



Best Value Review of Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Panel's Findings

October 2002

Section One

Executive Summary

The evidence collected as part of the Best Value review process indicates that a good service is provided to the community by the Brent Registrar's Office. The strengths of the service outweigh any areas identified for future improvement.

Registrars' have no statutory Best Value indicators. However, the service has retained its Charter Mark on three occasions and achieved ISO 14001 accreditation in August 2001 and Investors in People accreditation in June 2002.

The Brent Registrar's Office have implemented a number of service improvements which has made it a leading edge service provider. These include:

- Extended opening hours
- Webcam for weddings
- Language line for customers where English is not the first language
- Saturday appointments

The service needs to consider its continued role in meeting Corporate priorities and the needs of the residents of Brent.

Section Two

Introduction

A Best Value Panel was established to examine Brent's Registration Service. The Panel consisted of the following members:

- Independent Convenor – Krutika Tanna
- Head of Sutton's Registration Service – Marion Vidler (Independent Expert)
- Elected Member – Cllr. Harshadbhai B Patel
- Finance Officer – Patricia Darkwah
- Deputy Director of Brent's One Stop Shops - Patricia McFarlane
- Policy and Performance Officer – Bridget Duley

The Panel met over one day on Monday 29 July 2002 in the Marriage Room of the Brent Town Hall. The service prepared a Self Assessment pulling together information outlining their economy, efficiency and effectiveness and addressing the 4 Cs of Challenge, Compete, Compare and Consult. This assessment can be found in Appendix A and includes a description of the key functions and service objectives of the Registrar's Service as well as a full and thorough portfolio of documentation (see Appendices 1 to 11). In addition evidence was gathered from the following sources:

- Interview with customers
- Interview with a member of the frontline staff
- Presentation and Q&A session with the head of the service & consultant appointed to support forward planning
- Discussion with Brent's Regional Inspector of Registration (See Appendix B)
- Consultant's Report: *Brent Registrar's Service Meeting the Challenge* (See Appendix C)
- Frame of Reference prepared by the Policy and Performance Officer outlining national guidance and recognised good practice (see Appendix D)

Section Three

Findings

The Panel found it helpful to evaluate the work of the service under the headings of 'Current Performance' and 'Meeting Future Challenges'.

Current Performance

Strengths	Evidence (contained in Appendices)
Customer Care	
Meeting customer needs	Survey results show year on year high levels of satisfaction & no complaints; Published service quality standards; Evidence that changes have occurred as a result of customer feedback and performance information; Awarded Charter Mark on 3 occasions.
Facilities – very high standard	Comments from Brent's Regional Inspector of Registration; Self assessment against The Registration Service Good Practice Guide.
Committed, well-trained, loyal staff	Results from staff away day; Staff member interview with Panel.
Accessibility	Support for customers who have English as a second language; Physical disability access; Flexible opening hours; Drop-in service; Good remote access links (Internet, telephone); Good access to public transport.
Strategic Planning	
Partnership working	Good communication links; Stakeholder forum – regular meetings.
Culture of continuous improvement	Regular changes to improve the service – for example extending hours, pleasant facilities, staff training and

	development, pro active.
Well managed service	Staff aware of future challenges/threats, loyal and committed; Use of performance information to make changes and drive improvements.
Innovative, highly regarded, leaders in their field	First to do many innovations; Prestigious external awards.
Honest and thorough self assessment	Self assessment highlighted strengths and weaknesses; Good evidence provided – shows that management information is genuinely used to develop the service.
Income generation	Income generated covers 60% of costs.

Areas for Improvement	Evidence	Actions Already Taken	Panel Recommendations
Cost comparison	Lack of hard evidence as comparisons not based on like with like service; No staff salaries for other LAs.	Hourly cost comparison.	Continue to explore ways of comparing costs with other authorities.
Service Comparison	No comparison of waiting times, facilities, methods of income generation, staff numbers.		Establish a forum to compare good practices.
Facilities	Lack of parking during the week; No separate waiting areas for births and deaths registrations.	Many attempts have been made to improve parking facilities.	Explore options for having separate waiting areas for births and deaths registrations.
Language barrier for people with English as a second language Difficulties explaining technical registration requirements resulting in misunderstandings and mistakes	Departmental survey – Oct 2001 (12.5% difficulties accessing the service); Service Director's comments.	The service has tried very hard to overcome this problem and have done extremely well given the range of languages in Brent and the numbers of people requiring translation services. They rely heavily on friends and relatives of those requiring registration services to translate. Unfortunately the information is often technical in nature and difficult to explain.	Technical interpretation – the panel recognises that this is potentially very expensive and will not necessarily be possible. Other options need to be looked at – maybe the use of video, CD Rom, tapes etc. Maybe the costs could be shared with other registration services.

