

**HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****Decision Report**

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Member for Policy and Resources
<b>Date:</b>	25 October 2012
<b>Title:</b>	Registration Strategy Update
<b>Reference:</b>	4185
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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## **1. Executive Summary**

1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Executive Member approval for the Registration Strategy following the first phase of formal consultation on the Service's plans for the future.

1.2. The first phase of consultation focussed specifically on the following proposals:

- Relocation of Register Offices in:
  - Romsey
  - Petersfield
  - Andover
- Closure of Bishops Waltham Register Office
- Centralisation of Citizenship Ceremonies to Winchester whilst retaining a facility in Aldershot

1.2.1. A further proposal has arisen subsequent to the publication of the strategy in relation to Totton Register Office. The Workstyle project team have identified an opportunity to further improve accommodation by relocating to the proposed new south west office hub at 1 High Street, Totton. This would be subject to the approval of the Hampshire Workstyle report elsewhere on the agenda, and represents a separate recommendation outside of the Registration Strategy. Given the proximity to the new location it is not considered necessary to formally consult on this proposal (see recommendation 4.2 (f) below).

## **2. Consultation process**

2.1. This included a targeted campaign which reflected the potential local impacts of each proposal and comprised;

- Public notices and feedback forms located in all relevant Register Offices and libraries
- On-line access to the county council's consultation web portal
- Direct communication with relevant stakeholders including District, Borough and Parish councils, funeral directors, hospitals, hospices and GP surgeries

2.2. The publication of the strategy also generated some media coverage which ensured broad public awareness of the proposals.

## **3. Outcomes**

3.1. A total of 219 responses were received, the majority of which indicated support for the proposals. A comprehensive summary of outcomes is supplied in Appendices 1 (a) and 1 (b).

3.2. *Key points and considerations –*

3.2.1. A key factor for consideration when relocating a Register Office with a ceremony facility is the legal framework and personal investment related to the choice of venue by a member of the public. Such choices are made up to 2 years in advance and can often be based on very personal reasons (e.g. family member previously married in that venue).

In addition to this, once a booking has been confirmed and Notice of marriage/civil partnership given, it is not possible for the room or venue to be amended without a change to the legal process which includes statutory time restrictions in relation to notice period and residency requirements.

Any ambiguity around the future of a ceremony facility has the potential to cause substantial anxiety to any couple having booked/considering a ceremony at that venue, and poses a reputational risk to the county council.

3.2.2. While the majority supported the proposals for Petersfield and Romsey, themes from the consultation included concerns around the quality of proposed alternative buildings, particularly for the highly regarded ceremony facilities. Alternative high quality ceremony facilities are available in Alton, Winchester and Ringwood Register Offices. These offices along with a wide range of approved venues continue to provide a wide range of choice within a 20 mile radius.

3.2.3. 93% of respondents were in agreement with the proposal to relocate the Andover office and ceremony room to Beech Hurst.

3.2.4. In relation to the proposed closure of Bishops Waltham, clearly there is a desire to retain a local facility, however, notwithstanding this, 61% of respondents agreed with this proposal.

- 3.2.5. The proposal to centralise citizenship ceremonies received considerable support with a small minority seeking to retain a local and more personal choice for new citizens.
- 3.2.6. As a result of the consultation the Registration strategy has been amended and is attached at Appendix 2.

#### 4. Recommendations

- 4.1. All recommendations including proposed disposals align with the wider Workstyle strategy, and make a direct contribution to the capital receipt and revenue savings programme for the County Council.
- 4.2. It is recommended that the Executive Member for Policy and Resources approves the Registration Strategy, as set out in Appendix 2 and, in particular:
- a) Approves the relocation of Register Offices with ceremony facilities as follows;

Current location	New location	Timescale
The Old College, College Street, Petersfield	Petersfield Library 27 The Square Petersfield	October 2013
Hayter House, Hayter Gardens, Romsey	1 Market Place Romsey	August 2013
Wessex Chambers, South street, Andover	Beech Hurst Weyhill Road Andover	April - October 2013 (subject to agreement)

- b) Endorses the recommended closure in November 2012 of Bishops Waltham Register Office on the basis of utilisation levels and proximity to alternative offices in Eastleigh and Fareham (approx 8 miles).
- c) Supports the partial centralisation of group Citizenship Ceremonies to four register offices including Aldershot, Winchester, Fareham and Basingstoke.
- d) Agrees to proceed with the second phase of consultation during 2013/14 focussing on the relocation of Winchester Register Office to Castle Hill, Winchester as per the Registration strategy 2012-17.
- e) Defers consultation on the relocation of Aldershot Register Office until such time as a suitable alternative has been identified.
- f) Supports the registration service in pursuing an opportunity which has arisen to relocate Totton Register Office to improved accommodation nearby

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

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
<u>Title</u> Registration Strategy	<u>Reference</u> 3779	<u>Date</u> 13.06.12
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>		
<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:**

- 1.1. The public use the registration service on average three times in an entire lifetime i.e. not on a regular basis.
- 1.2. 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:**

- 2.1. None directly.

### **3. Climate Change:**

- 3.1. Operating in shared buildings will ensure a positive impact upon climate change.

