26 March 2019

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – 405/19

Dear Sir/Madam

Your request for information has now been considered and the information requested is provided below.

Request:

1. Please indicate the last date on which a genealogist, probate researcher or tracing agent was used.

2. If a researcher has been used in the past year, on how many occasions has this occurred?

3. Which company was last used and by which local authority department?

4. Does the local authority have any contract with any researcher? If so, please provide the contract document, redacted as required.

5. In the circumstances where the local authority was aware of the existence of relatives of a deceased person but lacked the resources or expertise to locate them, would the council use a genealogical researcher on an exclusive basis again?

6. Are there plans for the council to undergo a tendering process for a researcher?

7. If the council previously used heir hunters or other tracing services but no longer does so, what are the reasons behind the change in policy?

8. What is the council’s policy and process for making a referral to a genealogical researcher?

9. Please identify the measures in the existing policies and procedures for making referrals to a genealogical researcher which:
   a) protect next of kin from overcharging through a market exposure and
   b) ensure all entitled relatives are found?

10. Does the local authority now publish an online list of public health funerals where there is an intestacy?

11. If so, when is information added to the list? Is information only added to the list AFTER the researcher has exhausted their investigations or is it added at the same time that a referral is made to the researcher?
12. Does the list include names of deceased individuals where a researcher has been used and family have been located who have taken over responsibility for the funeral?

13. Bearing in mind the benefits to the next of kin of maintaining competition, if the local authority is not already doing so does it intend to begin using or tender for a panel of three researchers to whom each case will be referred concurrently?

14. If the local authority is still engaging in exclusive relationships with heir hunters rather than making referrals to the Bona Vacantia Division or to a panel of three and/or maintaining a regularly updated online list, what is the justification for this? Please refer to any relevant policies and legislation.

15. Please provide any records of internal decision making or external consultation from the past year which have resulted in the local authority’s current stance on the use of genealogical researchers

16. Would the local authority welcome some formal guidance or regulation from the government or another independent body in order to provide clarity on the appropriate course of action for using private sector services which are free to the local authority but which may result in a third party being charged or prejudiced in some way?

17. Would the local authority welcome some formal guidance from the government or another independent body to provide clarity on the appropriate course of action for when a person dies intestate in their area and there is evidence that there are next of kin but the local authority do not have the resources or skills to locate the relatives themselves?

Response:

All publicly available information regarding public health funerals in Rutland is available online at:

https://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-services/funerals-and-cemeteries/public-health-funerals/?RHC_tab=1

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If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request please contact the Head of Corporate Governance, Rutland County Council, Catmose, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6HP You can also complain to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House, Water lane
Wilmslow, Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Tel: 01625 545700
Yours faithfully

FOI Administrator
Corporate Support Team, Rutland County Council