

# Hampshire County Council's Registration Strategy 2012 to 2017

## 1. Scope and Purpose

- 1.1 This strategy sets out the vision and direction of travel that will guide Hampshire Registration Service's improvement planning over the next five years and beyond. It outlines the current provision of services and the challenges facing registration at the present time. Of particular significance is the coalition government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the impact this will have on HCC's budget and, as a consequence, on the registration service.
- 1.2 It seeks to challenge traditional thinking about the way in which we deliver services and makes recommendations for the future in terms of providing a sustainable delivery model.

## 2. Background and Context

### 2.1 History

A civil registration service was first introduced in July 1837. For the most part this remains the basis for the registration service of today. The service fundamentally provides a facility for people to register and record all births deaths and marriages/civil partnerships that occur within England and Wales, thereby giving everyone a name and identity within society. The information captured at the point of registration provides important statistical data which enables central government to make adequate provision for services such as health and education.

### 2.2 Local Context

Hampshire's Registration Service (HRS) operates from 16 Register Offices across the County, of which 5 are within a Library, 5 in shared buildings and 6 in stand alone accommodation – 9 of the offices currently have dedicated ceremony rooms. The service employs approximately 120 staff (see Appendix I) and operates without a budget from the County Council, but has annual operating costs of £2 million.

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 (with the exception of the Tell Us Once service). The 'choose to use' services subsidise the statutory services, so the balance between 'service' and 'business' is therefore crucial, and this is a high risk area for the County Council in terms of reputation.

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.

## 2.3 Service Overview

The primary functions and responsibilities of the local registration service in Hampshire are as follows:

| Statutory (i.e. legal) Functions   | 'Choose to use' services  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Register births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships</li> <li>• Take notices of marriage and civil partnership</li> <li>• Be the custodian of registers (birth, death and marriage) dating back to 1837</li> <li>• Produce certified copies of the registered entries as and when requested</li> <li>• Conduct civil marriages/civil partnerships</li> <li>• Citizenship ceremonies</li> <li>• License venues (including religious premises for civil partnerships) where civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies may be solemnised and other ceremonies celebrated</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a nationality checking service to ensure that British Citizenship application forms are completed correctly and are submitted to the UK Borders Agency with the correct documents</li> <li>• Provide a range of alternative ceremonies including renewal of vows; naming and private citizenship ceremonies</li> <li>• Provide commemorative certificates</li> <li>• Offer the 'Tell Us Once' service (free service) to all customers attending to register a death</li> </ul> |

**It is important to highlight that whilst there remains a legal requirement to deliver ceremonies and license venues, these services are optional for the public in terms of where they choose to contract their marriage (i.e. outside of Hampshire/any other registration authority in England and Wales)**

## 2.4 National Context

In more recent times, the registration service in general has assumed a higher profile nationally and has a significant part to play in key issues on the national agenda including:

- (i) Tell Us Once – offering citizens the opportunity to inform a range of central and local government departments and agencies of key life changes as part of the birth and death registration process
- (ii) Protection of Freedoms Bill received Royal Assent in April 2012. – this includes the removal of time restrictions on when a marriage/civil partnership may take place (currently between 8am and 6pm). A more flexible approach to resourcing will be required to fulfil customer

expectations for the future.

- (iii) Government initiatives to tackle immigration – consultation currently underway to include: preventing abuse (sham marriages); promoting integration (citizenship) and reducing the burden on the tax payer. The consultation considers potential new measures for identifying and preventing sham marriages, and for the role of the registrar working in partnership with UK Borders Agency enforcement staff
- (iv) Coroners and Justice Act – anticipated introduction of the role of Medical Examiner in April 2014 (one of the outcomes of the Shipman enquiry) to provide improved scrutiny around the death certification process. There is an anticipated impact on the role of the registrar.
- (v) Section 202 of the Equalities Act – proposals to allow civil partnerships to be formed in religious buildings came into effect 5 December 2011. Impacts on expanded arrangements for approved venue licensing and charges made for registrars' attendance at civil partnerships in religious buildings.
- (vi) Identity Fraud – role of registrars in preventing fraud through vigilance in the processing of copy certificate requests

## 2.5 Core Values and Operating Principles

The registration service is very much part of a range of public services which are increasingly provided on modern business principles. The need to ensure value for money for Hampshire residents is balanced with the provision of high quality customer focussed services which continue to uphold the fundamental principles of excellent public service. Other core values and operating principles include;

