

POLICY AND RESOURCES

CABINET BOARD

5TH JANUARY 2012

FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

INDEX OF REPORT ITEM

Part 1 - Doc. Code: PRB-050112-REP-FS-DM

SECTION A - MATTER FOR DECISION			
Report Item		Page Nos.	Wards affected
1.	New Governance Arrangements - Register Office	2-15	All

PART 1
SECTION A, ITEM 1

NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS - REGISTER OFFICE

1. **Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. To consider a report of the Head of Legal & Democratic Services seeking approval for the introduction of new governance arrangements for the delivery of the Authority's Registration Services. This will give the Authority more freedom and flexibility in delivery of the service and create the opportunity to offer a service that best fits local needs. The new governance arrangements will facilitate the more efficient use of resources and outline local arrangements to be put in place to improve the service.

2. **Background**

- 2.1. Civil Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths was established in England and Wales in 1837. Although regulated by the General Register Office, this statutory function has been delivered through a network of local Registration Districts for the past two hundred years. In many respects this system has remained largely unchanged until the last few years when the General Register Office for England and Wales embarked upon a national programme to overhaul and modernise civil registration with increased emphasis on developing flexibility to meet local needs.
- 2.2. For some time this national agenda for change has been evident and in 2008 Registration Service staff ceased to be civil servants and became local government officers. The next step is for Neath Port Talbot to follow the other registration districts by seeking to modernise the way the Service itself operates.

3. **Proposal:**

- 3.1.1. To authorise the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, following staff and trade union consultation, to prepare a Scheme and apply to the General Register Office for approval of a new scheme of governance for the Council's Registration Service.
- 3.1.2. To authorise the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to sign and seal the new scheme of governance.

3.1.3. To authorise the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to continue to act as the Proper Officer for the Registration Service under the new scheme of governance.

3.1.4. To authorise the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, to do anything necessary to give effect to the proposals in this report including but not limited to the entering into of any required Code of Practice, establishment and management of any performance management arrangements, determination of any objections to the proposed new Scheme.

3.2. Reasons for the proposal:

3.2.1. Currently, the Registration Service is delivered within a framework that has not significantly changed for two hundred years and these arrangements have become inconsistent and out of step with other council services. The existing governance arrangements are very prescriptive and previously has not allowed the local authority to use staff in a flexible and efficient way.

3.2.2. There is an opportunity to adopt a new scheme of governance and this new framework will enable the Registration Service to modernise and focus more on local service delivery and needs. The new arrangements will give the Authority greater control over staffing and administrative arrangements. Subject to Committee approval, a provisional implementation date of the 19TH March 2012 has been agreed with the Registrar General for the introduction of the new scheme of governance.

3.3. Alternative options considered:

The Registration Service could do nothing and continue with the present scheme of registration. This option would prevent further modernisation of the service by not allowing the benefit of local freedom and flexibility. The General Register Office would continue to have the role of, not only inspecting the service outcomes but also the local inspection of individual officers and detailed administration activity. If new governance arrangements are not adopted then any changes to staffing would be required to continue to be approved by the General Register Office via a formal scheme change process. For these reasons, the do nothing option has been rejected.

4. New Governance Scheme Implementation:

4.1. The process for implementation is as follows:

4.1.1. Service Delivery Plan (SDP) – Appendix 1 attached for consideration.

4.1.2. The SDP proposals for monitoring performance and reporting annually to RG - performance to be monitored against national standards and as a minimum it must include the 5 Key Performance indicators.

4.1.3. Consultation on the SDP with Registration officers in line with section 14(4) of the RSA 1953.

4.1.4. Public consultation is not required at present but may be required in future when any proposed further changes have an impact on service delivery.

4.1.5. Confirmation that internal controls and management systems are in place.

4.1.6. Scheme formally submitted to GRO

5. Recommendations

5.1. That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to undertake the actions referred to in paragraph 3 of this report.

5.2. That the Service Delivery Plan is adopted subject to the steps set out in paragraph 4 of this report.

6. Reason for Proposed Decision

As set out in paragraph 3.2. of this report.

