



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
<b>Subject:</b>	City Hall: Memorandum of Understanding – Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages
<b>Date:</b>	22 November 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects, Ext. 6217
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ruth McClean, Estates Surveyor, Estates Unit Ext. 3495

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	The General Register Office is part of the NI Statistics and Research Agency, which is an agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel and is responsible for the administration and control of civil registration of births, adoptions, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.
1.2	The legislation provides that each local government district shall be a registration district. Registration is undertaken by Council staff on Council premises. This is controlled by: Section 104 Local Government Act (NI) 1972, Section 5&8 of the Births and Deaths Registration (NI) Order 1976, Sections 30 and 32 of The Marriage (NI) Order 2003 and Article 144 of The Civil Partnership Act 2004.
1.3	In 1977 the Council and GRO entered into an agreement in respect of the use of offices at City Hall and the former General Purposes and Finance Committee agreed terms to recover costs relating to the Council's provision of the service and use of offices within City Hall.
1.4	These costs included a rental for the accommodation which comprised offices, a ceremony room and a parking space, together with recovery of rates, heating, cleaning and other costs.
1.5	Since the date of the initial agreement, costs have been recovered quarterly and rent reviews have been undertaken by LPS every five years. A report was taken to SP&R on 19 November 2010 which outlined some changes which GRO made to the service. In addition, other changes have occurred regarding which costs are recovered and the Memorandum of Understanding seeks to regularise changes which are already in effect.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Over the years, changes have occurred in the delivery of the births, deaths and marriages function, which have resulted in less area occupied (therefore proportionally less rent) and recovery of some costs not being undertaken.
2.2	Although GRO ceased to rent the ceremony room, the Council has retained it for ceremony use, and now charges customers direct for ceremony room hire. This income is only achievable given the presence of the BDM function in City Hall.
2.3	Whilst some losses in recoverable items have occurred, the Council continues to get best value by offsetting the income from the ceremony room against costs. Under the new Memorandum of Understanding LPS and the Council will agree the rental value every five years, in line with the previous agreement.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u> An agreed rent of £21,010 per annum is applicable from 1 July 2011 (which corresponds with the existing rent review pattern). This is to be reviewed every five years. Non property costs comprising salaries, post, stationery, printing, computer supplies, equipment, credit card charges and other charges arising from provision of the service will continue to be recovered from GRO.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u> Legal Services and Estates Management have been involved in drafting the Memorandum of Understanding.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The terms of the Memorandum of Understanding regularise the use of the accommodation in City Hall by GRO.</p>

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	There are no known equality or good relations issues associated with this report.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Committee is asked to note that a new Memorandum of Understanding has been drawn up between the Council and GRO in respect of the use of the accommodation in City Hall to include changes to the rent and cost recovery and to record amendments in practice since the initial agreement back in 1977.

<b>6</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	<p>GRO – General Register Office  BDM – Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships  LPS – Land and Property Services</p>