

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET (Policy and Resources) Sub Committee

25th July 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – Mr Craig Griffiths

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED – ALL

Provision of Celebrant Services

Purpose of Report

To seek approval from members to launch a Civil Celebrant service for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council at Neath Register Office (“the Council”)

Executive Summary

Neath Port Talbot Register Office has worked hard to promote the local registration service and build relationships with other users, including liaising with Licensed Approved Premises, Funeral Directors, Crematorium staff, Hospitals and GP surgeries with a collaborative approach to providing a high level of service provision. The service now wishes to expand and enhance the service by offering Civil Funerals, utilising processes and skills already available, including bookings, customer engagement, building ceremonies and ceremony delivery, meeting increased demand for the local community.

Background

The Council’s Register Office, based at Forster Road, is the service responsible for ensuring civil marriages are conducted and births, marriages, and deaths are recorded with the issue of certificates and the provision of citizenship ceremonies.

In the previous financial year, the service conducted:

- Birth Registrations – 20
- Death Registrations - 992
- Notices of Marriages -1206
- Civil Ceremonies - 356
- Citizenship Ceremonies – 52

The Register Office is funded by a combination of payment from the General Register Office and the services that it provides to the general public.

In recent years the service has embraced opportunities to enhance income, reducing any subsidies from the Council but at the same time ensuring customer service remains at the heart of delivery.

The following represents a summary of the figures to date:

	Total Expenditure (£)	Total Income (£)	Net amount (£)
2018/2019	170,498	164,155	-3,657
2019/2020	181,685	191,028	-9,343
2020/2021	180,916	190,828	-9,912
2021/2022	196,074	201,781	-5,797
2022/2023	236,479	234,977	1,503

It should be noted 2022/2023 saw a net amount of £1,503 due to the national pay award that was granted.

Through modernising practices (embracing digital opportunities where feasible), offering further services and flexibility in arrangements the service and the staff have developed innovative ways of service delivery putting the residents of Neath Port Talbot at the forefront of delivery, whilst at the same time increasing the income that has been received. Further investment in the service through additional members of staff and profiling budgets have provided the opportunity for greater income generation

Attempts have been ongoing to look at ways of reducing any costs to the Council whilst at the same time look at ways to enhance service delivery to the residents of Neath Port Talbot

To that end, one service that has been highlighted as a way to generate income, whilst at the same time offer a service that appears to be in demand in Neath Port Talbot, is the provision of a Civil Celebrant service.

Civil celebrants lead funeral services with either no religious context at all, or with a mixture of things that were important to the person who died, which may include prayers or favourite hymns. A civil celebrant focuses on remembering the life of the person who has died. What's said and shared during a civil funeral or memorial service is decided by family or friends, with the support of the funeral celebrant.

Typically, a funeral celebrant will:

- Be a point of support and guidance from the very first meeting right through until the end of the service

- Spend time understanding the wishes of the family and make sure these are carried out sufficiently
- Keep family members fully in the loop of how the service will run so that they never feel out of control
- Prepare the eulogy/tribute with guidance from the family so that it is a true reflection of their loved ones life and memory
- Take charge of the timing of the service so that no moments are ever rushed
- Craft a ceremony that is personal and helps all friends and family to find some sort of closure for the person they have lost.

In the last financial year, it should be noted that of the 1554 cremations that took place at Margam Crematorium, 253 were celebrant led services undertaken by independent celebrants along with a smaller number of humanist services

The plan is to extend the services already offered to residents within the Neath Port Talbot district. The Register Office can utilise a variety of robust systems already in place to manage service bookings and appointments for families in order to prepare a fitting tribute to a loved one. The service builds on the experience and knowledge already held by the local registration staff, providing additional support to local funeral directors when seeking independent celebrant services in the locality. The aim is to offer choice, flexibility and reassurance to bereaved families that the service can provide consistent support through to delivery of the funeral service.