- Preserving the integrity of the registration process to ensure the legality of every transaction and accurate data for social, economic and historical purposes
- Preserving the facility for a domiciliary visit in the event that a customer has limited access or specific needs
- Harnessing technology to improve efficiency of, and access to, the service – face to face transactions will always be protected as a fundamental right
- Operating on the basis of a full cost recovery model to ensure that all reasonable costs are covered without recourse to the taxpayer for the provision of 'choose to use' services
- Preserving the facility of a statutory fee marriage of £45 (bride, groom, and 2 witnesses) in every region across the county
- Maintaining a culture of performance management – we respect that we cannot give anyone back their marriage/civil partnership, birth or death registration and therefore operate on the principle of right first time, every time
- Providing the same level of service to everyone irrespective of ability, class, age, ethnic origin, gender or sexual orientation

- Preserving the required level of resource to sustain statutory services i.e. not providing income generating services at the expense of birth and death registrations
- Using customer and staff feedback to inform service improvement and planning for the future

### **3. Customer trends and expectations**

- 3.1 National research tells us that customers are now expecting a much greater choice over how and when they use both public and private sector services. Many people now expect to be able to bank online in the comfort of their homes, pay for goods and services at the touch of a button, or speak to a customer services representative any time, day and night. This 24/7 culture means that, like any other business in the modern world, the registration service needs to adapt and change to meet these expectations when it is appropriate to do so.
- 3.2 It is important to remember that there are aspects of the registration service that are entirely optional for our customers (getting married/forming a civil partnership, using the Nationality Checking Service, and non statutory ceremonies such as renewal of vows) alongside those that are statutory (birth and death registrations).
- 3.3 Our services are not used routinely or frequently - on average, any one individual will use the service on 2 to 3 occasions in their life time. Those occasions are, however, at defining moments in people's lives and their importance cannot be overestimated. This is, therefore, a high risk area for the County Council, particularly in terms of loss of reputation.
- 3.4 The implementation of Hantsdirect for registration in 2009 has transformed the way in which customers interact with the service, including improved choice of service location, extended access for the booking of appointments, and vastly improved telephone response times. This in turn has directly impacted office utilisation and workload distribution across the county as customers are provided with improved choice around which office they wish to attend.
- 3.5 We routinely seek customer feedback on every single registration transaction. All complaints are followed up in person by telephone and/or in writing, and within the corporate time frame. Based on c3,200 feedback forms p.a. we achieve a consistently high level of customer satisfaction (currently 98% pleased or extremely pleased with the service) and the number of complaints (12 in total for 2011/12) received represent c0.01% of the total workload.
- 3.6 Service delivery will continue to be informed by asking our customers what they think, responding to their feedback, and being open, honest and transparent about our performance.
- 3.7 It is worth noting that, given the unique characteristics of the statutory elements of the service 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.

- 3.8 However, as mentioned, the Registration Service is not accessed on a regular basis, so a change to Register Office location will have minimal impact in this context. Furthermore, availability of appointments is often the key driver for our 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 their personal schedules.

#### **4. Financial Model**

- 4.1 The registration service operates without a budget from the county council and has annual operating costs in the order of £2 million (excluding buildings and infrastructure costs which are met from the CCBS Office Accommodation budget). Income generating activity from 'choose to use' services therefore remains critical to support statutory functions which include birth, death and still-birth registrations as no charge can be made for these services.
- 4.2 The service is split into 2 distinct strands – statutory services offered free at the point of delivery, and 'choose to use' services (see table in 2.3) which, with the exception of Tell Us Once, generate income.
- 4.3 We need to consider carefully the financial stability of the registration service in view of the risks to ongoing income streams and the real costs of providing birth and death registrations.
- 4.4 Risks include:
- In recent years there has been a national decline in the number of people getting married:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/feb/11/marriage-rates-uk-data#data>.
  - Although this has yet to translate into a reduction in Hampshire (which has continued to demonstrate a strong trend towards people choosing to marry in the county - Appendix II), there is no guarantee that this local trend will continue in the future. Additionally, the service has created capacity in its resourcing models to offer more marriage slots at popular times
  - Statistics would suggest a downturn in Register Office marriages/civil partnerships (by c.4%) and a corresponding increase in approved venue ceremonies (c.6%). In terms of income, a higher level is received from attending outside venue ceremonies so this risk is mitigated as long as customers continue to marry in an approved venue in Hampshire.
  - There has been a reduction in the number of migrants achieving settlement in the UK and this is reflected in a reduction in customers accessing the Nationality Checking Service and obtaining British citizenship