Meeting Future Challenges

Strengths	Evidence (contained in Appendices)
Forward Planning	Meeting the Challenge –20 tangible steps outlined which it is anticipated will lead to real improvements; External consultant appointed to support forward planning; Staff aware of changes – involved in deciding their future; Staff have already begun to make changes.

Areas for Improvement	Evidence	Actions Already Taken	Panel Recommendations
Clarification of aims and objectives	At the moment, the service primarily contributes to 3 Corporate Aims – achieving best value services, involving our community and creating a modern, well-managed authority. Registration services are currently provided because they are a legislative requirement, not because they are necessarily meeting any Council priorities.	Because there is a clear statutory duty to provide a service, there is an assumption that the direction and purpose of the service has always been clear.	In light of changes in direction of the service nationally, examine service aims and objectives. Seek a political view on the value of the service. Develop and review a long-term service strategy in consultation with the residents of Brent. Ensure there is continued development of income generation activities. Develop SMART PIs to measure whether aims and objectives are being achieved.
Explicit statement about continued value to the organisation – internal and external	As providing registration facilities is a statutory requirement, the service has not considered it's continued value to the Council and the residents of Brent.	So far, only one model of service delivery has been considered. The action plan <i>Meeting The Challenge</i> outlines a path to expand current services and to gain a larger share of the market for marriages in order to add value to the service and ensure it is sustainable into the future.	Once clear aims and objectives have been established, examine different service delivery options to determine which option will best meet the aims and objectives of the service. The options should include consideration of partnerships with other local authorities, other departments within the Council and other organisations as well as 'do nothing'.

Partnership working	No feasibility analysis	Limited partnership working is already in place.	Develop partnerships in order to develop future opportunities – both internal and external (particularly with other Council services).
Customer involvement in developing the future of the service			Consult customers in order to appraise future options to ensure they meet future customers needs and wants.
Continued staff development	Evidence of strong service leadership however, without appropriate levels of devolved responsibilities. Staff feedback from away day. Evidence that staff may not be ready to deliver their improvement projects.	There are plans to train and develop staff to perform their new roles.	Staff at all levels should be challenged to add more value to the organisation and in turn should be supported to fulfil this role. The Council should be confident that the service is robust enough to continue to deliver high quality provision even if there were changes of key personnel.

Recommendations

Current Performance

- 1 Prepare an activity log of advice/information and other activities which do not form part of the formulae to allocate costs. This will enable the true costs of all activities to be known.
- 2 Establish a forum to compare good practices.
- 3 Explore options for having separate waiting areas for births and deaths registrations.
- 4 Examine different options for providing technical interpretations to customers for whom English is not their first language including the use of video, CD Rom, tapes etc. Explore the potential for sharing costs with other registration services.

Meeting Future Challenges

- 5 In light of changes in direction of the service nationally, examine service aims and objectives.
- 6 Seek a political view on the value of the service.
- 7 Develop and review a long-term service strategy in consultation with the residents of Brent.
- 8 Ensure there is continued development of income generation activities.

- 9 Develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-related) PIs to measure whether aims and objectives are being achieved.
- 10 Once clear aims and objectives have been established, examine different service delivery options to determine which option will best meet the aims and objectives of the service. The options should include consideration of partnerships with other local authorities, other departments within the Council and other organisations, as well as 'do nothing'.
- 11 Develop partnerships in order to develop future opportunities – both internal and external (particularly with other Council services).
- 12 Consult customers in order to appraise future options to ensure they meet future customers needs and wants.
- 13 Challenge and support staff at all levels to add more value to the organisation. The Council should be confident that the service is robust enough to continue to deliver high quality provision even if there were changes of key personnel.