7. Background Papers

None

8. **Officer Contact**

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9. **Wards Affected**

All

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

1. NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS – REGISTER OFFICE

(a) Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

(b) Sustainability Appraisal

Community Plan Impacts

Economic Prosperity	-	no impact
Education & Lifelong Learning	-	no impact
Better Health & Well Being	-	positive
Environment & Transport	-	no impact
Crime & Disorder	-	no impact

Other Impacts

Welsh Language	-	no impact
Sustainable Development	-	no impact
Equalities	-	Positive
Social Inclusion	-	Positive

- (a) There has been no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

**NEATH PORT TALBOT REGISTRATION DISTRICT
NEW GOVERNANCE SCHEME APPLICATION
SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN**



Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Contact Details and Opening Hours	3
Key Achievements & Targets	4-5
Staffing Structure & Development	5
Commitment to Code of Practice & Performance Indicators	6
Consultation	6-7
Complaints Procedure	7
Equalities	7
Internal Control	7
Accounting Arrangements	8
Accommodation	8

Introduction

The Register Office is situated within the Finance & Corporate Services Directorate in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and reports to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, who acts as Proper Officer to the Registration Service. Its primary role is to deliver the Civil Registration service within the boundary of Neath Port Talbot County Borough District. The boundaries of Neath Port Talbot registration district and sub-district are coterminous with those of the county borough of Neath Port Talbot

The main functions of the Register Office are:

- The registration of births, deaths, marriages, still-births and civil partnerships which occur in the Neath Port Talbot district
- Taking notices of marriage and civil partnership for residents of Neath Port Talbot County Borough
- To conduct marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at the Register Office and licensed venues
- To issue certificates of birth, marriage, death and civil partnership from archived registers in the custody of the Superintendent Registrar
- Carrying out Citizenship Ceremonies
- To collect and maintain records of religious marriages from returns supplied by the clergy and authorised persons
- To approve venues for marriage and civil partnership
- To be custodian of Parish records dating back to 1837
- To provide advice on Registration issues

Contact details for Head Office/Register Office

The Registration Service is delivered from the Head Office (sub-district office) and Register Office (district office) which are co-located at:

The Register Office and Head Office
119 London Road
Neath
SA11 1HL

Tel: 01639 760020 / 21 / 22

Fax: 01639 760023

E-mail: registrars@npt.gov.uk

Current Opening hours

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	9.30 – 1.00	9.30 – 1.00	9.30 – 1.00	9.30 – 1.00	9.30 – 1.00
Afternoon	2.00 – 4.30	2.00 – 4.30	2.00 – 4.30	2.00 – 4.30	2.00 – 4.00

In order to improve customer service an appointment system is now in place for death and birth registration as well as marriage and civil partnership notices, although no one will be turned away without an appointment. Changes to Opening hours can be authorised by the Proper Officer.

During the Christmas holiday period the Council offices are closed for a week but the Register Office remains open except for the statutory Bank Holidays.

Out of hours emergency contact details are made available via the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's main telephone number and Funeral Directors also have staff contact details.

Opening hours are being reviewed to extend the availability of appointments during the lunch hour.

