

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Policy and Resources
Date:	13 June 2012
Title:	Draft Strategy for Hampshire's Registration Service 2012- 2017
Reference:	3779
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the proposed long-term strategy for Hampshire County Council's Registration Service (HRS) from 2012 to 2017. The strategy focuses on a modernisation programme that seeks to provide value for money services to Hampshire residents.
- 1.2. It also proposes a targeted public consultation (as appropriate to the potential impact on local residents and the timing of the change) on the proposed future configuration of services.
- 1.3. This report seeks to:
 - provide the context to the Registration Service
 - set out the key elements of the strategy
 - consider the finance for the strategy.
 - consider the national and local context for change.

2. Contextual Information

- 2.1. Hampshire County Council's Registration Service (HRS) operates from 16 Register Offices across the County, of which five are within a Library, five in shared buildings and six in stand alone accommodation, with 9 dedicated ceremony rooms. The service employs approximately 120 staff and operates without a budget from the County Council, but has annual operating costs of £2.2 million.
- 2.2. The service is split into two distinct strands that include statutory services offered free at the point of delivery, and 'choose to use' services that generate income. The one exception is the Tell Us Once service which, as part of a death registration appointment, offers informants the opportunity to

share details of the deceased with a range of central and local government departments and agencies. This is a discretionary service for which no charge is made. The 'choose to use' services subsidise the statutory services, so the balance between 'service' and 'business' is therefore crucial.

- 2.3. During the last 4 years, HRS has implemented significant changes in terms of modernising its infrastructure, pay harmonisation, developing new services and integrating with other departments in the County Council.

3. Finance

- 3.1 As indicated above, HRS is reliant on its income generating activity to support statutory functions including birth, death and stillbirth registration, for which no charge can be made to the public. The strategy seeks to safeguard these statutory services whilst maximising income generating opportunities in the 'choose to use' services to ensure long term financial viability.

4 Key Elements of the Strategy

- 4.1 A commitment to providing a statutory fee marriage/Civil Partnership ceremony for £45 in every region across the County (bride, groom and 2 witnesses), along with domiciliary visits for birth and death appointments for customers with specific needs or access issues.
- 4.2 No compromise on access to statutory services (birth and death registration and notices of civil marriage/partnership).
- 4.3 In the event of any proposed office/ceremony room closure, capacity will be assured in alternative offices, or new accommodation identified in existing County Council buildings to absorb any increase in demand as a result of proposed changes.
- 4.4 Office relocations will provide statutory services on a 'like for like' basis in shared accommodation within close proximity, which will build on the successful integration with libraries that has already been achieved through co-locating five register offices in a library setting.
- 4.5 Introduction of new services that improve the customer journey. For example, the Tell Us Once service enables registrars to share information about the deceased with other Government agencies and departments (e.g. DVLA, Identity and Passport Service and Council Tax offices).
- 4.6 Improving customer service generally through;
 - the ability for the public to book an appointment online either in person or through a trusted third party (e.g. Funeral Director, Hospice or Bereavement Officer), which will be available from June 2012
 - extending ceremony availability until 8pm with later bookings available on request and subject to resource availability
- 4.7 Pursuing opportunities to work in partnership with surrounding registration areas to share best practice and deliver improved customer outcomes e.g. 'full' birth registrations for babies born in Portsmouth and Southampton.

- 4.8 Making the County Council's resources work as efficiently as possible to ensure value for money services, including buildings, staff, IT, and all other supporting infrastructure.
- 4.9 In essence, the focus of the strategy will be improving the customer journey through partnership working and integration with other services, both internal and external. Underpinning all of this is the need for a financially sustainable service, which in the case of HRS is entirely dependent on maintaining current levels of income from 'choose to use' services.
- 4.10 The full HRS strategy is attached at Appendix 1 of this report, but key impacts are indicated in the summary table below:

OFFICE	IMPACTS	
	Statutory Services	Non statutory services
Aldershot (2014/15) Move the current office. Key element of Workstyle strategy to release capital receipt for the County Council	No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation. Location to be established	No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation. Location to be established
Andover (2012/13) Move the current office. Lease expires on existing building in 2013.	No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation in Beech Hurst, Andover	New ceremony facility to be established in shared Conference Room accommodation at Beech Hurst, Andover.
Bishops Waltham (2012/13) Closure of current office	Part time office (5 hours per week over 2 days). Utilisation levels cannot justify resource. Proximity to closest alternative offices in Eastleigh or Fareham (from approx 8 miles)	No ceremony facility currently therefore no impact
Petersfield (2013/14) Move the current office. Key element of Workstyle strategy to release capital receipt for the county council	Minimal impact – relocate appointments to new facility within Petersfield library	New ceremony room to be established in shared multi-functional meeting room in Petersfield Library. Additionally, alternative high quality ceremony facility at Alton Register Office can readily accommodate an additional 254 ceremonies in a currently under utilised facility. However seating capacity is reduced from 50 to 40. Anticipated revenue reduction.
Romsey (2013/14) As above	Minimal impact – relocate appointments to new facility within Romsey library	Ceremony facility to be relocated to new accommodation – location to be established. Alternative high quality ceremony facilities also available in Winchester, plus an approved venue in immediate vicinity.