- IT and infrastructure costs continue to rise
- 4.5 Due to the high ratio of premises fixed costs (rent, rates, service charge etc) to variable costs (staffing costs, consumables etc) the fees charged for holding a ceremony at one of HCC's own venues is amongst the highest in the country (See Appendix III). Despite this, as mentioned above, the number of ceremony bookings has continued to rise (16% increase over the last 2 years). One of the key reasons for this is the competitive market which has emerged in recent years which has seen approved venues offering fixed cost deals and discounted packages. The capacity to respond to this increase in demand has been largely achieved through improved local management of resources and the introduction of flexible contract types (annualised hours and fixed term contracts).
- 4.6 A summary of infrastructure costs and activity by Register Office is supplied in Appendix IV

## 5. Vision and Proposals for the Future

- 5.1 The current configuration of service delivery points has remained largely unchanged from that dictated by the General Register Office many years ago. This has resulted in some communities being better served than others in terms of proximity/access.
- 5.2 A full list of offices is provided in Appendix IV. A summary of the key impacts of the proposed changes is provided below;

| OFFICE  | I M P A C T S  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | Statutory Services   | Non statutory services   |
| <p><b>Aldershot (timescale to be agreed)</b><br/>Move the current office.<br/>Key element of Workstyle strategy to release capital receipt for the County Council</p> | No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation. Location to be established                    | No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation, including ceremony facility. Location to be established             |
| <p><b>Andover (2012/13)</b><br/>Move the current office.<br/>Lease expires on existing building in 2014.</p>  | No change – services to be relocated to new accommodation in Beech Hurst, Andover (subject to agreement) | New ceremony facility to be established in shared Conference Room accommodation at Beech Hurst, Andover (subject to agreement) |
| <p><b>Bishops Waltham (2012/13)</b><br/>Closure of current office</p>   | Part time office (5 hours per week over 2 days). Utilisation levels cannot justify resource.             | No ceremony facility currently therefore no impact   |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Proximity to closest alternative offices in Eastleigh or Fareham (from approx 8 miles)                            |   |
| <b>Petersfield (2013/14)</b><br>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. Anticipated revenue reduction. High quality alternative ceremony facilities in Alton Register Office (13 miles from existing) |
| <b>Romsey (2013/14)</b><br>As above  | Minimal impact – relocate appointments to new facility within Romsey library                                      | Ceremony facility to be relocated to Romsey Town Hall Alternative high quality ceremony facilities also available in Winchester & Ringwood (within a 20 mile radius).   |
| <b>Winchester (2015/16)</b><br>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*,)<br>*including group citizenship ceremonies in the future.   |
| <b>Totton (2013/14)</b><br>Move the current office   | No change – services to be relocated to proposed new accommodation at 1 High Street, Totton.                      | No ceremony facility currently therefore no impact  |

5.3 For the future we propose to focus our services at 5 full time regional ‘hubs’ with satellite offices in shared public service buildings as follows:

- Hubs located in: Aldershot; Basingstoke; Winchester; Fareham and Lymington
- Satellite offices in; Andover, Alton, Eastleigh, Gosport, Havant (x2), Petersfield, Ringwood, Romsey and Totton

- HCC ceremony rooms in: Aldershot; Andover; Basingstoke; Alton; Winchester; Fareham; Havant (Spring 2013); Ringwood; Petersfield and Romsey
- Of these, 10 will be located in shared (county/district/borough/town council) buildings

Full details of proposals are in Appendix V.

- 5.4 In response to the Protection of Freedoms Bill (see para. 2.4) Hampshire will initially offer extended ceremony availability until 8pm. Any requests for ceremonies beyond 8pm will be considered in the context of resource availability and any potential health and safety issues.
- 5.5 The service operates on an appointment only basis, although any customer presenting without an appointment will be seen if at all possible. Access to the service is via the county council's contact centre, Hantsdirect. Customers and other trusted third parties (e.g. Funeral Directors) are also able to make all routine appointments for birth and death registrations on-line with other on-line services to follow by the end 2012.

