jade Monroe – Chief Solicitor Dated 28 February 2023

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Proposals and Analysis of Options

1. The proposal is to approve the proposed Registration and Mortuary Services fees and charges from 1 April 2023 as set out in Appendix 1 in order to remove the existing budget pressure and generate some income for the Council.
2. If the proposals set out in this report are not approved the budgeted income projections will not be achieved in full and the budget pressure will be ongoing.

Reasons for Decision

3. The full range of Registration service fees and charges have not been reviewed in detail for over two years. Benchmarking data shows that the Council is undercharging in most areas compared to our neighbouring boroughs. This is putting pressure on the budget and a loss of income which could be used to support the Council objectives.

Issues

4. This report outlines the fees and charges raised within the service and proposes:-
 - a. A 10% increase to fees and charges from 1 April 2023 in line with Full Council's recommendation.
 - b. The introduction of some new fees within the Registration service.
 - c. Higher than 10% increase in some of the commercial fees to match charges by neighbouring boroughs.
- **Citizenship income – Expected income to increase**
5. The service currently provides two citizenship sessions per fortnight with ad hoc private ceremonies held during the month. For efficiency, one large ceremony is being proposed per fortnight with more private ceremonies held during the week particularly on Friday and Saturday to meet the current demand. This will increase the number of private ceremony slots available during the week. It is expected that an additional £20,000 income will arise from these changes.
- **Citizenship Income Trends**
6. The citizenship sessions picked up during the pandemic due to the demand for private ceremonies. This trend will be matched in 2022/23.

Year	Income £
2019/20	£144,777.00
2020/21	£79,368.00
2021/22	£252,711.00
2022/23	*£172,403.00

**Estimated*

Proposed 2023/24 Fees		
Monday – Thursday £125.00	Friday - £145.00 (New)	Saturday - £175.00

- **Nationality Check and Send (NCS) Income**

7. The Home Office has taken over the provision of this service. As a result, there has been a sustained drop in income for the Council as set out in the table below.

NCS Income Trends

Year	Income Budget £
2019/20	£9,474.00
2020/21	£164.00
2021/22	£367.00
2022/23	*£371.00

**Estimated*

This decrease will continue.

- **Registration Income**

8. Registration income is comprised of both statutory and non-statutory income. The current forecast for 2022/23 meets the budget however it has not reached the pre – pandemic level.

Registration Income Trends

Year	Income Budget £
2019/20	£502,640
2020/21	£542,768
2021/22	£463,135
2022/23	*£470,129

**Estimated*

- **Ceremonies at Approved Venues across the borough**

9. The lack of a Town Hall venue with multiple rooms to use has restricted the revenue generated through weddings at Clockwork. More emphasis will be placed on licensing more appropriate external venues for weddings/civil partnerships and increasing other related service charge categories. We currently have 13 licensed venues. The plan is to license more approved venues for weddings/civil partnerships within the Borough to increase income. This will generate more licensing fees and increased fees paid for Registrars' attendance at these approved venues by £9,800.

- **External license fees**

10. Our External license fees have been reviewed to reflect the going market rate.

2022/23 Licence Fees			
Authority	License Fee 3 Years	License Fee 5 Years	Renewal
LBHF	£454.77	N/A	£454.77

Proposed 2023/24 Licence Fees	
	3 YEARS
Up to 100 capacity	£800
101 - 200 capacity	£1050
201 +	£1,250

- **Internal Room Hire**

11. Customers will be directed to the Rose Gold room as our basic offer once the Registry wedding office listing is full. The Rose Gold room will cost £177.56 off peak. The proposal is to increase the cost by 10% although some authorities charge more for a similar size room. The pricing tiers has been adjusted by £10 to differentiate between high and low season to encourage more bookings during quiet off-season months. (April – Sept – high season and Oct – March – low season)

The Rose Gold Room (Clockwork Building - Capacity of 12)

Proposed 2023/24 Fees				
	Monday - Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
April – Sept	£187.56	£242.16	£297.65	£364.30
Oct to March	£177.56	£232.16	£287.65	£354.30

The Copper Suite (Clockwork Building - Capacity of 60) -

12. The Copper suite currently costs £422 to hire on a Saturday while the Rose Gold room costs £261. It is proposed that the Rose Gold room service will no longer be offered on a Saturday except where other services are on offer e.g. Citizenship ceremonies. Proposed fees 2023/24 are increased to match some of the fees charged by neighbouring districts. The pricing tiers has been adjusted by £10 to differentiate between high and low season to encourage more bookings during quiet off season months. (April – Sept – High season and Oct – March – Low season).

