

REPORT TO THE CABINET
19 February 2013

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan C Thomas

Subject: The pattern of the future provision of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Service in Gwynedd.

Contact Officer: Iolo P Roberts, Registration Manager

The decision sought

To provide the registration service from the satellite stations in Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Tywyn and Bala as well as the main offices in Bangor, Pwllheli and Dolgellau. Consequently, the service will not be available in Llanberis, Deiniolen, Penygroes, Criccieth, Penrhyndeudraeth, Trawsfynydd, Harlech and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Local member's views

The consultation document was sent to every councillor and a response was received from 2 members

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Gwynedd Registration Service registers all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships occurring in the county. The main Registration Office is based in Bangor and there are two other main offices in Dolgellau and Pwllheli. There are registration officers located in the three sites and the whole range of registration services is offered from all three main offices.
- 1.2 As well as the three sites mentioned above, the registration officers travel to register births and deaths in various other sites (known as satellite stations). These sites are listed in appendix 1 where details are also provided about the use made of the various offices.
- 1.3 In relation to registration, any event must be registered in the registration district in which it has occurred. Following the reorganisation in 2009, Gwynedd is now one registration district and,

therefore, any event can be registered in any one of our registration sites.

- 1.4 A review of the service was undertaken in 2011/12 and as part of the review the possibility of not providing the service from the satellite sites in future but rather focusing on offering the service from the three main offices, namely Bangor, Dolgellau and Pwllheli, was identified. A consultation on this was undertaken during December 2012/January 2013.

2. Reasons for recommending the decision

- 2.1 Following further discussions and having considered the comments received during the consultation, it became apparent that there was a case to keep a presence in Caernarfon due to the high level of use of that office. There should also be presence in Porthmadog on two mornings which would serve as a registration site for the residents of Dwyfor east and north Meirionnydd. It is also intended to keep a presence for one morning a week in Tywyn and Bala due to the travelling distances between Dolgellau and those areas. In order to be able to achieve this, some of the services offered in Bangor, Dolgellau and Pwllheli will have to be reduced.

- 2.2 To summarise this is what is being proposed

Current situation	Proposed situation
<p>Main Offices: Bangor/Dolgellau/Pwllheli</p> <p>Satellite Stations: Caernarfon,Deiniolen,Llanberis, Penygroes,Criccieth,Porthmadog, Blaenau Ffestiniog,Harlech, Penrhyndeudraeth,Trawsfyndd, Bala, Tywyn</p>	<p>Main Offices: Bangor/Dolgellau/Pwllheli</p> <p>Satellite Stations: Caernarfon,Porthmadog*,Bala, Tywyn</p> <p>*see observations in 3.6</p>

- 2.3 On 10 December 2009 the full Council requested that the service made savings of £18,550 from its budget by rationalising the pattern of providing the service. The changes proposed will allow the service to satisfy this requirement.
- 2.4 Moving forward to rationalising the service provision pattern, it will be possible to make more efficient use of scarce resources by saving time and staff travelling costs. A saving would also be made on the cost of using the building and the cost of equipment /

computerised communications etc in the building. It must be borne in mind that, although there could possibly be only one registration appointment in the satellite station, the officer must be allowed time to travel to the office in question, park and set up prior to holding the registration interview. (Also more computer problems have been experienced in the satellite stations which affect the service provided). The same process is gone through at the end of the registration also. During the summer months, travelling times increase substantially due to the increase in traffic.

3. Relevant considerations

- 3.1 As the proposal to rationalise the pattern of providing the service has an impact on the service offered to the public, a consultation process was carried out. The consultation document gained a lot of press coverage. It appeared on the BBC new website, Golwg and there were several articles in the Daily Post, Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald and the Cambrian News. Appendix 2 provides the details of the responses received during the consultation period and to whom the document was distributed.
- 3.2 A total of 16 responses were received, 3 from individuals, 2 from county councillors, 8 from community councils, 1 from a historical society, 1 from a community councillor and 1 from a political party.
- 3.3 Since 2009, when Gwynedd became one registration region, it has been possible to register any event occurring in Gwynedd in any of the registration sites. However, the high demand for the service which still exists in Bangor shows that there are other factors affecting people's choices of places to register, such as the presence of a hospital nearby.
- 3.4 There is another option for residents living in the southern regions of the County, e.g. Bala and Tywyn areas, if the birth/death has occurred in a hospital in Wrexham or Aberystwyth (which is quite commonplace as these are the nearest hospitals) we can not undertake the registration in Gwynedd. Bearing in mind the principle that an event must be registered in the registration district in which it has occurred, all we do is collect the information and the relevant fee and send them on to the relevant County to undertake the registration. The option of travelling to the Registration Office of a nearby county is available if it is more convenient to the citizen.
- 3.5 Registering must be done by means of an interview with the registrar and it is not currently possible to register on-line.

Consideration has been given to using librarians to register; however, as a half hour slot is needed for every registration and that this needs to be confidential, it would not be possible during the public opening times of the Library.

- 3.6 If the recommendations are accepted, the department will have to consider relocating the service in some sites to Council buildings. Also, they will have to consider which days would be practical for them to be able to offer the service there. With the proposal of providing a service in Porthmadog for Dwyfor east and north Meirionnydd, in the short term it is proposed to locate the service in the Library in Porthmadog but Penrhyndeudraeth could be considered in the long term if a suitable site was identified there.
- 3.7 It is acknowledged that reducing the number of sites in which births and deaths can be registered will have an impact on the service provided to the citizen by reducing the choice of registration sites available to them. However, it is also believed that the following should be considered:
- A citizen is only required to visit a registrar occasionally
 - It is a legal requirement to register a death within five days of the event, therefore, people tend to go for the first available appointment and they would mostly be in the three main offices.
 - With births, there is a period of 42 days to register which allows considerably more time to arrange an appointment. Also, parents need not bring the child with them to the appointment.

4. Next steps and timetable

- 4.1 If the Cabinet is willing to support the proposal to change the pattern of providing the Registration Service in the county we will aim to do this by April 2013.

Views of the Statutory Officers

Chief Executive:

This report acts upon a previous Council resolution to rationalise the service and make a substantial saving. It is inevitable therefore that the recommendations have a considerable effect on the service. However without other proposals to discover this sum, a balance must be struck between the necessity to rationalise on the one hand and the unpopularity of the changes on the other.

Monitoring Officer:

I have been part of the discussions to formulate this recommendation and am satisfied as to the propriety of the proposal.

Head of Finance Department:

As stated in section 2.3 of the report, there is a commitment by the Democratic and Legal Service to achieve a saving of £18,550 as part of the £1.6m savings package agreed upon by the full Council in December 2009. I understand that there has been a full consultation on the proposals since then. I can confirm that with the Cabinet's agreement to change the pattern of Registration Service delivery that the changes under consideration together with other minor adjustments to the Unit's budget will achieve the required saving.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Details of registration offices

Appendix 2 – Responses received during the consultation period