The range of services provided includes: birth and death registrations; marriage/civil partnership ceremonies; notices of marriage/civil partnership; nationality checking service; citizenship ceremonies; copy certificates; Tell Us Once; and a range of alternative ceremonies (including Naming and Renewal of Vows)

- 5.6 Our aspirations for the future are to;
- improve the bereavement journey for Hampshire residents (through, for example, the proposed centralisation of the Coroners service);
  - routinely signpost to other services e.g. Surestart, Library membership;
  - web-enable services to provide improved access and customer choice;
  - hold monthly group citizenship ceremonies in just four register offices at Aldershot, Basingstoke, Winchester and Fareham. Individual ceremonies can also be accommodated upon request in any ceremony room across Hampshire) and from time to time high profile ceremonies will continue to be held in the Great Hall and other prestigious venues
  - sustaining our current high levels of customer satisfaction (over 98% of customers pleased or extremely pleased with service and 12 complaints which translates to 0.01% of overall workload )

## **6. Longer term aspirations**

- 6.1 There remains considerable potential in the registration service. Part of this will be realised by new 'enabling' legislation, but other existing options include;

- Offering adjoining registration authorities the option to 'buy in' to the Hampshire performance management framework, including technical assessment and competency frameworks, and skills training for Registration Officers
  - Beyond this, there is scope for a joint management proposal to be developed to achieve further efficiency savings and a single registration offering to the public of Hampshire. This could include a centralised ceremony workforce with accompanying electronic management system
  - Potential centralisation of birth, death and marriage registers for cross-border authorities. This would enable Hampshire to produce copy certificates on their behalf and to utilise volunteers to publish indexes (birth, death, marriage and civil partnership) on a national web site.
  - Partial centralisation of citizenship ceremonies to four Register Offices located in Aldershot, Basingstoke, Winchester and Fareham.
- 6.2 Hampshire is also leading on the development of a national qualification for the registration service, working closely with the Local Registration Services Association (professional body for registration) who are funding the project. Additionally, a new bespoke apprenticeship framework is planned which will be underpinned by the professional qualification. This will help to address the future skills deficit as long serving members of staff move towards retirement.

## **7. Considerations:**

- 7.1 In order to successfully deliver against this strategy it will be important to consider;
- Our core values (see para 2.5)
  - Accessibility (particularly in terms of public transport links and e-enabling services in the future)
  - The growth in the number of approved venues which has seen an increase of 28% over the last 5 years – and continues to grow (Appendix II provides a full list of approved venues)
  - The need to balance financial viability and customer expectations
  - Providing a limited number of low cost, value for money alternatives to the top end of the approved venue market for marriage and civil partnership
  - The aspirations of the County Council's Workstyle agenda
  - Following the formation of the Culture Communities & Business Services department, the successful move of Register Offices into libraries in Eastleigh, Havant, Gosport and Lymington. In the future any further opportunities to share services in this way will be proactively pursued (for example future integration with the Totton Hub).

- A partnership agreement with Portsmouth City Council was established in February 2011. This enables the public to register births for babies born in Portsmouth Hospital in any Hampshire Register Office. Plans are in place to extend such partnership working to other surrounding authorities over the next 2 to 3 years
- Business development opportunities – e.g. offering new services such as wedding rehearsals; commemorative certificates; and change of name deeds. There may well be other opportunities that result from national legislative change.

## 8. Back Office Frameworks

To fully embrace opportunities for further service modernisation, and ensure the continued efficiency of the overall service, the strategy proposes the following:

### 8.1 E-enabling services

- New booking system implemented 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012 which in the longer term will allow customers and trusted third parties (e.g. Funeral Directors) to book routine appointments online and receive confirmation of details via SMS text messaging. It also facilitates payment in advance to reduce 'no shows' and wasted appointment times
- New ceremony management system by end of 2013 (c£30K) to afford electronic administration and reduce back office costs; online payments for ceremonies combined with booking and resource co-ordination

### 8.2 Management Structure

The management structure has been reviewed in line with the wider changes in Registration. The final phase was completed at the end of March 2012 and brought an overall reduction in management numbers of 30% , equating to £160,000 of savings

### 8.3 Training and Technical Assessments

The high quality technical training to support the development needs of registration staff is of paramount importance if registration accuracy and data integrity is to be retained. Whilst local specialisms have been developed there remains an ongoing requirement to outsource technical skills training as required (including the need to respond to legislative changes).