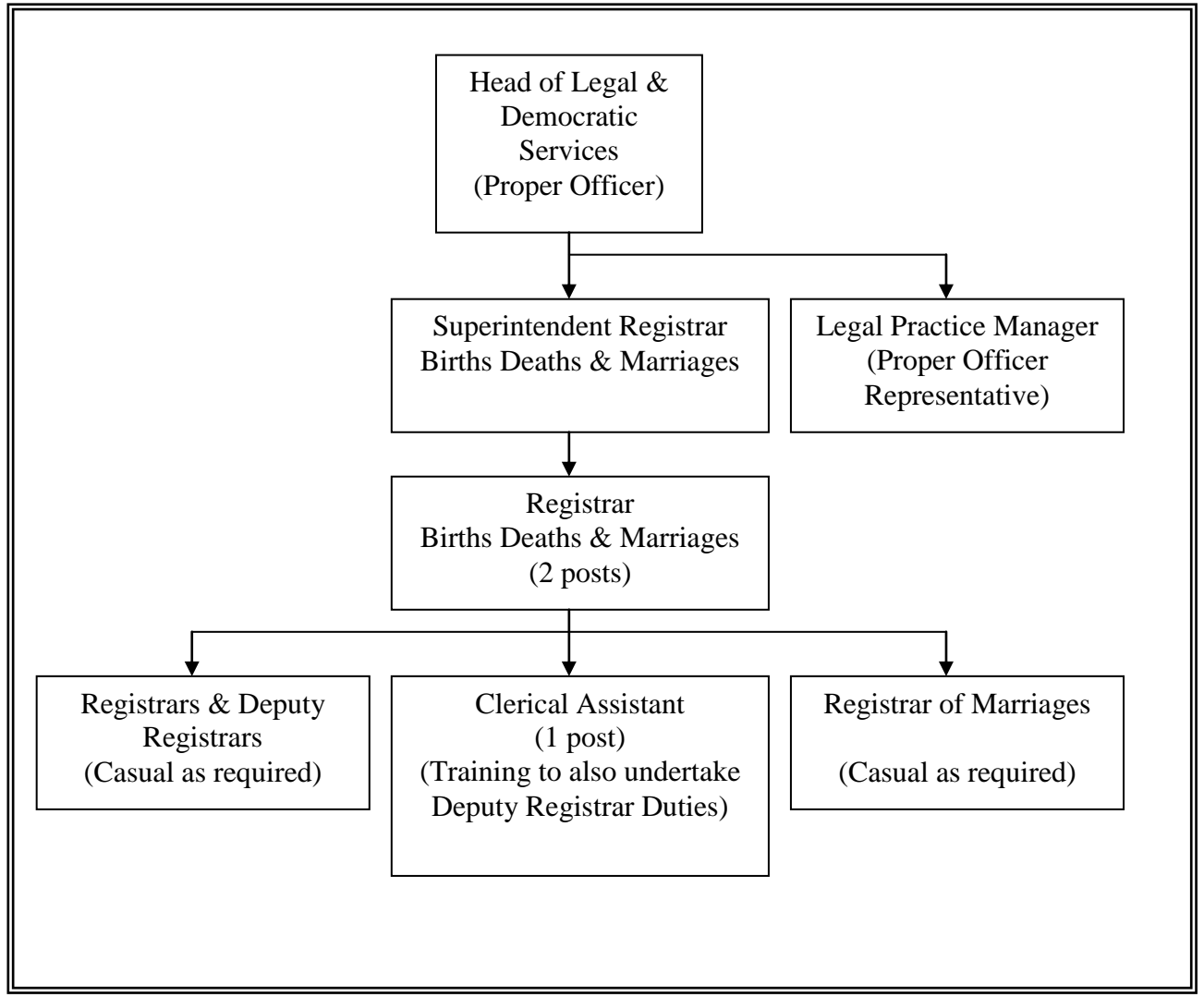
Key Achievements

- One of the top performances in the UK for death registrations within 5 days - 98% against a national average of 90%
- Introduction of RON (Registration On Line) for registering births and deaths in March 2007
- Transfer of registration staff to local authority employment status December 2007
- Introduction of RON for marriages November 2009
- Appointment system introduced for birth & death registrations May 2011
- Introduction of “Tell Us Once” initiative in November 2011

Projects/Targets for 2011/12

- To achieve new governance status from April 2012
- To develop our business continuity strategy and identify the main opportunities, threats and constraints that the service faces
- To look at accommodation options
- Promotion of non-statutory ceremonies
- Improvements to our website

Staff Structure



Staff development and training

Staff development and training is a crucial element in the Registration service – over the last twelve months staff have been trained in Tell Us Once Initiative; Taking of a Marriage Notice as well as Corrections & Registrations Training. We continue to place importance on succession planning and a recently appointed administration assistant is now starting to be trained in Deputy Registrar duties

Commitment to Code of Practice

In applying for a New Governance scheme in Neath Port Talbot County Borough the local authority is giving its formal commitment to the Code of Practice and the Good Practice Guide. We are committed to improving standards and will use data collected from stakeholder surveys to achieve this. An annual stewardship report will be submitted to the Registrar General within 2 months of the end of each financial year.

