

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Cabinet**

**1<sup>st</sup> August 2018**

### **Joint Report of the Head of Legal Services – Mr C Griffiths & the Head of Property and Regeneration – Mr S Brennan**

#### **Matter for Decision**

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Relocation of Neath Port Talbot Registration Service to part of the former Neath County Court.**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To obtain approval for the relocation of the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service from its current office location at London Road, Neath to the recently acquired former Neath County Court.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. As part of its overall accommodation strategy, there is a requirement to ensure that the Council is making best use of its property assets and to ensure that where necessary the Council decants from leasehold properties where there are ongoing rental liabilities.
3. Neath Port Talbot Registration Service presently operates out of leased offices at London Road, Neath, the freehold of the building being outside of the Council's ownership and the Council pays a rent and service charge to the landlord.
4. The Council has recently acquired the former Neath County Court which is currently vacant.

- 5 This acquisition affords the opportunity for the Council to consider rationalising its use and occupation of a number of satellite buildings in the area to include Neath Port Talbot Registration Service.
- 6 Approval is therefore sought from Members to agree to the relocation of the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service within part of the former Neath County Court.

## **Background**

- 7 As part of its overall accommodation strategy, there is a requirement to ensure that the Council is making best use of its property assets and to ensure that where necessary there is limited expenditure on rental fees.
- 8 The Council currently benefits from a lease of offices at London Road, for the purpose of providing the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service.
- 9 This is an internal repairing lease for a term of 8 years wef June 2004 at an annual rental of £17,262.00 together with a service charge, which has been held over since June 2012.
- 10 The Council is required to serve a 3 month formal notice on the landlords before being able to terminate its occupation of the same which once served would provide a long stop date of December 2018 for the lease to come to an end.
- 11 The termination notice will no doubt result in the landlords serving a claim for dilapidations which mean that the Council will have to undertake works or make a financial payment to the landlords in lieu of the same, which is standard for this type of arrangement.
- 12 On the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017, the Council acquired the freehold of the former Neath County Court from Her Majesty's Court Service (**Appendix 1**)
- 13 It was recognised that part of this building could be a suitable home for the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service and remove the element for a rental payment to be made to the Landlords for use of the premises at London Road.
- 14 Plans have now been drawn up for the re-location of the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service (**Appendix 2**) but these will require formal approval from the General Registration Office, the statutory body that oversees the registration of births, marriages and civil partnerships and deaths. Certain minor works need to be undertaken to facilitate the

proposed use and once completed, the General Registration Office will inspect the proposed new premises to confirm its suitability.

- 15 Early dialogue with the General Registration Officer Representative has proved favourable and they are content to date with the proposals made though before final approval is given; an inspection is required to officially sign off the relocation.
16. The GRO have certain criteria that are required to be met for accessibility, venue size and the records storage. All of these matters have been addressed and agreed. Some of these requirements, particularly the repository will require building works to be carried out to satisfy the GRO. The Council will take steps to ensure that the criteria will be complied with to the General Registration Office standards and in line with their specification.
17. As part of the consideration to identify a suitable venue, particular issues have been considered:

- (a) The car parking available at the current office at London Road consists of 5 car parking spaces allocated to the Neath Port Talbot Registration Office (to include wedding cars).

At the proposed new venue, there will be a one reserved parking bay for the wedding car in the small parking area adjoining the premises on the Police Station side of the building as well as access to the disabled parking space. This will be accessed via a barrier in order to prevent unauthorised use. The area is close to local public transport and the Multi Storey Car Park in Neath Town Centre will provide parking spaces for members of the public and for staff working in the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service.

- (b) At present, the London Road office also benefits from a small garden area to the rear of the premises which can be used for photographs. Although such a facility is not available at the proposed location, there is a small outside area between the proposed waiting room and the other offices which could be suitable for photographs and steps will be taken to allow this area to be used for such purposes.
- (c) Consideration must be made around expansion plans of records in light of the potential for Marriages moving to a scheduled based system – this means that should this be enacted, all Clergy and Authorised Persons marriage registers within the district will need to be closed and deposited with the Registrar's Office.

- 17 All access provisions to the new location will ensure compliance with Equality Act 2010 requirements and the proposed new location will provide a venue for the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service for the longer term.
- 18 In response to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, On a longer term basis through the relocation of the service into the Councils civic office estate, the Council will be able to ensure that a suitable venue is guaranteed for the future to ensure service continuity for the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service and will ensure that Council remains in control of the premises and will not be subject to any action to bring arrangements to an end in the future and as time progresses will allow the Council to further develop the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service as it looks to new ways of working, in collaboration with local services and the more national organisation such as the General Registration Office.
- 19 The Council has set three strategic objectives which contribute to the seven national well-being goals that the Welsh Government requires all public bodies in Wales to contribute to. The Council's well-being objectives and the supporting improvement priorities are set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. This proposal contributes to our plan as it aims to ensure the Council has systems in place to monitor and maintain the assets of value that it owns

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 20 A Screening Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Authority in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. After completing the assessment, it has been determined that this function does not require an Equality Impact Assessment.

### **Financial Impact**

- 21 The Council will be reducing its leasehold estate as a result of the relocation, which will allow the savings made in rent and other occupational costs to be transferred into the running of the former Court premises which will deliver the Registrars Service. The Council may also have to settle dilapidations on exit of the London Road premises in an amount yet to be confirmed or determined. This would occur whenever the Council would vacate the London Road premises and any additional costs will be met by the Accommodation reserves.

## **Workforce Impacts**

- 22 There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

## **Legal Impacts**

- 23 There are no legal impacts associated with this report but in determining a suitable venue for the Registration Service the Council must at all times have regard to the rules surrounding the location of registration services that are stipulated by the General Registration Office

## **Risk Management**

- 24 Without suitable alternative premises, the Council will be unable to operate a Registration Service and will have to remain at the present location, exposing the Council to additional rental payments.

## **Consultation**

- 25 There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

## **Recommendations**

26. That
- (a) works be undertaken at the former Neath Port Talbot County Court to accommodate the changes required by the General Registration Office to make the venue suitable for housing the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service; and
  - (b) subject to approval being granted by the General Registration Office to the move of the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service to the site of the former County Court in Neath, that Members approve the said relocation on a date to be agreed in consultation between the Head of Legal Services and Head of Property and Regeneration.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision**

- 27 To ensure that an appropriate location for the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service is provided.

## **Appendices**

- 28 (a) Appendix 1 – Location plan of the former Neath County Court
- (b) Appendix 2- Proposed layout of the Neath Port Talbot Registration Service

## **List of Background Papers**

- 29 None

## **Officer Contact**

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