The registration service in Hampshire has developed a Technical Assessment tool which has been accepted by the GRO as a national model of best practice. Technical Assessment will be a measure of progress for staff undertaking a possible national qualification which will improve career development and succession planning.

### 8.4 Ceremony Administration and Resourcing

*Administration* - this is presently supported through 3 ceremony teams in Fareham, Aldershot and Winchester. With the relocation of Winchester RO into Castle Hill during 2015/16, there is an opportunity

to centralise to a single ceremony management team, bringing the potential for some further efficiency savings. This option is only feasible if the aspiration of an electronic ceremony diary and resourcing system capable of replacing the current manual operations can be identified and procured.

*Resourcing* - in addition to the proposed centralisation of ceremony management arrangements, discussions with HR are being progressed with a view to agreeing revised contractual arrangements for the future provision of ceremonies. Key considerations are: the need for full flexibility in the way in which hours can be utilised and paid to enable us to respond to seasonal fluctuations; and the need to address health and safety issues (e.g. working time directive and out of hours working) in response to opportunities offered by legislative change, whilst ensuring business continuity for this high risk area.

## **9. Risk and Challenge**

- 9.1 Any strategy which involves re-location/re-provision of services in a different way should be subject to challenge and consultation. As part of our customer feedback systems, we identify recent service users who are willing to comment on proposals for change. We intend to widely circulate a survey to a cross section of users to canvass opinion and enable us to respond appropriately to the needs of different groups of people. Beyond this, the strategy document represents the a key part of the consultation process which also includes other key stakeholders (County Councillors, District and Borough Councils, Funeral Directors and Hospitals).
- 9.2 In thinking about the location of our services, consideration was given to using Mosaic and the Customer Insight process. It was found that, on this occasion, Mosaic does not add value due to some of the unique characteristics of the service such as:
- the need to register births, deaths and marriages is not peculiar to any socio-economic group, time of life or location and so does not lend itself to segmentation in this way
  - although it may be possible to segment some groups who are more likely to make certain registrations (i.e. older people making death registration) the registrations themselves are often done by relatives and the locations they choose are governed by other factors (e.g. where they work).
  - for ceremonies, people frequently choose locations which are not the closest to their home as other issues influence their choices.
  - service users are occasional customers linked to life events rather than repeat customers who develop preferred behaviours
- 9.3 In terms of Customer Insight for these customer groups it has been found that more reliable insight into customer preferences can be gained from:

- looking at patterns and trends in behaviour
- making best use of the understanding we have gained about the drivers of that behaviour by seeking customer feedback.  
(Methods of getting this feedback have included; customer surveys, interviews with death informants, conversations with customers in the course of delivering the service)

It is therefore these two types of Customer Insight that we have relied upon in developing this strategy.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 The service has seen an unprecedented level of change over the past 3 years. This trend is likely to continue as Registration has assumed a much higher profile nationally and is linked to key aspects of government policy including immigration and fraud (e.g. Nationality Checking Service, sham marriages and copy birth certificates) and equalities.
- 10.2 This strategy sets out a direction of travel for the service that will enable the sustained delivery of high quality customer service for the public and value for money for the County Council, including the release of assets where it is sensible and logical to do so. It also acknowledges the challenges posed by the geographical spread of the county of Hampshire. We need to secure our core business in terms of statutory service provision whilst continuing to develop income streams that improve choice for our customers and help subsidise these core services. This will ensure that the legal requirement to maintain a 'free at the point of delivery' service for birth and death registrations is sustainable.

## Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Approved Venue     | Premises licensed by the county council for the purposes of civil marriage/civil partnership                         |
| Copy certificates  | Certified copies of birth, death and marriage/civil partnership certificates   |
| CCBS               | Culture, Communities and Business Services Department  |
| GRO                | General Register Office (national governing body for registration services in England and Wales)                     |
| Hantsdirect        | Hampshire County Council's contact centre  |
| LRSA               | Local Registration Services Association  |
| Market Supplements | Regular fixed payment made to all Registration Officers in relation to provision of set number of weekend ceremonies |
| NCS                | Nationality Checking Service (similar to Passport Checking Service) for those applying to become a British citizen)  |
| SCS                | Settlement Checking Service (similar to the above for the previous stage i.e. those seeking leave to remain the UK)  |