

Open Report on behalf of Les Britzman, Chief Fire Officer

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	29 October 2019
Subject:	Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service Update

Summary:

This is an update on the Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service. Councillors are requested to note the progress and performance of the service and consider timescales for further reports and actions.

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider and comment on the progress within the Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service and highlight any additional comments for consideration.

1. Background

The Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service (RCCS) continues to meet the needs of families at sensitive and key times in their lives. The primary objective of the Service is to fulfil the statutory obligations for the registration of births, deaths, stillbirths, marriages/civil partnerships and citizenship with related ceremonies as well as to provide a support function to HM Coroners.

The RCCS provides these front line services and the service also conducts a range of discretionary ceremonies for example naming, renewal of vows, funeral and memorial services. These are all periods of immense change for families, and the care and customer service that is delivered plays an important part in these transition periods.

In November 2018 we began to offer the European Settlement Scheme (ESS) in two different offices, Lincoln and Boston. This enables European Citizens to obtain pre-settled or settled status. This service is offered on a full cost recovery basis and in partnership with United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) as part of the Home Office.

We also provide the Tell Us Once Service whereby central and local government can be notified of the death of an individual. This timely notification has assisted bereaved families and supported central government departments in ensuring the

right benefits are paid, prevents overpayments of benefits and reduces the risk of potential fraud e.g. inappropriate use of the Blue Badge Scheme.

The local authority has a responsibility to provide support to the Coroners Service in their administrative area. In Lincolnshire there is now one Senior Coroner Timothy Brennand, supported by an Area Coroner covering the single coronial jurisdiction of the county of Lincolnshire.

In April 2017, the Coroner's Officers employed by Lincolnshire Police moved over to Lincolnshire County Council under TUPE arrangements. This is working very well with improved communications and teamwork with co-location with the rest of the Coroner's teams in Lincoln and Boston. Significant work has been completed to improve timescales for families. This is evidenced by the reduction in the time period taken for the release of supporting paperwork by the Coroner to the Registration Service to facilitate the death registration.

We have office locations based across the county including Bourne, Boston, Gainsborough, Grantham, Horncastle, Long Sutton, Lincoln, Louth, Skegness, Sleaford, Spalding and Stamford. There is a repository for archived registers and certificate production in Lincoln. The main Coroner's office is in Lincoln with an additional office and dedicated inquest room at Boston. We retain a geographical presence in localities and we are aware that families value that presence and often prefer to wait and register locally.

Activity Levels and Budget

A summary of activity and volumes can be found in Appendix A

The Registration and Celebratory Service generates a significant level of income, through their service delivery and celebratory events. In previous years this has supported the Coroners Service with a significant overspend. The Coroners Service is demand led, and each case needs to be investigated on its own timeline with associated costs to ensure the integrity of the investigation and avoid any criticism or legal challenge that could lead to a judicial review.

Assurance

There are a number of audit mechanisms that provide the Committee with an assurance of the standards of service. In April 2018, the Registration Service received a 'High' rating following a Stock and Security Audit by the General Register Office (GRO), part of Her Majesty's Passport Office, under the umbrella of the Home Office. In addition, a 'High' rating was given following the submission of the Annual Performance Report to the GRO.

We meet the requirements to register births and stillbirths, and also appointment availability. Customer feedback is reviewed daily with the receipt of customer comment cards with the results in 2018-19 of 99.62% rating the service as Good, Very Good or Excellent. Annually we undertake a customer satisfaction survey. In 2018-19 this provided a 100% satisfaction level and the results over the last five

years are captured in Appendix B under our Key Performance Indicators and Standards of Service. The annual survey took place again in August 2019 and the results will be ready by the end of October 2019.

