

---

**REGISTER OFFICE – NEW GOVERNANCE SCHEME**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Stephen Harker, Health and Leisure Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services**

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval to amend Darlington's current Registration Scheme with effect from 1st April, 2010.

**Summary**

2. To allow more flexibility within the registration service and bring it into line with other local authority service areas in relation to setting, maintaining and monitoring performance within the Register Office, the Council must adopt new governance arrangements set by the Registrar General. To implement the new governance arrangements Darlington must amend its current registration scheme.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that to implement new governance arrangements at the Register Office, Darlington's current Registration Scheme be amended with effect from 1st April, 2010 as detailed in the **Appendix** to this report.

**Reason**

4. The recommendation is supported to enable new governance arrangements at the Register Office to be implemented.

**Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Corporate Services**

**Background Papers**

'Civil Registration: Delivering Vital Change' White Paper  
A Guide for Councils on the Delivery of Local Registration Service  
E-mail from Identity and Passport Service dated 13th January, 2010.

Linda Todd: Extension 2354

---

S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no specific crime and disorder impact.
Health and Well Being	There is no specific health and well-being impact.
Sustainability	There is no specific sustainability impact.
Diversity	There is no specific diversity impact
Wards Affected	All Wards are affected equally.
Groups Affected	All groups are affected equally.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This decision will not have a direct impact on the objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy but will support elements of it.
Efficiency	Implementation of the Corporate Governance arrangements will support the Council's ongoing efficiency programme.

## MAIN REPORT

### Background Information

5. The Register Office currently operates within legislation that has changed little since its introduction in the 1830's. Initial approaches to reform started with a White Paper in 2002 ('Civil Registration Vital Change') when it was proposed: -
  - (a) Local Authorities should be responsible for the delivery of the local registration service;
  - (b) Registration Officers to become local authority employees;
  - (c) Greater Choice as to how to register births and deaths;
  - (d) Electronic transmission of registration information;
  - (e) Creation of a national central database of registration records.
6. These initial proposals were subsequently considered too complex but they have informed the current priorities for reform in the registration service by the General Register Office which includes 'new governance arrangements'.
7. The key features of new governance arrangements include: -
  - (a) The adoption of a National Code of Practice and a Local Service Delivery Plan;
  - (b) Meeting the national standards as set out in a Good Practice Guide and reporting annual performance against those standards to the Registrar General;
  - (c) Submitting an annual service plan to the General Register Office; and
  - (d) The provision of a more flexible, less prescriptive Registration Scheme allowing local authorities greater discretion to deliver registration services that meet both national standards and local community needs.
8. In practical terms these arrangements mean that the Council: -
  - (a) becomes solely responsible for the service;
  - (b) becomes the sole employer of staff engaged in the service; and
  - (c) can specify the roles, duties, terms and conditions of staff employed in the service (without consultation with the General Register Office).
9. To move to the above, the Council must implement a 'scheme change' and amend its current Registration Scheme.

### Information and Analysis

10. Darlington has continually modernised its registration service (as far as legislation has permitted) since it obtained unitary status in 1997. Achieving new governance arrangements

by 1st April 2010 is included in Corporate Services Department's current Service Plan and Officers have been working towards its implementation during the current service plan year.

11. Customer satisfaction with the Register Office services is high; the Team were awarded the Council's Team of the Year for Customer Service delivery in 2008; and the Superintendent Registrar was the Register Office employee of the year in 2009. All staff transferred to local authority terms and conditions of service in 2006 as part of single status.
12. To achieve new governance there is a formal process to undertake, the sequence of events is as follows: -
  - (a) Complete initial General Register Office questionnaire;
  - (b) Confirm commitment to code of practice;
  - (c) Develop a service delivery plan;
  - (d) Submit proposals for monitoring performance against standards in the Good Practice Guide;
  - (e) Consult with staff within the Register Office
  - (f) Consult with the public if change to service delivery is proposed (not applicable with the proposed scheme change);
  - (g) Demonstrate that internal control and management arrangements are in place;
  - (h) Meet with General Register Office (GRO) inspectorate;
  - (i) Formal submission of amended Scheme.
13. Following the submission of all the relevant documentation required for new governance, the meeting with the GRO Inspector was undertaken in mid-January and confirmation has been received from GRO that all the relevant procedures are in place and the approval process can proceed.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

14. As there is no service delivery change proposed within the registration service for the public, there is no requirement to consult on the proposals. All staff within the service are aware of the proposals and are supportive.

### **Conclusion**

15. Darlington has modernised its registration service over recent years and the proposed amendment to the Darlington Registration Scheme (attached as an **Appendix**) is the final step to transferring control of registration to the Council with processes in place to ensure that the registration service meets the national standards set out in the good practice guide and commits to the terms of GRO's code of practice.