

ITEM NO: 9

DECISION-MAKER:	CABINET			
SUBJECT:	THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COUNCIL'S REGISTRATION SERVICES			
DATE OF DECISION:	7 JUNE 2010			
REPORT OF:	CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT			
AUTHOR:	Name:	Liz Marsh	Tel:	023 8083 3613
	E-mail:	liz.marsh@southampton.gov.uk		

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Not applicable.

SUMMARY

Following the White Paper 'Civil Registration: Vital Change' which set out an agenda to modernise Registration Services, the General Register Office and Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) have developed a modern governance framework for the local delivery of Registration Services.

These "New Governance" arrangements provide local authorities more flexibility and freedom to deliver services to meet local needs, at the same time as setting national standards, and a framework of clear accountability.

This report sets out the main proposals and implications for the city council in introducing a new scheme of governance. It highlights that staffing resources will be managed locally and therefore more efficiently and how local management and accountability will be achieved by the introduction of a local Service Delivery Plan.

Before it can apply for a new scheme of governance, the city council is required to sign up to a code of practice, have in place a performance monitoring framework and a system to report to the Registrar General. A Service Delivery Plan which sets out the council's Registration plans and targets for the year ahead will also need to be produced.

This report seeks approval for the council's Registration Service to apply for the new governance arrangements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) To authorise the Head of Environmental Health and Consumer Protection, following consultation with the Cabinet members for Environment and Transport and Resources and Workforce Planning, 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.

- (ii) To authorise the Solicitor for the Council to sign and seal the new scheme of governance.
- (iii) To authorise the Head of Environmental Health & Consumer Protection to continue to act as the Proper Officer for the Registration Service under the new scheme of governance.
- (iv) To authorise the Head of Environmental Health & Consumer Protection, following consultation with the Solicitor to the Council and the Executive Director of Resources, 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.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Currently, the Registration Service is delivered within a framework that has not significantly changed for many years and these arrangements have become anomalous and out of step with other council services. The current governance arrangements are very prescriptive and do not allow the local authority to use staff in a flexible and efficient way.
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. The new arrangements will give Southampton City Council greater control over staffing and administrative arrangements. Subject to Cabinet's approval, a provisional implementation date of the 1st August 2010 has been agreed with the Registrar General for the introduction of the new scheme of governance.

CONSULTATION

3. The Staff are statutory consultees under the Registration Service Act 1953 and consultation with them has commenced. Consultation has been carried out by written staff briefings and team meetings. The consultation has included the Trade Unions.
4. The Code of Practice requires that local authorities consult locally with stakeholders about any scheme change and a stake holder survey has been carried out to meet this requirement.
5. Consultative meetings have also been held with the General Register Office local account manager, HR and Legal Services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

6. 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.

DETAIL

7. The Civil Registration Service registers births, still births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships and carries out marriage, civil partnership and citizenship ceremonies. The service also has responsibility to maintain the historic records of these events and licence venues for civil marriage and civil partnership.
8. The proposed new governance arrangements will give the city council more freedom to manage the Registration Service locally and will allow the flexibility to offer a service that fits the local community's requirements. It will also give the council's nominated Proper Officer more accountability for the delivery of the service rather than this resting with the Registrar General.
9. The benefits of this include greater opportunities to explore more innovative ways of delivering the service, and importantly, to strengthen the management locally. Changes to staffing levels under the proposed new scheme of governance will be able to be made without the need for a formal scheme change approved by the General Register Office which is required at present.
10. Another key benefit under new governance is that local performance monitoring of staff and the service will become the responsibility of the Proper Officer. The present inspection regime is carried out by the Account Manager from the General Register Office. Under this regime service wide inspections are conducted which can also include the detailed inspection of individual officers. Registration Services will still have to be delivered inline with statutory requirements and the national standard however there will be more opportunity to meet these standards in a more flexible way. The General Register Office will collect performance information about local services by analysing data from the online registration system and by reviewing performance self assessments made by the local service.
11. To gain approval for the new scheme of governance, the council must adopt a national Code of Practice and agree to meet national standards set out in a Good Practice Guide. It is also required to produce a Service Delivery Plan, an annual Stewardship Report and adopt a performance monitoring system which will enable reporting to the Registrar General. The Registration Service already produces an annual plan and monitors and reports on key performance indicators, therefore the new scheme will not require significant additional work.
12. The city council currently has nominated a Proper Officer for Registration. The new scheme of governance will also require that there is a Proper Officer for Registration and it is proposed that the current Proper Officer, who is also the Head of Environmental Health & Consumer Protection, be appointed to this role. The Proper Officer will be required to assure the Registrar General that robust arrangements are in place for the control and security of Registration stock. The security stock includes the certificates and registers of births, deaths and marriages and loose leaf Registration