The Registration Service is also subject to annual inspection in relation to its commitment to the Government's standards for Customer Service Excellence. The Service held a 100% compliance rating for 8 years, although one non-compliance was advised in 2017 due to the lack of credit/debit card payments for financial transactions. The latter has been a corporate project for a number of years and I am pleased to report that as of July 2019 the Registration Service have been able to take card payments for certificates and all other services, at their main Lincoln office. This was a soft launch where customers were given the opportunity to pay by either Chip & Pin or cash when they attend their appointment. Over the summer the project team worked to embed the service, making sure that the processes were fully understood by staff and ironed out any issues in relation to system set up and training, before rolling out the solution to other Registration Offices around the county, where onsite support isn't as readily available. At the start of October the project commenced rolling out the Card Payment solution to other offices, starting with Gainsborough, Stamford and Boston. The rollout to the remaining offices is being planned over the remainder of October and will be completed week commencing 4th November 2019.

The service has been waiting a number of years to be able to offer this facility within offices and real positive response has been received by all.

The service is piloting the taking of death appointments within the Bereavement Centre at the County Hospital in Lincoln. Early signs are encouraging albeit only four appointments per week are being offered at this stage. Monitoring take up will lead to the possibility of increasing appointment availability.

SECTION A: DEATHS REPORTED TO CORONER IN 2018									
	With post mortem			Without post mortem			TOTAL		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
(i) Deaths reported to the coroner which will not result in an inquest (whether or not a certificate of any sort is issued)	588	361	949	907	959	1866	1495	1320	2815
(ii) Deaths reported to coroners on which inquests are to be or were opened (even if not concluded)	188	79	267	59	38	97	247	117	364
(iii) Deaths reported to coroners which are under investigation and it is not yet known if an inquest will be opened	30	7	37	1	0	1	31	7	38
TOTAL (i) + (ii) + (iii)	806	447	1253	967	997	1964	1773	1444	3217
(iv) Number of cases transferred out of area under Sections 2 or 3 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (not to be included above, even if they included a post mortem before transfer)									4
(v) Deaths reported or referred to the coroner requiring neither inquest nor the issue of any certificate MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE "NO INQUEST NO POST MORTEM" box above, along with cases where certificates were issued. <u>For cases where sex of deceased not known, please indicate the number of such cases in the yellow cell on the right.</u>									0

Key Performance timescales suggested to Coroners by the Chief Coroner are as follows:

- Referral – contact made with families and enquiries commenced the same day or next working day;
- Release of the deceased should be within three days;

- The date for inquest should be within six months, and no more than 12 months, however the complexity of the case may require additional reports, for example toxicology, or specialist medical reports, or a health and safety report which can cause delays.

In 2018 as reported

4. Deaths on which inquests in 2018 were: (a) concluded or (b) not resumed following adjournment under Schedule 1, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 or 5. (i.e. all conclusions in section B plus all charges in section C)		
Number of cases where the inquest was either concluded, or adjourned under Schedule 1, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 or 5, within:		
Deaths in England and Wales	One month or less ²	11
	One to three months ²	25
	Three to six months ²	62
	Six to twelve months ²	188
	Over 12 months ²	129
	TOTAL CASES - England and Wales	415
Deaths elsewhere	TOTAL CASES - elsewhere	+ 1
All deaths on which inquests were held in 2018 i.e. total of Sections B and C		= 416

The RCCS also plays an active part in the Emergency Planning Team's Mass Fatalities and Temporary Mortuary planning which considers the response to a major incident as well as flu pandemic planning.

Underpinning both services is a clear commitment to customer service.

Promotion, Marketing and Signposting

The RCCS also provides lots of information for families. There is a 'Celebrate in Lincolnshire' brochure supporting families with their celebrations, a Bereavement Guide and also a comprehensive website. The Service will be considering social media as a mechanism to promote our services and wide range of venues in which to get married to a much wider audience and encourage couples to marry in Lincolnshire; therefore supporting local businesses with the related spend on flowers, car hire, accommodation etc. There is an annual service plan which is published alongside our Standards of Service and Achievements Documents (<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/>).

2. Conclusion

The staff and Coroners of the RCCS areas work hard to provide a fantastic service to people in often challenging circumstances, and in a dynamic work area due to pressures of timescales. Their commitment and the service provided to families should be recognised and applauded.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

N/A

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Statistical Information for Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service
Appendix B	Key Performance Indicators

5. Background Papers

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Ministry of Justice - Coroner Statistics	www.gov.uk/government/collections/coroners-and-burials-statistics
Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Service - Service Plan	www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/

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