

THE EXECUTIVE

7 SEPTEMBER 2004

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT

CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES	FOR DECISION
<p><i>To report back the review of the Citizenship Ceremonies and the proposed Fees and Charges for in accordance with Executive Minute362, 13 April 2004. The setting of fees and charges is reserved to the Executive.</i></p> <p>Summary</p> <p>Under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, all local authorities are required to provide Citizenship ceremonies for all successful applicants for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen, aged 18 or over, whose application has been received and processed by the Home Office from 1 January, 2004.</p> <p>On 13 April 2004, The Executive agreed that group Citizenship ceremonies be held in the Civic Centre Council Chamber from 26 April, but asked that a review be undertaken after some ceremonies had taken place to examine the suitability of the accommodation and costs associated.</p> <p>No problems have been experienced with the running of these ceremonies and participants surveyed have expressed their satisfaction with the overall ceremony experience. Regular payments are being received from the Home Office for each citizenship certificate issued and costs associated with the Citizenship process are well within the level of payments received.</p> <p>Following a slow start, increased numbers of citizenship notifications are being received from the Home Office. With new citizens encouraged to bring up to two guests, this highlights the importance of holding the group ceremonies in suitably large accommodation to keep pace with demand and costs to a minimum.</p> <p>In addition, local authorities may provide and set the fee for non standard ceremonies for prospective citizens who request an individual ceremony to include their own guests. To cater for the limited demand that is expected from this, it is suggested that this could be provided at Arden House for a fee of £100 per ceremony.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>The Executive is recommended to agree to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Citizenship ceremonies continuing to be held at the Civic Centre Council Chamber and at other suitable premises as may be required in the future.ii) A fee for non standard ceremonies of £100.	

Reason		
To comply with requirements of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and assist the Council in achieving its Community Priority of <i>“Raising General Pride in the Borough”</i> .		
Contact Valerie Harding	Business Continuity Manager	Telephone: 020 - 8227 3222 Fax: 020 – 8227 3288 Minicom: 020 – 8227 3040 E-mail: val.harding@lbbd.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 includes provisions that require all successful applicants for naturalisation or registration as British Citizens, aged 18 or over, to take an oath and pledge at a Citizenship Ceremony. These provisions came into operation on 1 January 2004 for all successful applications received and processed by the Home Office from that date.
- 1.2 The ceremony must take place within 3 months of the applicant being advised by the Home Office that their application for citizenship has been successful.
- 1.3 The applicant pays a fee of £68 for the ceremony to the Home Office with the other fees for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen and the Home Office then remits the ceremony fee to the local authority. The fee is intended to cover the full cost of ceremony provision.
- 1.4 Under the Act each local authority
- Must provide or make arrangements for premises where Citizenship Ceremonies may be held.
 - Must arrange for ceremonies to be conducted with sufficient frequency to enable applicants in their area to undertake a ceremony within the 3 month period.
 - May provide additional facilities or make additional arrangements for which a charge not exceeding the extra cost may be made.
 - And the ceremony must be conducted by a Superintendent Registrar or Deputy Superintendent Registrar from the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration service.
- 1.5 The Executive on 13 April agreed that in order to comply with the requirements of the Act and assist the Council in achieving its Community Priority of *“Raising General Pride in the Borough”* that Citizenship Ceremonies be held in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre from 26 April 2004 and at other suitable premises as may be required in the future. The Executive also agreed to a review being undertaken after a few ceremonies had taken place to look into the suitability of the location and costs associated.

2. Group Citizenship Ceremony - Operating Arrangements

- 2.1 Based on Home Office figures on past successful citizenship applications by Borough residents, the expectation was that there would be an annual need for around 600 persons to attend group Citizenship Ceremonies.
- 2.2 Ceremonies have been held fortnightly since 26 April. At first, few citizenship notifications were being received from the Home Office, but since late June over 20 notifications are being received each week and at mid July over 370 applications were known to be waiting to be processed by the Home Office.
- 2.3 Use of the Civic Centre Council Chamber for these ceremonies has proved to be very successful. The setting gives dignity and meaning to the ceremony which is intended to celebrate the significance of becoming a British citizen and welcome the new citizen into his or her community. There is suitable waiting space outside the Chamber for the registration staff to receive new citizens and check documentation. This same area is then used after the ceremony for refreshments and for the Mayor or Deputy Mayor and staff to chat with the citizens and their guests and for any additional photographs to be taken. All new citizens are consulted on their impression of the ceremony and all responses received have been very favourable.
- 2.4 The Chamber itself is able to hold at least 25 citizens plus children and up to two guests each. With the increased number of citizenship notifications being received it is important to use a large venue to minimise the number of ceremonies needed and avoid additional costs.
- 2.5 The Mayor is scheduling certain monthly meetings at the Civic Centre to follow on from the Citizenship Ceremony. The new Deputy Lieutenant, Major Tony O'Hagan DL, has also indicated his wish to participate in a future ceremony.
- 2.6 It has been suggested that these ceremonies could be held at Arden House Register Office. The Registration service is located on the ground floor of a double fronted detached house in Longbridge Road. The accommodation comprises 3 office areas, a hallway and the Marriage Room. Daytime office hours would not be practical for large numbers of people to attend the Register Office for a citizenship ceremony as this would conflict with the general public using the office for a wide range of registration services. It would also reduce the time available for taking notices of and registering marriages with a consequent reduction in income.
- 2.7 The Marriage Room is laid out to seat 28 people with a wide aisle to allow space for the bridal party. The room could accommodate up to 40 people if extra furniture was purchased. There is no large ante room for citizens and their guests to assemble or have refreshments other than the hallway which would be a cramped arrangement. The public toilet is accessed from the rear garden where there is no external lighting, which would be required in winter and only limited on street parking is available. In addition, based on current citizenship notifications use of the smaller accommodation provided at Arden House would necessitate additional ceremonies being held to keep pace with demand, which would increase costs.

