

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Cabinet**

**24th October 2018**

### **Report of the Head of Legal Services – Mr C Griffiths**

#### **Matter for Decision**

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

#### **Proposal for introduction of non-refundable ceremony booking deposits for Neath Port Talbot Registration Services**

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

1. To obtain approval for the proposal of non-refundable ceremony booking deposits for ceremonies conducted with Neath Port Talbot Registration Service

#### **Executive Summary**

2. It would be proposed to introduce a non-refundable Booking Deposit from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019, applicable to all ceremonies of £50.00. Such a deposit being in addition to any statutory fees or attendance fees due as is the current system.

#### **Background**

3. On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019, Cabinet (Finance) Sub-Committee agreed the non-statutory fees for the Registration Service effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019
4. In addition, to both the statutory and non-statutory fees, Neath Register Office currently takes a non-refundable deposit of £100 for ceremonies at Approved Premises (those being venues that are licensed for the solemnisation of Marriages/ Civil Partnerships, where 2 registrars attend to officiate and register). Such deposits are deducted from the outstanding balance for attendance, typically payable 6 weeks prior to

the date of the ceremony. Deposits are only retained if the ceremony is cancelled but can be deferred if a ceremony is postponed. The administrative costs for arranging a booking for any ceremony are currently only reflected for advance ceremonies at Approved Premises by the non-refundable booking fee, which allow customers to book up to 20 months in advance via a paper diary system.

5. However, there is no deposit/ holding payment applicable to customers wanting to book a Register Office ceremony, the current provision is that their booking for the Register Office will be confirmed when the statutory Notice of Marriage is given (such notice of marriage is only valid for 12 months, not allowing customers to secure future dates beyond this time).
6. The proposal is to utilise an electronic diary system (access to which will only be available to the Registration officers), allowing for future dates to be available for booking of all statutory and non-statutory ceremonies (Marriages/Civil Partnership/ Naming Ceremony/Renewal of Vows Ceremony/Private Citizenships). In addition to introduce a 'Provisional Booking' template in order to capture essential details, email confirmation direct to the customer, retaining data only on customers file until the date of the ceremony (compliant with GDPR regulations).
7. It would be proposed therefore to introduce a non-refundable booking deposit, applicable to all ceremonies of £50.00 (which will replace the £100 deposit identified above) to take effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019. Such a deposit being in addition to any statutory fees or attendance fees due.
8. This deposit will not be applied retrospectively and will be introduced for all statutory and non-statutory ceremonies where the customer makes a booking on a date after the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.
9. The non-refundable deposit is used by many districts to support the back-office function of dealing with the process of booking and managing the customer booking and is clearly stated as a non-refundable booking fee within the terms and conditions
10. The Registration Office will process all bookings using a PDF pro-forma Provisional Booking Template that details terms and conditions of the booking made and confirms outstanding amounts due/ process for giving notice if required/ documents required as evidence.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

11. A Screening Assessment (Appendix 1) has been undertaken to assist 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**

- 12 This option based on all Register Office Ceremonies/ Approved Premise Attendance and Non-Statutory Ceremonies for 2017 would have yielded an additional income of £13,800.00 for the Council, such income as well as potentially supporting staffing provision (a report on which will soon be taken to Personnel Committee) for the back-office function but also assist in any surplus amounts contributing to the Council's budget gap.

## **Workforce Impacts**

- 13 There are no workforce impacts associated with this report. A separate report to Personnel Committee will consider the use of some of these proceeds to improve the administrative capacity of the service

## **Legal Impacts**

- 14 For the non-statutory fees that apply to services provided by the Registration Office (i.e. Marriages/Civil Partnership for those performed at Approved Premises, Naming Ceremonies, Renewal of Vows Ceremony and also Private Citizenships), customers using the service only have to pay for the services they want. The Council therefore can set such fees as they deem appropriate for such services provided such costs are reasonable.
15. There are statutory fees such as for the registration of marriages and civil partnerships that are universal and set by the UK Government and apply to all, however, the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Fees Order do not preclude administrative fees being charged of this kind, again provided such costs are reasonable.

## **Risk Management**

- 15 The proposal, if implemented could not only result in income generation but will assist in improving administrative support at the Neath Registration Office, with the aim of enhancing customer choice and experience and allowing for better preparedness for busy periods for ceremonies and staffing requirements.

## **Consultation**

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

## **Recommendations**

17. That a non-refundable ceremony booking deposits for ceremonies conducted with Neath Port Talbot Registration Service be set at the rate of £50 to be implemented for all customer bookings made after the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision**

18. The proposal, if implemented could not only result in income generation but will assist in improving administrative support at the Neath Registration Office, with the aim of enhancing customer choice and experience and allowing for better preparedness for busy periods for ceremonies and staffing requirements.

## **Appendices**

19. Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Screening Assessment

## **List of Background Papers**

20. None

## **Officer Contact**

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