



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

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	19 September 2023
Subject:	Registration and Celebratory Service Report

Summary:

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

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to:

- (1) review and comment on the progress and performance of the service; and
- (2) consider timescales for further reports as required.

1. Background

The Registration Service has made significant steps forward in service delivery, modernisation, and digitisation during 2022/23. The service has focused on digital delivery and improving accessibility to the public throughout the year with the introduction of new products and services.

It was reported last year that the service has recently gone live with a new IT system which allowed for online customer appointment bookings of birth, death, and notice appointments. This has been well received by the public and take up of online appointment booking continues to increase with over 1,000 appointments per month now being made online, equating to 80% of all registration appointments. Further enhancements are planned which will allow for weddings and civil partnerships to be booked online with couples being able to choose and secure their date and time via the Council's website.

In addition to online bookings the service has moved forward with online payments. In February 2023, online payments for weddings and civil partnerships were made available. Couples are sent a notification which takes the customer to the payment portal on the Council’s website. Over 90% of payments for marriage, civil partnerships and certificate orders are now made online. The service is in the process of moving even further with online payments and will soon be bringing online a function where people can pre order birth and death certificates when they book their appointment online.

Improvements have been made to the customer information held on the Council’s website. A full review has been taking place to ensure the information is easily accessible and answers the questions being asked by the public. This allows the public to better understand what is needed and how to access registration services. The service will be also introducing a new customer feedback mechanism via the Council’s Let’s Talk Lincolnshire platform to better understand the customer experience and continue to improve service delivery.

Death Registrations

Death registrations continue to be a vital part of the death management process. The service continues to ensure adequate death registration appointments are available as quickly as possible whilst ensuring there is enough capacity to meet demand.

Death registration volumes have increased during 2022/23 to a similar level seen in 2020/21, just below 9,000. The largest increase was seen during the winter period (December to February) exceeding the previous year’s figures. What was reassuring to see is how the winter period of excess deaths was managed across the county. Challenges seen in previous years with body storage and timeliness delays were not experienced and the death management system held up very well.

The Medical Examiner role out continues across the county, providing greater scrutiny of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This is due to become statutory in 2024. This should provide further improvements to the death registration process.

Total deaths registered 2020/21	Total deaths registered 2021/22	Total deaths registered 2022/23
8,996	7,781	8,877

Total deaths registered April 22 - June 22	Total deaths registered April 23 - June 23
2,071	2,159

Birth Registrations

Total number of birth registrations increased by 9% in 2022/23 compared with 2021/22, however there has been a decrease in the numbers registered for the first quarter of 2022/23. Appointment availability remains good across the county. There are no backlogs in registrations and the Government’s target of 98% of all births being register within 42 days is being met.

Total births registered 2021/22	Total births registered 2022/23
4,464	4,883

Total births registered April 22 - June 22	Total births registered April 23 - June 23
1,365	1,040

Ceremonies

The service continues to develop its ceremony offering with more services and ceremony types being introduced. A wider citizenship offering has been made available since January 2023 with the introduction of private citizenship ceremonies which are increasingly popular alongside group ceremonies. These were launched in January 2023 and now account for around one third of all citizenship ceremonies. In addition, the service will be reintroducing renewal of vows and baby naming ceremonies.

Weddings and civil partnerships continue to remain popular. Last year, over 2,600 were undertaken, an increase from 2021/22 as this was the first full year for ceremonies without any Covid restrictions. This offer has developed over the last year with more venues becoming licenced, the undertaking of more outdoor ceremonies, and increasing our availability allowing couples to plan further in advance. Bookings are already being taken for 2026/27.

Legislative Change

All registration appointments remain face to face and continue to be delivered across all 12 service points. The legislation to allow for telephone birth and death registrations has been delayed. The bill is currently making its way through the parliamentary process and the General Register Office is hoping to enable the ability to undertake telephone registration in early 2024. The service recognises the benefits of telephone death registrations experienced during the pandemic and would look to offer telephone and face to face appointments to the public as soon as possible.

The service continues to await the Government's response to the Law Commission review of marriage. It is anticipated that the Government will take forward several recommendations, however the parliamentary process still needs completing before any changes are introduced.

2. Conclusion

Building on the successes of 2022/23, the registration service will deliver further digital improvements and continue to make the service more accessible to the public.

The service will also continue to deliver against its statutory registration duties of registering births and deaths and undertaking marriages and civil partnership and continue to introduce new products and services to the public.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

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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