In preparation for the proposed introduction, much work has been done to understand the current service provision and type of services being offered at funerals. Enquiries with local funeral directors regarding availability and cost of celebrant led services, coupled with numbers of such services held at Margam Crematorium evidence a growing trend toward a tribute or celebration of life as a There remains a limited number of independent celebrants available and it is apparent that a service need exists. The addition of the service would fully compliment the statutory and non-statutory services already offered.

The provision of the celebrant service will be undertaken by existing staff within the Register Office. Colleagues within the Register Office are already skilled and trained in undertaking public speaking and delivering ceremonies and are eager to develop new skills in performance of this work. Additional support will be offered by utilising the current casual pool of registration staff.

Legal Implications

With the enactment of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 'Act'), the General Power of Competence ('GPoC') has been conferred on Welsh Local Authorities and eligible community councils, putting them in line with their English counterparts regarding these broader powers. The intention of the powers under the Act is to allow local authorities such as the Council to "act in their communities' financial interests to generate efficiencies and secure value for money outcomes and to take on financial risk. It would also enable authorities to have greater confidence in pursuing innovative policy solutions than relying on the well-being power". The Act also aims to reduce concerns surrounding whether they have the requisite authority

when taking decisions, and instead creates the position that qualifying Local Authorities have assumed power, unless there is legislative restriction.

In order to provide this service, the Council would be looking to invoke its powers under the General Power of Competence.

Financial Implications

It should be noted that the Register Office will not look to profit from the arrangement and any costs incurred will merely be by way of cost recovery for time spent.

To that end an analysis of costings has been undertaken and it is proposed that the Council charges £200 per celebrant service which is based on the cost of service provision and overheads by the Register Office staff. Value Added Tax will also be charged on this sum. Services of a celebrant are not statutory requirements and can be provided in the private sector. If the service is provided by the Council, it will be taxable at the standard rate of 20%.

It is proposed that a sum of £5,000 be incurred for set up costs, which would include training, promotional literature and travel expenses. This sum for year one will be found within existing budgets of the Legal and Democratic Services section.

Below is an indication of the potential income that could be generated by this service.

	Projected Income £	Set-Up Costs – Training/Promotional Literature Ongoing Costs – staff/training/travel £
Year One	5,000 (25 x £200)	5,000
Year Two	10,000 (50 x £200)	6,500
Year Three	20,000 (100 x £200)	6,500

Year Four	30,000 (150 x £200)	6.500
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Consultation

There is no requirement for any external consultation on this report.

Discussions have been ongoing with funeral directors within the locality who have identified the need for services of this kind and the limited arrangements that exist within the Neath Port Talbot locality. Continued discussion will continue with them to fine tune service delivery.

Integrated Impact Assessment

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. An integrated impact assessment is enclosed at Appendix 1, which members are asked to consider as part of determination.

Workforce Impact

The provision of the celebrant service will be undertaken by existing staff within the Register Office. Colleagues within the Register Office are already skilled and trained in undertaking public speaking and delivering ceremonies and this work is a natural extension of their current role. Staff have been consulted as part of changes and are eager to develop a skill set in this area, which will be supported by ongoing training and development opportunities.

Recommendations

It is recommended, that having due regard to the integrated impact screening assessment:

- Members grant delegated authority to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to commence the provision of a celebrant service for services performed in the Neath Port Talbot locality; and
- Members approve the payment of £200 per celebrant service
- Members note a report be brought back to the Cabinet (Policy and Resources) Scrutiny Committee on the provision of this service in Spring 2024.

Reason for Proposed Decision

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Approved Premises, Funeral Directors, Crematorium staff, Hospitals and GP surgeries with a collaborative approach to providing a high level of service provision. The service now wishes to expand and enhance the service by offering Civil Funerals, utilising processes and skills already available, including bookings, customer engagement, building ceremonies and ceremony delivery, meeting increased demand for the local community.

Implementation of Decision

Implementation is proposed after the three-day call in period.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Background Documents

None

Officer Contacts

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