

HERFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

4

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2002 AT 10.30 A.M.

CIVIL FUNERALS

Report of the County Secretary

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Executive Member: Gerald Game

1. Purpose of Report

To enable members to review progress to date on the Civil Funerals pilot and feedback from customers following the decision of the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2002 to include Civil Funerals on the Scrutiny work programme.

2. Summary

Hertfordshire is one of eight Registration Authorities piloting Civil Funeral Ceremonies. These are funerals which take place anywhere except a religious building. There is no restriction on the service containing religious elements, however, if requests are received for a number of hymns and prayers, staff would advise families to contact their local vicar who would be better suited to meet their needs.

3. Conclusions

The Committee are invited to consider whether to comment on the service at this time or undertake further scrutiny of this issue.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Hertfordshire Registration Service has, over the past 2 years, attended meetings with other like minded authorities to discuss a Civil Funerals pilot. In December 2001 it became apparent that everything was in place to enable a pilot to be undertaken.
- 4.2. The purpose of the pilot is to offer customers a greater choice of funerals through the provision of a civil ceremony. Currently the main choices are a religious ceremony or a non-religious ceremony offered by humanists. A civil ceremony can contain some religious elements.
- 4.3. The pilot is being run in partnership with a private sector business, Civil Ceremonies Limited, who are responsible for the administration and assessing of customer satisfaction through a questionnaire. Civil Ceremonies make an administration charge for this aspect of the service.

5. What has happened in Hertfordshire during the Pilot

- 5.1. Hertfordshire are piloting an approach that involves face to face contact at a venue of the customer's choice. This could be at the Register Office, Funeral Directors or the relatives home.
- 5.2. There is a flat rate charge of £180 for the service. The charge is the same for each pilot authority.
- 5.3. To date we have only carried out two ceremonies.
- 5.4. Meetings have been held with all the main Hertfordshire Funeral Directors who have agreed to hand out leaflets detailing the service we can offer to families wanting a civil service.
- 5.5. 12 Hertfordshire Registration staff have attended and passed, the 3 day residential Funeral training course.

6. Feedback

- 6.1. Both families were profuse in their thanks to the Registrar for both the service and the support she had given them prior to the ceremony.

7. Marketing /Advertising

- 7.1. We have carried out no advertising ourselves. Instead we have relied on Hertfordshire Funeral Directors and Hospital Bereavement Officers to provide a leaflet to the bereaved advising them of our service (see Appendix i).

7.2 Meetings have been held with Hertfordshire Funeral Directors both individually, and in groups, to explain the service to them. They have indicated their support for what we are offering, specifically requesting that for the duration of the pilot we rely on them alone to hand out the leaflets.

7.3 We hope to have an article in Herts Direct in January advertising the service.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications as the service is self-funding. The fee levels cover the cost of deputies, travel and any marketing/advertising costs we may incur.

9. The Way Forward

9.1 Take up of the service has been very disappointing, though other pilot authorities have not been any more successful.

9.2 We propose holding another round of meetings with the Funeral Directors in order to obtain feedback from them on the service to date.

9.3 We intend to have the leaflets advertising the service available at Register Offices from January 2003. To date this has not been the case as Funeral Directors were keen to be the ones providing families with information and also because it was felt that when people come to register they have already made a decision over the service the deceased is to have.

9.4 We will continue to monitor the time spent on each ceremony.

9.5 We propose continuing with the pilot for a further 6 months and reviewing the situation again then.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

None