OFFICE	IMPACTS	
	Statutory Services	Non statutory services
		Anticipated revenue reduction.
Winchester (2015/16) As above	No adverse impact – opportunity to offer new services including ‘drop in’ facility and centralisation of Coroners	Improved choice of in house ceremony facilities (Basing Room, Council Chamber*, former Law Library and Former Grand Jury Room) *including group citizenship ceremonies in the future.

5 Considerations

- 5.1 Given the unique characteristics of the statutory elements of the service (i.e. the legal requirement to, for example, register births and deaths), the use of customer insight data does not add any value as the element of choice in terms of whether or not to use the service does not apply – the location is the issue.
- 5.2 However, the Registration Service is not accessed on a regular basis. On average, individuals will use the service between two to three times in their lifetime, so a change to Register Office location will have minimal impact. Furthermore, availability of appointments is often a key driver for customers. Choice of location is less linked to where the deceased died, but more to where the informant lives or works and what fits into to their personal schedules.
- 5.3 The growth in the approved venue market (venues licensed for the purpose of civil marriage/civil partnership) has noted a 28% increase in Hampshire over the last five years and there are now in excess of 150 venues, in addition to nine Register Office ceremony rooms.
- 5.4 Statistics would suggest a downturn in Register Office marriages (by approximately 5%) and a corresponding increase in approved venue ceremonies (approximately 8%). In terms of income, a higher level is received from attending outside venue ceremonies as charges are higher.
- 5.5 In making recommendations, careful consideration has been given to how people are accessing the ‘choose to use’ services, with a view to the County Council ensuring that its buildings work harder and provide improved value for money.
- 5.6 The recommendations take into account the need to respond to legislative change and develop services for the future e.g. centralising the provision of group citizenship ceremonies in high profile buildings in Winchester, whilst retaining a group facility in Aldershot due the high levels of demand in this area.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that the Executive Member for Policy and Resources:
- a) approves the draft strategy for Hampshire’s Registration Service from 2012 to 2017.

- b) endorses the commencement of a targeted public consultation (as appropriate to the potential impact on local residents and the proposed timing of the change) on the proposed future configuration of services.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

<i>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</i>	No
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
<i>Maximising well-being:</i>	Yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
<i>Enhancing our quality of place:</i>	Yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- a) A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in the preparation of this report and has shown that the overall impact will be to bring significant service improvements in terms of more accessible buildings often with easy access to car parking, improved customer choice through web self service, which enables 'trusted third parties' (funeral directors etc) to book appointments at a time and location to suit the customer, as well as allowing members of public to book their own appointments online.
- b) Additionally, the service will always maintain a facility for customers to have a civil ceremony for the statutory fee of £45. The closure of a part time office will enable more efficient use of Registration Officer time thereby creating capacity for additional appointments. Also the facility for Home Visits will remain available in appropriate circumstances.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- a) None directly.

3. Climate Change:

- a) **How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?** Operating in shared buildings will ensure a positive impact upon climate change.
- b) **How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?** As above.

FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTEES:**OTHER EXECUTIVE MEMBERS:**

Executive Member & Portfolio	Reason for Consultation	Date Consulted	Response:
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

OTHER FORMAL CONSULTEES:

Member/ Councillor	Reason for Consultation	Date Consulted	Response:
Councillor Eric Neal	Local Member for Aldershot East		
Councillor Roger Kimber	Local Member for Aldershot East		
Councillor Peter Mason	Local Member for Bishop's Waltham		
Councillor John West	Local Members for Petersfield Butser		
Councillor Vaughan Clarke	Local Members for Petersfield Hangers		
Councillor Roy Perry	Local Members for Romsey Extra		
Councillor Mark Cooper	Local Member for Romsey Town		
Councillor Brian Collin	Local Member for Winchester Eastgate		
Councillor Phrynette Dickens	Local Member for Winchester Westgate		

OTHER COUNTY COUNCILLORS IN THE WINCHESTER DISTRICT:

Itchen Valley	Councillor Jackie Porter	Liberal Democrats
Meon Valley	Councillor Felicity Hindson	Conservative
Winchester Downlands	Councillor Charlotte Bailey	Liberal Democrats
Winchester Southern Parishes	Councillor Patricia Stallard	Conservative