Proposed 2023/24 Fees				
	Monday - Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
April to September	£380	£437	£497	£552
October to March	£370	£427	£487	£542

13. **Search fees** – Currently, a fee is not charged for records searches. It is proposed that a £5 admin fee is introduced.
14. **Amendment/cancellation** - We currently take £35 amendment fees for all ceremony bookings and a cancellation fee of £100 non-refundable deposit (Weddings). It is proposed that any amendment will incur a £40 fee and cancellation fee of £150.
15. **Advance Collection of Fees** – Majority of fees are currently taken by the Registration Officers over the phone or in person. When a customer comes to an appointment with the wrong documents, does not show up or turns up late; they are not charged a fee as they have not paid for the appointment in advance. Therefore, the Council loses out. It is proposed that fees will be collected in advance via the website and will not be refundable if the person is late, does not show up or brings the wrong documents to the appointment. This is common practice across many districts.
16. **Planned Service Improvements** - Other service improvements that will assist in bringing in additional income are listed below:
 - Promotion of other services by the Registration officers such as naming ceremonies.
 - Improvement of web access and self-service.
 - ☐ Make citizenship bookings accessible online
 - ☐ Allow notices to be booked online
 - ☐ Pre-payments for all appointments
 - Births
 - Deaths
 - Marriages
 - Civil Partnerships
 - Private Citizenship Ceremonies
 - Notice of Marriage / Civil Partnerships
 - ☐ Complete ceremony planner self-service – Allows customers to create their ceremony planner and make payments and amendments
 - Improved marketing of the service.
 - Choice of additional licenced venues.
 - Improve our décor offer to suit our site – Change some current prices to make them more suitable, creating décor packages, allow Bring Your Own décor/flowers with a charge to hire the room for 30 minutes prior to ceremony.

Benchmarking

17. Benchmarking has been undertaken against other local authorities – Ealing, Wandsworth, Islington, RBKC and Westminster Councils. The proposed fees and charges are in line with neighbouring boroughs as set out above.

Mortuary Service

18. Fulham Mortuary provides body storage and post mortem services for LB Hounslow under a contract. It occasionally provides high risk mortuary services to Uxbridge mortuary and Kingston Hospital.

Below is the mortuary income generated from this service.

Year	Income - Hounslow, Uxbridge mortuary and Kingston Hospital
2019/20	£313,697
2020/21	£343,022
2021/22	£314,080
2022/23	*£335,462

**Estimated*

Description of Fee / Charge	<u>Mortuary</u>
Funeral director over stayer storage – daily charge	£30.00
Other public mortuary storage – daily charge	£20.00
Post Mortem- Private/2nd	£766.25
Post Mortem - Special	£1,044.44
Post Mortem - Infectious	£1,120.35
Post Mortem - non infectious	£400.00
Releasing body out of hours	n/a

These charges will be increased in line with the Council's general fees and charges uplift (inflation).

Consultation

19. Benchmarking of fees and charges and an additional service charge category has taken place to ensure that the proposed fees are in line with neighbouring boroughs and allow the service to remain competitive whilst creating additional commercial categories.

Equality Implications

20. There are no equalities implications as a result of the proposals set out in this report.

Risk Management Implications

21. The report recommends increasing fees and charges for the Registration and Mortuary Services which are mainly in line with the general increase in fees and charges recently agreed by Full Council and brings the council in line with charges made by neighbouring authorities.

David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, 3 March 2023

Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications

22. There are no climate and ecology implications as a result of these proposals.

Jim Cunningham, Climate Policy & Strategy Lead, 3rd March 2023

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – 2023/24 Fees and Charges