

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources
DATE	13 <sup>th</sup> June, 2013
DIRECTOR	Stewart Carruth
TITLE OF REPORT	Fees for Citizenship Ceremonies and Nationality Checking Service
REPORT NUMBER:	CG/13/073

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek approval (a) to increase the fee charged for individual citizenship ceremonies and (b) for a fee structure for a nationality checking service on behalf of the Home Office.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee agree -

- (a) to increase the fee charged for individual citizenship ceremonies to £50; and
- (b) a fee structure for a nationality checking service as follows –
  - Single adult - £75
  - Single person under 18 - £40
  - Couples - £120
  - Family - £180
- (c) to delegate authority to the Heads of Finance and Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Convener of the Finance and Resources (or equivalent) Committee, to review these fees annually and make adjustments if deemed necessary.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Income to the Registrars Service will increase if the recommendations are approved. The additional income from nationality checking will be used to fund a full time post of Nationality Checking Officer. This post will be fixed term until demand for the service is fully established.

#### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of a nationality checking service will require space to be set aside within Marischal College to conduct interviews. There will also be an impact on the team of Registrars who will require training in the provision of the service in order to support the Nationality Checking Officer once in post.

#### 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

##### **Citizenship Ceremonies**

5.1 The Registrars Service operating within Marischal College conducts ceremonies for people who have been successful in their application to the Home Office to become a British citizen. The ceremony is a requirement of their application, and part of the overall process of naturalisation. Local authorities are reimbursed at a rate of £80 for each person who has a citizenship ceremony - this is included within the overall fee paid by the applicant to the Home Office for British citizenship, currently £851.

5.2 Group ceremonies are held every six weeks in the Town House, and can include up to 150 participants. Individual ceremonies are offered to anyone who does not wish to wait for the group ceremony, or who wishes a more private setting for their celebration. A fee of £25 is charged for this, and the fee has been set at this level since first introduced in 2006. There is no fee charged by the local authority for a group ceremony. Anyone not wishing to pay a fee (on top of the £80 which is paid to the Home Office) can wait for the group ceremony.

5.3 The Home Office allows local authorities to set their own fee for individual ceremonies, and a wide range of fees is in place across Scotland, as shown below -

Glasgow	£100
Edinburgh	£90
Perth	£80
Inverness	£150

5.4 If an application for British citizenship is successful, the Home Office will issue an invitation to attend a citizenship ceremony. This will stipulate the local authority area in which the ceremony is to take place, and this must be the applicant's area of residence in the UK. It is not therefore possible for someone to choose where to have a ceremony.

- 5.5. In light of the varying fee structure above, it is suggested that Aberdeen fees increase from £25 to £50. Any further increase may result in applicants choosing to wait for the group ceremony.
- 5.6 Demand for individual citizenship ceremonies increased from 158 ceremonies in 2011 to 298 in 2012.

### **Nationality Checking Service**

- 5.7 The Registrars Service will introduce a nationality checking service in August of this year, a service provided on behalf of the Home Office to check eligibility to apply for British citizenship, and to check the application and any supporting documentation. This service is only provided in two other Scottish local authorities - Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire – and it is expected that Aberdeen will meet demand from the northern part of Scotland which could be fairly significant, although this cannot be forecast with any precision.
- 5.8 Again, local authorities can set their own fees for this service, and having benchmarked against the other two authorities, it is suggested that the fee structure be set as follows –

Single adult	£75
Single person under 18	£40
Couples	£120

- 5.9 The Home Office has informally confirmed that our proposed fees are not excessive and are at the national average. These fees will be reviewed annually.
- 5.10 The Home Office has also advised that there is a local demand, and that 56.9% of people participating in a citizenship ceremony will opt to use the local nationality checking service.

## **6. IMPACT**

Corporate – This will link with the 5 Year Business Plan, which includes the provision of a nationality checking service.

Public – The charging structures will be of interest to anyone wishing to apply for British citizenship.

## **7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK**

The risks associated with the introduction of a nationality checking service are being managed through the creation of a fixed term post, close

workload monitoring, and liaison with all relevant services of the Council as well as the Home Office.

There are no risks arising directly from the fee structure or the increase in fees for individual citizenship ceremonies.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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