



Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09 November 2021
Subject:	Lincolnshire Registration and Celebratory Service Annual Report

Summary:

This report is to update on the service delivered by the Registration and Celebratory Service and outlines the continued impact and disruption the Covid 19 pandemic has had on the service.

The report also highlights the continued work of registration staff and their continued commitment to public service and looks ahead at the future challenges the service face.

Actions Required:

The Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of the report, comment on the level of service achieved and to consider revised timings of future reports.

1. Background

The Registration and Celebratory Service has faced another difficult and challenging year with the delivery of services greatly impacted by the pandemic. Government lockdowns, restrictions and social distancing measures have caused significant disruption across the service.

The service has remained open to the public throughout 2021. Offices continued to operate as covid secure environments with protective screens and sanitising stations in place, ensuring it was safe to undertake face to face public appointments.

Government restrictions on gatherings have meant face to face and celebratory events were heavily restricted. The service had to limit attendees in line national restrictions on social gatherings and whilst ensuring social distancing was in place when required.

Throughout the year the service had to rapidly respond to each government announcement to ensure compliance against national guidance and restrictions. Registration staff have exercised their duty professionally and have gone above and beyond to help customers throughout the year. Staffing levels have been impacted due to a number of retirements and staff leaving the service.

Death Registrations

Death registrations have remained the priority during 2021. The registration service continues to play a key role in the death management process and continues to use the Coronavirus Act easements. All deaths continue to be registered via telephone. The Coronavirus Act has just been formally reviewed and will be in place until March 2022 and the registration service will continue the easements contained in the act relating to telephone death registrations.

Death registration volumes in 2021 are comparable to the numbers registered in 2020 for the same period (January to October). 5,999 deaths registered during 2021, 6,088 deaths registered 2020. It should be noted that since July death registration volumes have increased by 8% against 2020 volumes.

As we move towards the winter months death registration volumes are expected to rise even further. Winter planning is underway to ensure the registration service is prepared and can cope with the increase demand for appointment availability during this challenging period.

Birth Registrations

Birth appointments have been available to the public throughout 2021 and this continues to remain the case. HMRC easements to claim child benefit without registering the event have now ceased and the registration service is currently requisitioning all outstanding birth notifications to ensure the registration is completed. 3,151 birth registrations have been undertaken in 2021 an increase of 137 against 2020 volumes.

Marriages & Civil Partnerships

Marriages and civil partnership ceremonies have been impacted the hardest during 2021. The national lockdown and government road map resulted in ceremonies being heavily restricted with only emergency ceremonies taking place for the four months of the year.

As restrictions were eased during spring and summer under the government's roadmap, numbers who could attend these events started to increase. However, a return to big celebratory events did not take place until July. The registration service responded to heightened levels of customer enquires during this period and to huge demand for ceremony bookings. The service has undertaken 1,783 ceremonies between January and October 2021 against 711 ceremonies undertaken in 2020.

Due to the continued uncertainty during 2020 & 2021 a large number of ceremony bookings were deferred. 2022 bookings currently stand at 1,583 with projected volumes set to exceed 2,000 ceremonies presenting another significant challenge during 2022. In addition, nearly 300 marriage bookings for 2023 have already been taken. To ensure the service has the capacity to meet this demand the service has trained over 40 LCC current employees as ceremony celebrants to help cover these events.

Citizenship Ceremonies

Citizenship ceremonies were also heavily disrupted during the national lockdown as face-to-face ceremonies were temporarily prohibited by the regulations for the first part of 2021. The service quickly adopted the new Home Office virtual citizenship ceremony process ensuing ceremonies could continue during the year. Following the lifting of restrictions in person ceremonies have now recommenced. In total 255 new citizens have had their ceremony during 2021 compared to 128 in 2020.

Next Steps

The immediate focus for the service is to manage the upcoming winter pressures around death registrations, beyond this 2022 will see a full review of Lincolnshire Registration and Celebratory Service.

This will look to make the service more accessible and enhance our current customer offering.

A new IT system within the registration service will be introduced making the service more accessible to the public with the introduction of online appointment bookings, online prepayment for registration services and certificates and online communications directly from registration service. In addition, we will be improving the current process for wedding ceremonies with the introduction of an online ceremony planner for the public along with new wedding packages enabling more choice and flexibility.

Currently the service is delivered from 12 locations across the county, as part of the review the property at these locations will be reviewed to ensure our venues are of the standard required to deliver key life and celebratory events.

2. Conclusion

2021 has been a very disrupted year for the registration service and continues to feel the impact of the pandemic. Despite this disruption the Registration and Celebratory Service has continued to deliver a high level of customer service with registration volumes across all disciplines exceeding that of 2020.

If agreed the Registration and Celebratory Service gives the commitment to present its annual report following the end of the financial year aligning with the service requirement to annual report to the Home Office. Additionally, the service would welcome the

opportunity provide updates throughout the year on progress made during the service review.

3. Consultation

No consultation was used to inform on this report.

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The following risks have been identified:

- Projected increase in death volumes over this winter period.
- Increased demand of wedding and civil partnership ceremonies in 2022.

4. Background Papers

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

This report was written by James Chapple, Head of Registration, Celebratory and Coroners Services, who can be contacted on 01522 554052 or james.chapple@lincolnshire.gov.uk.