

	<h2>General Functions Committee</h2> <h3>12<sup>th</sup> October 2015</h3>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>Approval of premises for marriages and civil partnerships</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>Proper Officer for Registration (Head of Customer Strategy and Programmes, Commissioning Group)</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Key</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p>n/a</p>
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<h2>Summary</h2>
<p>The council wishes to increase the number of weddings and civil partnership ceremonies held in Barnet and can do this by approving new venues for this purpose. Since 3 March 2015 this approval has been a responsibility for General Functions Committee. This report recommends authorising the statutory Proper Officer for Registration to approve venues to enable a quicker and more efficient approvals process.</p>

<h2>Recommendations</h2>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Committee authorises the Proper Officer for Registration to carry out functions in relation to approving premises for marriages and the formation of civil partnerships under the Marriage Act 1949, the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005.</li> <li>2. That the Proper Officer for Registration be instructed to present half-yearly reports to this Committee listing details of all applications considered, during the period, for the approval of premises for marriages and the formation of civil partnerships.</li> </ol>

## **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 3rd March 2015, the authority to carry out functions in relation to the approval of premises was changed from the statutory Proper Officer for Registration to General Functions Committee. The impact of this was to add additional time and process to each decision, which makes it more challenging for the Registrars service to respond rapidly to new venue applications and which can delay the growth of a business in the borough.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is more efficient for the Proper Officer for Registration to take these decisions given that they are of relatively low risk. In any case where the Proper Officer felt it appropriate, they could bring a report to GFC, for example, where a large number of objections were received.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 The alternative would be to continue with the current arrangements, which are felt to be disproportionately resource intensive for the level of risk being managed and which lead to delay in premises being authorised which may be detrimental to the growth of a business in the borough.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 The Scheme of Delegation would be amended to include the delegated authority to the Proper Officer for Registration.
- 4.2 All delegated decisions are published on the council's website for full transparency.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 This change supports the council's principle of Opportunity: the council will capitalise on the opportunities of a growing economy by prioritising regeneration, growth and maximising income. It also supports the council's Entrepreneurial Barnet Strategy which aims to make Barnet the best place in London to be a small business
- 5.1.2 This change supports the council's objective of a borough where services are delivered efficiently to get value for money for the taxpayer.

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.2.1 This change will reduce the resources required for obtaining approval for premises and speed up venue approval.

### 5.3 **Social Value**

5.3.1 Expanding the number of licensed premises in Barnet increases the likelihood of weddings and civil partnerships being held in the borough, which is positive in terms of both social and economic value.

### 5.4 **Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 Local authorities are able to approve premises as venues for civil marriages and civil partnerships in pursuance of Section 46A of the Marriage Act 1949 and the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 and in pursuance of Section 6 (3A)(a) of the Civil Partnerships Act 2004. Such premises are required to meet certain criteria when making an application and they are set out in guidance from the Registrar General:

- The application must be made in accordance with regulations and the necessary public notice has been given.
- Any objections or comments must have been considered by the local authority
- The premises are a seemly and dignified venue for the solemnisation of marriages and civil partnership
- The premises meet the necessary Health and Safety and Fire requirements
- The premises will be available for regular use by the general public for both the solemnisation of marriages and civil partnership registrations

5.4.2 Council Constitution, Responsibility for Functions, Annex A states that the terms of reference of the General Functions Committee include 'Approving premises for marriages and the formation of civil partnerships'. Responsibility for Functions, Annex B, sets out the scheme of delegated authority to officers.

### 5.5 **Risk Management**

5.5.1 The risk of a venue not being suitable is managed through the process followed by the Registrars service, as indicated above.

5.5.2 An inspection of the premises is made by the Head of Registration and Nationality, who checks that:

- The premises are a seemly and dignified venue for the solemnisation of marriages and civil partnership
- The premises meet the necessary Health and Safety and Fire requirements

5.5.3 The ongoing suitability of venues is reviewed each time a marriage or civil

partnership ceremony is conducted, at which 2 qualified registration staff must always be present. Should a venue subsequently fail to meet the national and local requirements, a license can be withdrawn. This has never happened in Barnet or Brent.

## **5.6 Equalities and Diversity**

5.6.1 The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 provide for the joint approval of premises for both civil marriages and civil partnerships.

5.6.2 All premises must be accessible for persons with limited mobility.

## **5.7 Consultation and Engagement**

5.7.1 All applications are subject to a statutory notice in the Hendon and Finchley Times allowing objections during a three week consultation period.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1 Council on Tuesday 3rd March 2015, as part of Report of the Head of Governance (Agenda Item 12.2), confirmed the Head of Customer Strategy and Programmes as statutory proper officer for births, marriages and deaths and delegated its functions in relation to approving premises for marriages and the formation of civil partnerships under the Marriage Act 1949 and the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 to the General Functions Committee:

<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=162&MId=7819>