Section Five

Action Plan

Current Performance

Recommendation	Action	Target
Comparison of Good Practice	Participate Actively in the on-line Best Practice website being developed by LACORS	Website being developed by LACORS during 2003. As soon as website established Brent Registration Service to input and compare data.
Separate Waiting Areas for Birth and Death Informants	Consider options to separate customers for birth and death registration	Accommodation project already set up. Project Manager to set out proposals for birth and death service delivery by April 2003. Accommodation for the registration of births and deaths by appointment established at Central Middlesex Hospital. Service to commence in September 2003.
Technical Interpretation Facilities	Consider options to provide translation of technical information in different media	Set up project to consider most cost effective options by December 2003. Project Manager to produce report on costed options by April 2004.

Meeting Future Challenges

Recommendation	Action	Target
Examine Service Aims and Objectives	Establish aims and objectives that take into account future changes in legislation and that are in accord with the Council's Corporate Strategy	Revised aims and objectives to be published in Service Operational Plan in March 2003
Seek a political view on the value of the service	Report to Cabinet to seek endorsement of the value the Council places upon the service	Report to be presented by April 2003
Consult with Brent residents on developing a long term service strategy	Establish consultation mechanism to seek views on future service provision options	Results of consultation exercise to be available and published by March 2004

Continue development of income generation activities	Explore all ways of maximising income generation within the boundaries of the Corporate Strategy commitment to make services affordable	Set up project to explore income generation opportunities by May 2003. Project Manager to produce report on options by December 2003
Develop SMART Performance Indicators to measure whether aims and objectives are being achieved	Performance Indicators to be reviewed in line with newly developed aims and objectives	Revised performance indicators to be published in Service Operational Plan in March 2003
Examine different service delivery options that meet the aims and objectives of the service	Develop a range of service delivery options that include partnership working with other organisations in the public and private sector	Service delivery options paper to be produced by September 2004. Consultation with Brent residents in Autumn 2003.
Develop partnerships to maximise future opportunities	Explore ways in which the registration service can develop closer working links with other units of the Council and with external organisations	Consultation with One Stop Shops and other appropriate units to determine how collaborative services could be developed by Autumn 2003
Challenge and support staff at all levels to add more value to the organisation	Continue the implementation of the 'Meeting the Challenge' project and ensure staff are equipped with the appropriate skills to deliver service innovations	1 st Phase of recruitment / Receptionist and Registration Assistant completed in March 2003 2 nd Phase of recruitment / Deputy Directors completed in May 2003 Devolved appraisal responsibilities in place by March 2003

Appendices

Appendix A: Report provided to the Panel by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages: *Best Value Review of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages*. Includes 11 Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Registrar's performance on local indicators compared over the last three years
- Appendix 2: Registrar's Service Operational Plan for 2002/3
- Appendix 3: Hourly cost comparison with other London boroughs – benchmarking exercise
- Appendix 4a: Registration Service – LGA Good Practice Guide (self-assessment summary)
- Appendix 4b: LGA Good Practice Guide (self-assessment summary) – Graph showing how Brent compares with other boroughs
- Appendix 5: Comparison of Websites – Registrar's of other boroughs
- Appendix 6: Example of Brent Registrar's Comments Card
- Appendix 7: Minutes of Partnership Working Group Meeting
- Appendix 8a: Environmental Services Customer Survey 2000 – Summary Table
- Appendix 8b: Environmental Services Customer Survey 2001 – Summary Graph – Overall Satisfaction
- Appendix 8c: Customer Survey 2001 – Analysis of how Registrar's results compared to other units in Environmental Services
- Appendix 9: Customer Survey 2001 – Equalities data – graph showing how Registrar's compared to the average results for Environmental Services on Overall Satisfaction with the Service and Fairness of Treatment
- Appendix 10: Analysis of Registrar's Results from Customer Survey 2001 – equalities breakdown
 - a Ethnicity
 - b Gender
 - c Disability
- Appendix 11: Notes of Registrar's Challenge Away Day on 10th April 2002.

Appendix B: Notes of discussion with Brent's Regional Inspector of Registration – Stuart Cella

Appendix C: Consultant's Report: *Brent Registrar's Service Meeting the Challenge*

Appendix D: Frame of Reference prepared by Policy and Performance Officer

Summary of White Paper: *Civil Registration: Vital Change. Birth, Marriage and Death Registration in the 21st Century.*
January 2002

Summary of findings from inspection reports of other registration services

Registration Service: good practice guide. Prepared by the Local Government Association in association with the
General Registrar Office. January 2001

Newspaper Article. Guardian Society, Wednesday June 19 2002: *Out of View.*