2.8 Taking the above into account the Civic Centre Council Chamber is still considered to be the preferred location for holding group Citizenship Ceremonies.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 The administrative process associated with citizenship is very straightforward and the costs are negligible. The Home Office supplies the documentation to the Registration Service and the prospective citizen is required to make contact with the Service within a defined timescale. The Registrar goes through a Home Office checklist with the person, books the ceremony date and confirms this in writing. This work is being carried out within existing budgeted staff resources.

3.2 The Home Office is paying the local authority £68 for every Citizenship certificate issued with £5,712 received by 6 July which represents 84 certificates.

3.3 There are staffing, refreshment and photography costs for each group ceremony. The Superintendent Registrar and two registration staff deal with all aspects of the ceremony and casual staff have been employed specifically to be used for this additional work, to ensure sufficient staff availability and to reduce additional staffing costs.

3.4 The cost of a ceremony based on 25 Citizens is estimated as follows:

Staff Costs:	
Registrars (2 hours attendance per ceremony - at appropriate overtime rate plus on costs)	
SO2 x 1 = £19.77 per hour – planned overtime	£ 39.54
SC6 x 1 = £20.95 per hour	£ 41.90
SC4 x 1 = £17.12 per hour	£ 34.24
Porters / Security on attendance till 8.00 p.m. therefore no additional costs at present.	£ 00.00
Photographer Attendance (cost of photos in holder is £4 each)	£ 50.00 £100.00
Refreshments Order - only for 40 people (£1.25 per head)	£ 50.00
Postage and Stationary (based on two sets of mailings to applicants)	£ 23.25
Telephone calls and processing – estimates as exact timings difficult to quantify. Estimate cost at 4 hrs per ceremony (£11.42 per hour). No additional costs (covered by current staffing levels and budgets).	£ 68.52
Total Estimated Cost per Ceremony	£407.45
Estimated cost per Citizen (based on 25 at ceremony)	£ 16.30
Income per Citizen	£ 68.00

With income of £5,712 already received, this provides a surplus of approximately £4,340 at that stage in the financial year. The Revenue budget for 2004/05 assumes that the income received will equal the costs incurred.

- 3.5 All the above refers to group citizenship ceremonies. There is also provision within the Citizenship Guidance for local authorities to provide a non standard ceremony for those prospective citizens who request an individual ceremony with a number of their own guests.
- 3.6 In such cases, the local authority may set the fee to recoup the additional costs incurred. This fee would be in addition to the £68 already paid via the Home Office. No such requests have been made to date, but in order that the occasional request may be accommodated it is suggested that it would be appropriate to use Arden House Marriage Room at a convenient time during the week for this purpose. The suggested charge is £100 per ceremony. Care would be taken to ensure that the size of the ceremony would not conflict with other users of the Registration service. The cost of an individual Citizenship Ceremony at Arden House is follows:

Staff Costs: (Registrars - 2 hours attendance per ceremony - at appropriate overtime rate plus on costs)	
SO2 x 1 = £19.77 per hour – planned overtime	£ 39.54
SC6 x 1 = £20.95 per hour	£ 41.90
SC4 x 1 = £17.12 per hour	£ 34.24
SC3 x 1 - £ 15.20 per hour	£ 30.40
Total Cost	£146.08
Income: Payment from Home Office (£68) Proposed Individual Citizenship Ceremony Fee (£100)	£168.00

As there are no porters / security personnel at Arden House, the additional member of staff is required for security/safety reasons. As for weddings, the Citizen will be required to arrange and pay the full cost of a photographer themselves. It is not possible to provide any refreshments at Arden House. Processing costs and other overheads are marginal and will be covered by the £22 surplus.

4. Consultation

The following people have seen this report and are happy with it as it stands

Councillor Fairbrass, Leader's Portfolio (Accommodation).

Councillor Collins, Portfolio Holder for Developing Rights and Responsibilities with the Local Community and Providing Equal Opportunities and Celebrating Diversity (Income and Charging).

Councillor Wade, Portfolio Holder for Raising General Pride in the Borough (Registrars Service).

Bob Cooper, Interim Head of Finance, DRE.
Laura Williams, Management Accountant, DRE

Background Papers

- Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; Home Office Guidance on Citizenship Ceremonies for Local Authorities and Superintendent Registrars.
- Executive Minute 362 - 13 April 2004 re: Citizenship Ceremonies