pages. The Proper Officer is also required to maintain appropriate accounting arrangements and financial procedures. In addition, the location and safe storage of all the historic registration records must meet the required specifications and be agreed with the Registrar General.

13. The Code of Practice requires that local authorities consult locally and commit to the delivery of a registration service which meets both local needs and national standards. Currently, the service carries out regular customer surveys and has recently carried out a stakeholder survey seeking views on the Southampton Registration Service. A wide range of stakeholders were surveyed including hospitals, general practitioners, funeral directors and approved licensed venues for civil ceremonies. The results of the stakeholder survey and ongoing customer satisfaction surveys will be analysed and will be included in the Service Delivery Plan that will be formally submitted to the Registrar General as part of the application for New Governance.
14. A new scheme of governance will allow staffing resources to be used more efficiently and will strengthen local management and accountability. The Proper Officer will be responsible for ensuring that staffing arrangements are adequate and that staff are appropriately managed and trained to enable the Registration Service to meet the standards set out in the Service Delivery Plan. The City Council's arrangements for managing and developing staff, in particular its People Management Charter, and Learning and Development policies and procedures, satisfy the requirements of the General Register Office.
15. Information Technology is increasingly key to the effective delivery of the Registration Service. The service has already introduced Registration Online (RON) for Births, Deaths and Marriages as part of the national modernisation programme. However, under the present arrangements, the number of actual bound registers creates a restriction on the number of staff able to register events simultaneously, the freedoms of a new scheme of governance will allow as many registration staff as required to be able to carry out their functions at the same time. This example shows how archaic and inflexible the current scheme for registration is and why, for the service to modernise, it is necessary to adopt new arrangements which gives local management flexibility about how the service is delivered.
16. The new scheme will also allow modernisation of how the Registration Service accounts for income. It will allow financial accounting to be brought inline with the way the council accounts for its other services and therefore reduce the current duplication of effort.
17. The legislation gives registration officers the right to make representations to the local authority on the provisions contained within a proposed scheme of registration and the local authority has to consider any objections from staff and seek to resolve them. If there are any outstanding staff objections about the proposals for the new scheme of governance, staff do have recourse to the Minister, via the General Register Office.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital

18. None

Revenue

19. There are no additional revenue costs arising from the recommendations in this report. The new arrangements have the potential to allow resources to be used more efficiently and flexibly.

Property

20. The new scheme proposes that the Registration Service will continue to be delivered from the office in Bugle Street and the Princess Anne hospital.

Other

21. None

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

22. The Registration Service Act 1953 requires local authorities to prepare a registration scheme for the management and delivery of the Registration Service and allows scheme changes to the local registration scheme

Other Legal Implications:

23. The continued delivery of registration services will be carried out in a manner that is fully compliant with all prevailing Equalities legislation, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Council's duties under Section.17 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

24. The proposals in this report are consistent with and not contrary to any aspect of the policy framework.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Non-confidential appendices are in the Members' Rooms and can be accessed on-line

Appendices

1.	None.
----	-------

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None.
----	-------

Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)

Relevant Paragraph of the
Access to Information
Procedure Rules / Schedule
12A allowing document to be
Exempt/Confidential (if
applicable)

	Not applicable	
--	----------------	--

Background documents available for inspection at: N/A

KEY DECISION? YES

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	ALL
------------------------------------	-----