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

<i>Executive Member &amp; Portfolio</i>	<i>Reason for Consultation</i>	<i>Date Consulted</i>	<i>Response:</i>
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**OTHER FORMAL CONSULTEES:**

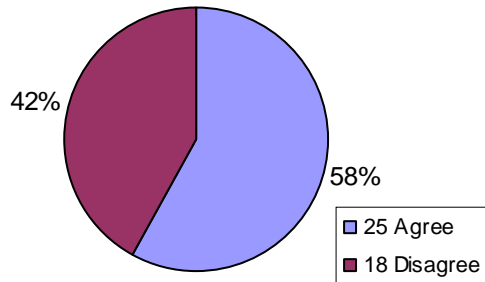
<i>Member/ Councillor</i>	<i>Reason for Consultation</i>	<i>Date Consulted</i>	<i>Response:</i>
Councillor Eric Neal	Local Member for Aldershot East		
Councillor Roger Kimber	Local Member for Aldershot East		
Councillor Peter Mason	Local Member for Bishop's Waltham		
Councillor John West	Local Members 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 Phrynnette Dickens	Local Member for Winchester Westgate		

**Other County Councillors in the Winchester district:**

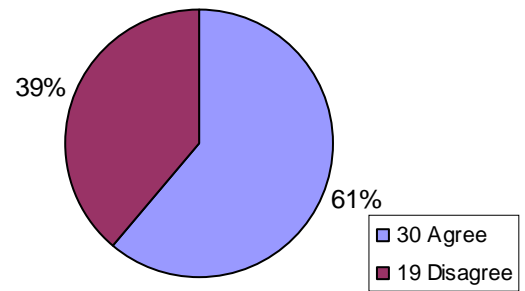
<i>Member/ Councillor</i>	<i>Reason for Consultation</i>	<i>Date Consulted</i>	<i>Response:</i>
Councillor Jackie Porter	Local Member for Itchen Valley		
Councillor Felicity Hindson	Local Member for Meon Valley		
Councillor Charlotte Bailey	Local Member for Winchester Downlands		
Councillor Patricia Stallard	Local Member for Winchester Southern Parishes		

**Consultation Feedback - Summary of Results**

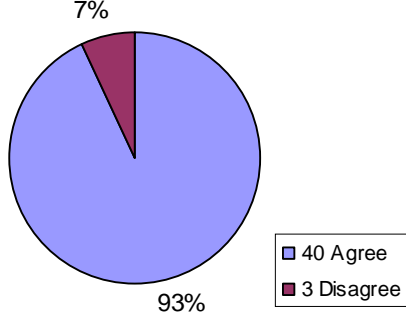
**Petersfield office relocation**



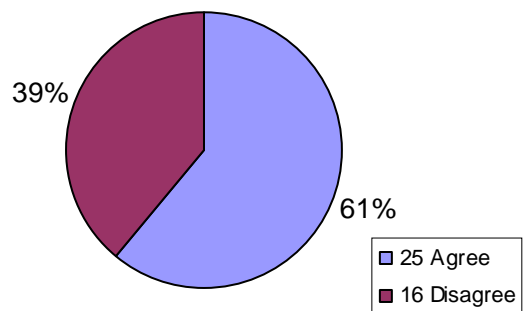
**Romsey office relocation**



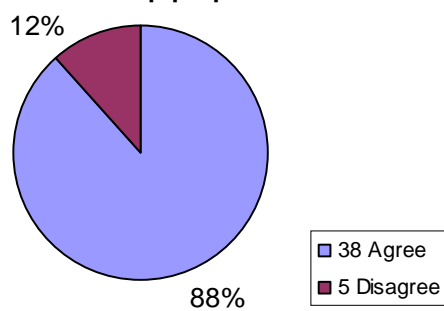
**Andover office relocation**



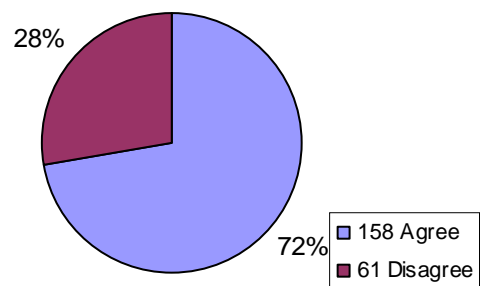
**Bishops Waltham office closure**



**Citizenship proposal**



**Overall consultation response**



## **Consultation Feedback - Summary of Comments**

### **Petersfield Office relocation**

While the majority of respondents agreed with the proposals there is clearly a sense of nostalgia and sentimental attachment in the comments which were received. Respondents commented on the lovely building, and particularly the ceremony room and beautiful grounds. It was also referred to as a quiet place to go for registrations and there were some concerns about the appropriateness of moving this service in to a library. Alternative suggestions included Festival/Town Hall and Old Police Station buildings.

### **Romsey Office relocation**

Similarly while most supported the relocation the concerns raised reflected those for Petersfield in terms of the library being a suitable venue for registration appointments and the loss of a high quality ceremony facility in this area. Respondents recognised that the potential issues of separating ceremony work from registration appointments would create an additional cost and time burden for the service in terms of staff travel.

There was no public support for the proposals to relocate to either Woodley Village Hall or King John's House. The preferred option for the majority of respondents was the Town Hall as this was considered an ideal place for ceremonies.

### **Andover Office relocation**

Overwhelming support for this option with no negative responses or suggested alternatives

### **Bishops Waltham office closure**

Over 60% of those responding supported the closure. The Parish Council have expressed their concerns regarding the proposed closure of this local facility particularly in terms of the additional travel required for local people to attend alternative offices at Eastleigh and Fareham. The public echoed the concern in relation to death registrations in particular proposing a mobile service for those who meet certain criteria or alternatively the payment of travel expenses for elderly service users.

### **Citizenship centralisation**

The majority of respondents supported the proposal to centralise Citizenship Ceremonies to Winchester, whilst retaining a facility in Aldershot. A single respondent considered local venues to be more personal and appropriate.