This report will show achievements and targets as set out in the Good Practice Guide and will show **Five Key Performance Indicators:**

1. Events registered within the statutory timeframe:

% of births registered within 42 days and total number of births

% of still-births registered within 42 days and total number of still-births

% of deaths registered within 5 days and total number of deaths

2. Customer waiting time:

% of customers seen within 30 minutes of arrival

3. Certificate applications:

% of applications dealt with within 5 days of receipt

4. Customer satisfaction surveys:

% of satisfied customers, number of forms received and response rate.

5. Complaints:

Total number of formal complaints received as a whole and as a % of all registrations.

The above indicators will be monitored through data extracted from the Registration on Line system, data from customer surveys and data from analysis of complaints received.

Consultation

In recent years the Authority has transformed and improved the way in which it consults with stakeholders to get feedback about its services. In the coming months we intend working with, and getting input from, Authority experts to assess the best methods of consulting with stakeholders. The nature of the Registration Service creates unique circumstances and methods must be sensitive to this.

Our Stakeholders include:

- Informants registering a birth
- Informants registering a death
- Couples attending to give notice of marriage/civil partnership
- Public attending a citizenship ceremony
- Couples who have got married/registered a civil partnership in the Register Office/licensed venue
- Public requesting copy certificates – in person, by phone or by post
- Owners and staff at licensed venues
- Members of the Clergy; hospital staff; GPs; Funeral Directors; Coroner; Crematorium Staff.
- National bodies such as the Passport & Immigration Service

Stakeholders will be encouraged to comment on how their needs have been met during their visit or contact with the service and to make any suggestions on how they feel the service could be improved. The analysis of this data will provide General Registers Office with vital monitoring information.

Complaints Policy

The Register Office adheres to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's Corporate Complaints Policy. Details of the procedure are displayed at the Register Office. Details of the Complaints Policy and Procedure can be found on the Local Authority's website at www.npt.gov.uk

Equalities

The Neath Port Talbot Registration Service is committed to promoting equality and value diversity as set out in the Equalities policy of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. Continuing progress is being made to ensure access to the Registration Service complies with, and exceeds legal requirements and staff are contributing to the Corporate Equalities Act 2010 Compliance Plan.

Internal Control

No changes are proposed to the current arrangements that are in place for the control of security stock, loose leaf registers and archived records. The Register Office contains a fireproof strong room where all blank certificates and archived records are stored. Each Registrar has their own safe where registers and monies are stored overnight.

Accounting Arrangements

Each Registrar is responsible for the receipt and banking of the fees relating to their own office. The cashbook is completed at the end of each working day with details of certificates sold. Money is banked at least twice weekly and is subject to the Local Authority's auditing procedures. Income is reconciled to the Authority's financial ledger by independent staff.

Accommodation

The Register has for many years been located at London Road Neath and has many positive features which benefits service users:

- ✓ Walking distance FROM town centre
- ✓ On site free parking
- ✓ Individual private offices for Registrars
- ✓ Welcoming waiting room
- ✓ Large well decorated Marriage / Ceremony Room able to accommodate up to 45 guests
- ✓ Separate large waiting room
- ✓ Small planted garden with paved area for photographs

However, the lease on the premises is due to expire in June 2012 and it is evident that the infrastructure of the building is in need of upgrading. In addition to rent, the lease demands that we contribute to other costs according to the floor area we occupy (approx 33%) which includes heating (shared boiler) and repairs and renewals. In 2010 / 2011 we contributed nearly £30,000 towards the landlords cost of re-roofing to stop the problems of leaks; the fire alarm system is due for replacement; windows are old. In essence the future accommodation needs of the Registration Service is a high priority for the authority over the coming months.