

Report to Budget & Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

20 March 2024

Subject:	Impact on Registration related services when the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital opens in 2024
Director:	Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer, Brendan Arnold
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director Mark_Satchwell@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the impact, actions, progress, and approach taken to the opening of the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH) in 2024 for Registration related services.
- 1.2 That the Board identifies any recommendations it wishes to make.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 From 2024 an increase in demand for Registrations related services is certain, as acute health care services move from City hospital in Birmingham to the new MMUH in Smethwick.
- 2.2 This will likely see an increase of up to 5000 registration (4000 birth and 1000 death) events for Sandwell as a Local Registration Service, more complex and an increased volume of cases referred to the Black Country Coroner, as well an increased number of cases referred to the Bereavement Services team related to Public Health Act funerals.



2.3 The Board is now requested to consider and note the current position, progress made to manage this increased demand and make any recommendations it wishes to make.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people. Timeliness of birth registration events affords families and their children access to key services support services early and at a point of need.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy The proposals and actions taken to date will ensure key bereavement related services continue to be available locally to families in Sandwell.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

Impact on birth related registration events.

- 4.1 Following the closure of the Sandwell and Solihull maternity units in 2011, Birmingham’s Local Registration Service have consistently been registering 7,000 extra births per annum.
- 4.2 Of these, Solihull Local Registration Service historically registered 3,000 a year prior to their maternity unit closing. Therefore, an estimated 4,000 extra births registrations are likely to take place at the MMUH when it opens in 2024.
- 4.3 It is anticipated as with all other registration events in Sandwell, these will take place at the Register Office, Highfields House, West Bromwich.

Action planned and taken to date.

- 4.4 An assessment has been completed to identify the number of additional posts that will be necessary to help manage the impact MMUH will have on registration events. To date, we have successfully accounted for from a financial perspective and subsequently appointed 2 x additional Registration Officers who are due to commence their employment with



our Register Office Team in February 2024. We will seek to appoint an additional 1 x Senior Registration Officer who will be more experienced in this type of work in the new financial year, 2024/2025.

- 4.5 To ensure that the service is efficient across all registration events, we are conducting Business Process reviews for all services that are to be provided. In addition, a training plan has been pulled together to ensure all staff are back up to speed with birth registration events.
- 4.6 Our customers can now book appointments to register the birth of their new baby online or by telephone via our Councils customer services contact centre. We also have a dedicated reception area at the Register Office where our customers can walk in and make arrangements directly with our Register Office team.
- 4.7 It is anticipated that we will have completed the reviews we have started of how we undertake birth registrations by April 2024.

Impact on death related registration events:

- 4.8 Historically some Sandwell residents who have been admitted to City Hospital for treatment and care have and will continue to sadly pass away. It is anticipated that these deaths will likely occur at MMUH in Sandwell when it opens in 2024 following the cessation and transfer of some acute health services at City Hospital which will transfer to the Midland Metro Hospital.

Historic total number of deaths at City Hospital are detailed below:

1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018 - 754 deaths

1 January 2019 – 31 December 2019 - 838 deaths

- 4.9 The above figures are pre-Covid and actual numbers which have been provided by Birmingham Register Office and City Hospital in Birmingham.
- 4.10 Other Birmingham hospitals have reported a general increase in the number of deaths, and we would therefore reasonably expect an increase in death related registration events up to 1000 per year.



Action planned and taken date.

- 4.11 As outlined in 4.4 above, we will as MMUH opens, have 3 new additional members of trained staff allocated to our Register Office Team.
- 4.12 A recent review of our approach to death registration has already been completed. This will subject to a further amendment to account for the death certification reforms following introduction of the Statutory Medical Examiner Service in April 2024 which will see all deaths reviewed by either a Medical Examiner or the Coroner.
- 4.13 Due to resourcing pressures, many Local Registration Services have dispensed with the “Tell us Once and Enrichment Service” which helps bereaved families notify key stakeholders of their loved ones passing. Despite the increase in anticipated death registration events, we will continue to resource and provide this service as we know this helps our customers and other relevant stakeholders at a very difficult time.
- 4.14 In addition, we have reviewed our approach to certificate production to capture a more efficient way of searching and producing registration certificates. This work was completed with a view of freeing up and maximising existing resources to help support the impact of MMUH on registration events.
- 4.15 Sandwell Register Office, Highfields House has long been the home of all registration events in Sandwell. We have invested in the iconic Grade Two listed building to improve facilities for both our customers and our staff. This includes but not limited to; the refresh of additional appointment rooms and welfare facilities for our staff, a new inclusive reception area, a new lift and refreshed ceremony rooms as well as music, recording and webcasting facilities.

Impact on the Black Country Coroners Service

- 4.16 For the purpose of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and where a coronial area covers one or more local authority areas, Schedule 2 of the Act requires those authorities to agree which of them will be the ‘relevant authority’ (formerly known as the ‘lead authority’). For the Black Country jurisdiction, it is Sandwell.



4.17 The Black Country Coroners Service will investigate a death which occurs in any of these areas, and:

- The cause of death is unknown
- The cause of death is unnatural; or
- The deceased was in a state of detention, e.g. police custody, at the time of their death

4.18 Accounting for a potential 1000 additional death registrations as outlined above, and with on average 34% of all deaths in 2020 referred to our Coroner, it is anticipated 340 additional cases will be referred into our coronial jurisdiction.

