



**Open Report on behalf of Les Britzman
Director of Fire, Rescue and Public Protection**

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	27 October 2020
Subject:	Registration and Celebratory Services Annual Report 2020

Summary:

This is an update on the Registration and Celebratory services. Councillors are requested to note the progress and performance of the service and consider timescales for further reports and actions. Note the exceptional work done during the pandemic to support individuals, couples and the bereaved to continue to deliver the service in changing and challenging circumstances.

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider and comment on the progress within the Registration, and Celebratory Services 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.

The service is fully supported by the fees charged across the complete range of services.

This report focuses on the registration and celebratory activities for the service including performance over 19/20 and the impact of the COVID pandemic in 2020.

Customer Service

Registration Services are accessible at 12 physical offices around the county. Although many of these sites had to be closed to the public during the initial part of the pandemic they are now all open and accessible by appointment apart from Bourne where being able to meet the Covid social distancing criteria is an issue. All other sites are adhering to strict Covid security requirements; plastic screens have been installed where necessary and PPE provided to staff as per government guidance.

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) continues to provide initial contact and an appointment booking service.

Customer Satisfaction remains very high, in the most recent satisfaction survey 100% respondents rated the service Excellent/Very Good/Satisfactory.

Service Activities 2019/2020

Please see Appendix A for activity during 2019/20

Issues to note in the year are:

- A shift to civil partnerships for some opposite sex couples is reflected in the reduction of marriages.
- A price increase (£4 to £11) for copy certificates has seen the reduction in express certificate requests
- European Settlement Scheme provided support to applicants who were unable to download the relevant phone app to submit an application and supporting documents.

Covid19 Pandemic Response and Impact

- **Birth registrations**

Birth registrations were halted in April by the General Register Office (GRO), until June when a new low contact process was introduced.

The backlog of around 1500 registrations is nearly complete with 76 outstanding. The low contact process will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

- **Death Registrations**

A new virtual process was introduced in April 2020 by the GRO which saw direct notification by doctors of a death into the registration service, which was then followed up with registrars contacting families by telephone, thus removing the need to visit an office. Whilst the lockdown was in place during April and May the system proved timely and efficient. However, once lockdown was eased the process has had to be adapted as more families are not at home to answer the phone. Alternative options are being explored.

- **Marriages/Civil Partnerships**

This activity saw the greatest disruption and ongoing demand for advice and rebooking. The changing national rules regarding ceremonies resulted in many cancellations, re-bookings and further changes and cancellations.

A notice of marriage only lasts 12 months and would normally require a new notice to be made incurring a further charge on the individuals. Where couples have been impacted due to Covid19, a decision was taken to waive this fee offering some support to couples who had been drastically impacted.

The cancellation of ceremonies and the simplification of ceremonies will have significant impact on the services income stream in 20/21. Planning is being put in place for increased activity in 21/22.

- **Citizenship Ceremonies**

These were initially cancelled however a low contact process was put in place in July 2020 and around 90 citizens had individual walk through ceremonies to clear the back log. Since then four small group ceremonies have been conducted and any that were further delayed by the Home Office have been completed.

2. Conclusion

In 2019/20 the services delivered continued to meet the needs of Lincolnshire citizens to a very high standard. During the first part of 2020/21 financial year the officers of the service have adapted to deliver services during the pandemic that not only meet national guidance but the needs of Lincolnshire by taking practical and innovative solutions which retain the customer at the centre.

3. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Statistical Information for Registration and Celebratory Service

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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