

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 17TH SEPTEMBER 2003

CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES – CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Report by Director of Community Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To agree on a response to the Home Office's consultation document on Citizenship Ceremonies.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", published in February 2002, set out the Government's proposals for enhancing the significance of the acquisition of British citizenship.
- 2.2 The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which received Royal Assent on 7th November 2002, includes provisions which will require that all applicants aged 18 or over for naturalisation or registration as a British citizen take a citizenship oath and pledge at a citizenship ceremony. Indications are that this will start April 2004.
- 2.3 The consultation document outlines the Government's provisional views on the form and content of that citizenship ceremony, as it will be carried out across the United Kingdom. Consultation is in the form of a series of questions relating to the issues outlined in the report. The questions and suggested responses are appended to the report for consideration.

3. CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Government feels that Registrars are well placed to deliver citizenship ceremonies. Registrars already have experience in civil marriage ceremonies and have access to suitable premises.
- 3.2 The Home Office will make a payment to a local authority for a standard ceremony, which would be carried out on a group basis. The group size would depend on the demand in a local authority area. Anyone wishing a private ceremony can request it but this may incur an additional fee.
- 3.3 New citizens will be able to celebrate with family, friends and children, who would be welcome at ceremonies. There is an option for local authorities to organise the celebrations and charge an appropriate fee.

- 3.4 The Government believes it would be right to agree that national symbols and anthem should be featured as part of the ceremonies. This would be balanced with an opportunity for the local community to welcome their new citizens, include a local flavour within the process and invite local dignitaries to be part of the welcoming party.
- 3.5 It is suggested that the Registrar would carry out the opening of the ceremony and that this would be a good time for a local dignitary to address the group. The dignitary would expand on the Registrar's speech with emphasis on the local community and involvement in it.
- 3.6 The citizenship oath and pledge will be at the heart of the ceremony. The rules for the swearing of the oath are set out in the Oaths Act 1978 and include the option to be sworn by Almighty God or affirmed. It is not expected that holy books will be routinely available at the ceremony but applicants can bring their own.
- 3.7 The format of the Registrar's words to those swearing the oath would emphasise the importance and meaning of the oath and pledge and what obligations they bring with them.
- 3.8 A formal welcome to the new citizens would be made on behalf of the Queen, Government and local Council along with a congratulatory speech from the Registrar or dignitary. This would also include the presentation of a nationality certificate.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Registration service will receive payment from the Home Office for each ceremony. There should be no staffing costs, as the ceremonies will be carried out within normal business times.
- 4.2 Any additional costs for celebrations or for Registrars to carry out any ceremony outwith their premises would be charged to the applicants.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The process is governed by the Acts mentioned in Section 2 and 3 of the report.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Nil

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Following detailed consideration of the Home Office "Citizenship Ceremonies" document, officers have prepared an appropriate response which is detailed in the Appendix to this report.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- i) approve the response to the Citizenship Ceremony Consultation Document shown in Appendix One to this report;
- ii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

William Stafford
Director of Community Services

18th August 2003

WS/JAG/DMcV

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Home Office consultation document "Citizenship Ceremonies"

Anyone wishing to inspect the background papers should contact John Griffiths, Head of Leisure Services, on 01563 576264.

Implementation Officer: john.griffiths@east-ayrshire.gov.uk

APPENDIX ONE

CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The following questions and responses have been compiled in consultation with the other two Ayrshire authorities' Registration managers.

- 1. Should national symbols – the Union Jack, and the national anthem – form part of the ceremony? Should some national cultural activity e.g. a piece of music, song or poem be included at the start or end of the ceremony?**

Response:

It is agreed that the Union Jack and the national anthem should form part of the ceremony as it is for a British citizenship. The national cultural activity should relate more to a Scottish theme. The format of the cultural activity should be at the discretion of the local authority.

- 2. How might a local flavour be imported to citizenship ceremonies in a manner which is in keeping with their purpose?**

Response:

There are a number of local cultural events already taking place within schools and recreational facilities that could be tied to the ceremony. It is envisaged that the ceremonies will take place a maximum of 4 times per year depending on demand. Importing a local flavour is desired but would depend on whether numbers were sufficient to justify involving third parties. The cultural activity mentioned in question 1 above could closely link with the area the ceremony is taking place in. This should be at the discretion of the local authority.

- 3. Do you have any suggestions on other suitable venues for ceremonies?**

Response:

The premises would require the facilities to ensure a dignified ceremony would take place. Apart from Registration premises, some local venues are already licensed for marriages outwith registration offices. These venues meet all the requirements in relation to Health and Safety and the conducting of a civil ceremony as well as being familiar to the Registrar and therefore would be suitable.

- 4. Do you have any suggestions for suitable music?**

Response:

This should reflect the local aspect of the process.

It would normally be traditional Scottish music but may also reflect the diversity of cultures in areas where a large ethnic minority reside. It could also be locally focussed e.g. in Ayrshire, the songs of Robert Burns. This should be at the discretion of the local authority.

5. Do you have any views on the content of the proposed welcome speech by the Registrar?

Response:

It is agreed that the suggested wording in the document be a good guideline. One aspect the Council would desire to add relates to a Scottish national identity and residing in a Scottish community in keeping with the principles and practices of the devolved Scottish Parliament and within a British context.

6. Do you agree that it would be a good idea to invite a local dignitary to address the group at this stage and do you have any suggestions about the advice which might be given as to the content of this address?

Response:

It is agreed that a local dignitary be invited to address the group. Since the Council employs Registrars in Scotland and the ceremony is under Council responsibility the Provost would be the favoured option. The Provost should make reference to the area and the importance of becoming involved with the community and civic life. The content of the speech would be at the discretion of the Council.

7. What are your views on the standard responses? Have you any other suggestions?

Response:

It is agreed the standard response is acceptable but should include an additional welcome from the Scottish Parliament and people.

8. Do you feel it is important for new citizens to have a commemorative certificate or other gift and have you any suggestions relating to gifts? What sort of gift do you think would be appropriate, and be a meaningful memento of the occasion?

Response:

The simplest approach would be to include a welcoming letter/certificate from the Provost on the Provost's headed paper.

9. Do you have any other comments/questions on the subject of citizenship ceremonies?

Response:

Within the legal and constitutional parameters, Councils should have the maximum discretion as ideas and circumstances will change as citizenship ceremonies develop.