4.19 Hospital deaths referred to a coroner given the setting can often be more complex by nature which could see as many as 66 complex cases (19%) referred for inquest.

4.20 Revenue implications associated with the service are share equally by the four Black Country local authorities in accordance with the existing collaborative agreement.

Action planned and taken date.

4.21 The Coroners facilities at Jack Judge House in Oldbury have been improved. In 2023, a new additional digital court was opened along with a new reception area and jury/family rooms.

4.22 An additional Senior Coroners Officer has been accounted for and successfully appointed to. In addition, to support both the Senior and Area Coroner, new Assistant Coroners have been appointed to support the service primarily from a resilience perspective.

4.23 A new case management system iCasework was introduced in November 2022 which is now embedded and has already led to improvements in the efficiency of case management. We will now complete a post implementation review of this system to identify any further opportunities to improve the functionality which will be completed by the opening of the MMH.

4.24 With coroner's service being shared across the four Black County Local Authority areas, an updated formal collaboration agreement for the next



four years has been reviewed and agreed effective from 1 April 2023. This agreement accounts for the governance arrangements along with the equal (25%) sharing of all costs associated with the delivery of the service.

Impact on Public Health Act Funerals

- 4.25 The Council is responsible for making funeral arrangements for anybody who dies within the borough, when no other arrangements are being or are likely to be made for example; when the deceased has no family and the deceased hasn't left a will. The responsibility is placed upon the Council by Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984. This includes deaths in hospitals.
- 4.26 In 2020, the Council through its Bereavement Service made the necessary funeral arrangements on behalf 60 deceased persons, of which 36 were referred from Sandwell Hospital. The remaining deaths were in the community.
- 4.27 Again, historically some Sandwell residents who have been admitted to City Hospital for treatment and care will have sadly passed away at the hospital. It is anticipated that some of these deaths will in the future occur at the Midland Metro Hospital in Sandwell following the cessation of some healthcare services at City Hospital which will transfer to the Midland Metro Hospital.
- 4.28 The number of deaths referred by City Hospital to Birmingham City Council to make funeral arrangements in accordance with its obligations for Public Health Act funerals is according to the trust on average 3% of all deaths at City Hospital.
- 4.29 When the number of deaths outlined above are considered, we can therefore anticipate an additional 24 cases being referred to Sandwell, which equates to estimated 40% increase in the number of Public Health Act funerals which will need to be arranged and administered by our Bereavement Services team.

Action taken to date.

- 4.30 Two additional posts for our bereavement administration team have been accounted for and successfully appointed to in support of the



increased demand which is likely to be more broadly across our bereavement services team.

- 4.31 A new case management system for our bereavement services team in support of more efficient ways of working and an improved customer experience for our service users is being progressed which is expected to be in place by July 2024.
- 4.32 We are also in discussion and have drafted for a Service Level Agreement with Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust for the provision of Public Health Act funerals where someone passes away at MMUH and there is no known next kin or arrangements cannot be made.
- 4.33 In addition, the Council through its bereavement service continues to provide a more affordable funeral option for families where the cost of using a local funeral director for a more traditional approach is an issue for them.

5 Implications

Resources:	<p>When the new demand for registration related services in Sandwell were considered and benching marking with current resources that are in place to meet the existing business need, it was estimated that an additional six full-time equivalent posts was needed across the three teams within Registration Services to ensure that adequate resource is in place to meet the new business need.</p> <p>The cost associated with these posts to contract end are estimated to be £280,000 and have already been accounted for from 2022/2023 onwards as part of the Council budget setting processes.</p> <p>This additional expenditure will be partly offset by an increased income target for Register Office Services of £60,000 which will be generated from certificate production for registration events.</p> <p>An increase in Public Health Act Funerals will likely see expenditure rise by an estimated £8,000 which we will look to mitigate by costs recovery from estates</p>
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	and as part of the annual budget setting process for the service.
Legal and Governance:	<p>The Registration Service Act 1953 is an Act to consolidate certain enactments relating to the registration of births and deaths in England and Wales.</p> <p>For the purpose of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and where a coronial area covers one or more local authority areas, Schedule 2 requires those authorities to agree which of them will be the ‘relevant authority’ (formerly known as the ‘lead authority’), for the Black Country that is Sandwell.</p> <p>The responsibility is placed upon the Council by Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 where people who have passed away and have no next of kin, or whose next of kin, relatives or friends are unable or unwilling to make the necessary arrangements for a funeral. This includes deaths in hospitals.</p>
Risk:	The analysis and actions undertaken taken to date it is felt will ensure appropriate mitigations have been put in place to manage the impending increase in demand for Registration related services.
Equality:	Services provided by Registration services have and will continue to ensure the needs of all community groups and protected characteristics are met.
Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals and actions taken to date will ensure Registration related services continue to be available locally to families in Sandwell at key moments in their lives.
Social Value	There are no specific Social Value issues regarding the proposals contained in this report.

6 Appendices

None



7. Background Papers

Report to Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board 13 October 2022

