



**Open Report on behalf of Glen Garrod,
Executive Director Adult Care & Community Wellbeing**

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| Report to: | Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee |
| Date: | 20 September 2022 |
| Subject: | Lincolnshire Registration and Celebratory Service Annual Report |

Summary:

This report is to update on the service delivered by the Registration and Celebratory Service.

The report also highlights the introduction of a new registrars IT system, the continued work of registration staff and future legislative change.

Actions Required:

The Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to review the contents of the report and comment on the level of service achieved.

1. Background

The Registration and Celebratory Service has faced another busy and challenging year. The lifting of pandemic restrictions during 2021 and the removal of Covid legislation in March 2022 has seen the service return to pre-pandemic delivery with all registration events conducted face to face.

The service has remained open to the public undertaking birth, death and notice of marriage or civil partnership appointments at all 12 service points across the county and undertaking weddings and civil partnerships at over 90 approved premises.

Throughout the year the service has had to rapidly respond to each government announcement of legislative change, impacting on the delivery of births, deaths and marriages and civil partnerships. Registration staff have exercised their duty professionally and have gone above and beyond to help customers throughout the year. Staffing levels have been addressed through a number of recruitment campaigns and adequate resource is in place to meet the demands on the service.

Death Registrations

Death registrations continue to be a vital part of the death management process. The service continues to prioritise deaths registration appointments ensuring there is enough capacity to meet demand. Over the last year the service has seen large change in how deaths are registered. The removal of telephone death registrations resulted in the service reverting back to face-to-face appointments, requiring changes not only in registration but also at bereavement offices and GP surgeries. The ability for medical practitioners to send paperwork electronically to the registrar has however been retained.

Death registration volumes fell in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21. This was due to two main factors. The high Covid related deaths experienced in the initial wave of the pandemic during April and May of 2020 was not replicated in 2021. Secondly, a less severe winter peak was experienced during the months of December 2021 to February 2022 compared with December 2020 to February 2021. It should be noted that death registrations have climbed by 14% during April to July 2022 compared with April to July 2021.

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Total deaths registered 2020/21 | Total deaths registered 2021/2022 |
| 8,996 | 7,781 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Total deaths registered April – July 2021 | Total deaths registered April – July 2022 |
| 2,313 | 2,691 |

The service worked closely with bereavement services and funeral directors during the winter period to ensure winter deaths were managed effectively. The service also planned for an increase in Covid deaths related to the Omicron variant to ensure no delays in the death management process were caused.

Birth Registrations

Covid easements around child benefit and the relaxation of the statutory 42-day timescale resulted in an increase in unregistered and late birth registrations. The service has worked hard to get these births registered during 2022. The current position regarding birth registrations is inline with pre pandemic levels, all backlogs have been cleared and registrations are taking place in a timely fashion.

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Total births registered 2020/21 | Total births registered 21/22 |
| 4,464 | 4,549 |

| | |
|--|--|
| Total births registered April 21 - July 21 | Total births registered April 22 - July 22 |
| 1,307 | 1,742 |

Marriages, Civil Partnerships & Citizenship Ceremonies

The demand for marriage, civil partnership and citizenship ceremonies remains high. All restrictions on ceremonies were lifted in July 2021 resulting in unprecedented demand for

these services. The national restrictions during the pandemic resulted in a large number of couples moving their ceremony date in to 2022 and beyond.

Between April 2021 and March 2022 over 2,000 ceremonies were undertaken. High demand continues for these services and since April 2022 over 1,500 ceremonies have already been undertaken this year. The service continues to receive booking requests daily for ceremonies and requests are now being received as far ahead as summer 2025.

The service continues to expand its offering with new venues being approved. In April 2022 the Ministry of Justice changed its legislation to permanently allow outdoor marriages and civil partnerships to take place. The service has undertaken two successful recruitment campaigns for Ceremonies Officers during 2022 to help meet the growing demand for ceremonies.

IT System

During 2022 the service has been working with Stopford Information Systems to introduce a new IT system within registration. The system provides registrars with a modern digital solution and changes the way residents can access registration services.

The system allows residents to book their birth, death or notice of marriage or civil partnership appointments online via the council's website on a computer, tablet or mobile device 24/7.

In addition to online bookings the system has self-service features which allows residents to manage their appointment bookings online with the ability to rearrange and cancel should they need to.

The ability to book birth, death and notice appointments has seen excellent take up since go live on 15th August (births/notices) and 25th August (Deaths) with 79% of birth appointments, 74% of notice appointments and 36% of death appointments being booked online.

A number of other functions within the system are due to be launched later in the year including online pre-payment, online bookings of ceremonies and an online ceremony planner.

Legislative Change

Following the national removal of the Coronavirus Act which saw the withdrawal of telephone death registrations, the General Register Office has announced that in collaboration with Department for Culture, Media & Sport a government backed bill is due to be passed in 2023 which will permanently allow customers the option to undertake birth or death registration appointments either face to face or via the telephone. As we await further information of timescales the service is looking at how this can be implemented following the success for telephone death registrations over the last two years.

In July 2022, the Law Commission published its findings and recommendations following their review of marriage. If taken forward by government, the recommendations would see national change to how marriages and civil partnerships are undertaken. We await the government's response within the next 12 months.

Next Steps

The immediate focus for the service is to manage the continued high demand for births, death and notice of marriage and civil partnership appointments and marriage and civil partnership ceremonies.

The service is committed to delivering digital improvements and improving accessibility for residents. Online pre-payment, online bookings of ceremonies and an online ceremony planner are all priorities for introduction.

The service continues to plan for the future legislative changes. The proposals outlined by government will bring about the largest changes to Civil Registration since it began in 1837.

2. Conclusion

Despite the challenges faced the Registration and Celebratory Service has continued to deliver registration appointments throughout the year, meeting the new levels of demand and clearing pandemic backlogs.

The Registration and Celebratory Service gives the commitment to present its annual report following the end of the financial year. Additionally, the service would welcome the opportunity provide updates throughout the year on progress made during the service review.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The following risks have been identified.

- Projected increase in death volumes over the winter period.
- Legislative change during 2023 and the impact on service delivery

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 and Coroners Services, who can be contacted on 01522 554052 or james.chapple@lincolnshire.gov.uk.