



## REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2ND JULY 2013

**SUBJECT: REGISTRATION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13**

**REPORT BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform members of the performance of the Registration Service in 2012/13, legislative changes and initiatives introduced to improve customer service.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Registration Service has a statutory duty to provide an annual report on performance to the General Register Office (GRO) and to publish a Service Delivery Plan. The Service Delivery Plan is accessible via the Registration pages on the Council's website. This Report sets details of service activity for the year and it is pleasing to note that all performance targets have been met or exceeded.
- 2.2 The service has adapted to changes in legislation and introduced new initiatives to improve customer service. 2012/13 was the first complete year of provision of the Tell Us Once (TUO) service, a national programme for the bereaved, and take up of the services has exceeded expectations. The Service holds copies of certificates for life events dating back to 1837 and has begun a project to digitise those records with a view to making them accessible to the public.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 This report links directly to the Registration Service Annual Service Delivery Plan but also the Bereavement Services plan and a number of Objectives under the Strategic Equality Plan.

### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 The Registration Service is responsible for Commemorating Life Events and Promoting and Celebrating Citizenship in the Community. Civil registration is based on a relationship between the Registrar General, registration officers and local authorities. The General Register Office are responsible for the legislative framework that governs the registration service nationally. The local Service establishes a permanent legal record of every birth, death, marriage and civil partnership in the County Borough, authorises and conducts civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies, administers the oath and pledge taken by new British Citizens. The Superintendent Registrar also has responsibility for the registers containing the birth, death and marriage records from 1837 to date and for the issue of certificates for legal and historic purposes from these records. In 2012/13 the Registration Service dealt with:

1542 birth events (registrations, declarations & re-registrations)  
 951 death events  
 523 marriage & civil partnership registrations  
 1259 legal notices  
 Issue of 7890 certificates

4.2 The Registration Services publishes a Service Delivery Plan on the Caerphilly Council website and submits an Annual Report to the General Register Office. Details of the performance of the Registration Service in 2012/13 against National targets set by the General Register Office are provide in the table below:

Indicator	Target	Result
All births registered within 42 days	98%	98%
All deaths registered within 5 days (except those following an inquest)	95%	95%
Incoming declarations registered within 24 hours of receipt	90%	100%
Applications for corrections and re-registrations processed within 7 working days of Registration Officer receiving General Register Office notification.	90%	100%
Certificates from entries in deposited registers issued in response to application within 5 working days	95%	100% (98% within 2 working days)
Waiting times for appointment		
(i) birth registration/declaration within 5 working days	95%	100%
(ii) still-birth registration/declaration within 2 working days	95%	100%
(iii) death registration/declaration within 2 working days	95%	100%
(iv) notices for marriage and civil partnership within 5 working days	95%	99%
Percentage of customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment time.	90%	98%
Percentage of satisfied customers evidenced from response to customer satisfaction surveys.	90%	100%

4.3 Stock and Security review

A General Register Office review of stock and security management by the Caerphilly Registration Service in January 2013, reported that the security of registration certificates is deemed paramount within the service. Registration officers are aware of the established security protocols and of the need to maintain robust filing and document retention systems. Up to date banking instructions and audit arrangements are in place. Cash handling and deposit arrangements are also appropriate. Observations and findings from the review demonstrated that the delivery and security arrangements for operational use of certificate stock are good; stock overall is being very effectively managed.

#### 4.4 Tell Us Once

2012/13 was the first complete year of provision of the Tell Us Once service, a national programme for the bereaved. The service offers bereaved families the opportunity to notify a number of local and central government departments at the same time as registering the death, thus reducing the number of separate contacts made. The service is of significant benefit to the families of the bereaved and those agencies that receive the information electronically in order to update their systems. In a Department of Work and Pensions review Caerphilly CBC have come out as one of the best performing offices in the country delivering the Tell Us Once service. They now wish to come and visit to look in detail at our delivery model in order to share our good practice with other offices.

The success of the Tell Us Once initiative in Caerphilly has exceeded local and national expectations. Tell Us Once is voluntary but 95% of bereaved people registering deaths in Caerphilly district took up the Tell Us Once service in 2012/13. Provision of the Tell Us Once service has however extended the appointment times for death registrations and increased the workload of officers within the Registration service. Caerphilly Customer First are now handling all initial phone calls and information queries for the service. Additional assistance by Customer First is being considered in areas such as electronic appointment booking systems.

#### 4.5 Sham Marriages and Civil Partnerships

The Registration Service is involved in prevention of crime nationally, working on tackling the abuse of marriage and civil partnership laws by racketeers involved in immigration fraud.

The legal provisions and reporting requirements in place have had a significant impact on the problem right across the country and resulted in a reduction in sham marriages.

#### 4.6 Forced Marriages

Registrars contribute to the recognition and reporting on forced marriages, helping prevent young women and men being forced into marriage under duress or threat, due to cultural and other influences.

#### 4.7 Fraudulent use of certificates and fictitious birth registrations

Another major issue is the fraudulent use of certificates and fictitious birth registrations. Registrars contribute to national initiatives aimed at combating the issue and use of certificates of birth, death, marriage and civil partnership that may be used in criminal and fraudulent activity and the fictitious registration and re-registrations of births.

#### 4.8 Index Digitisation Initiative

The Registration Service hold copies of certificates for life events dating back to 1837 and annually issue over 7500 certificates to members of the public and family historians from the records. Locating these can be time consuming, as officers have to search through paper indexes, many of which are fragile and require careful handling. The Service commenced a project to digitise the indexes in November 2012. It is intended to make them available for search through the Caerphilly Council website. Once completed this will improve access for the customer and reduce significantly the time taken to locate the records. The project will however take some time to complete, as there are over 600,000 index entries. The first phase of releasing parts of the index via the website should commence in June 2013, with the index to all the marriage records from 1837 to 2010 and the birth records from 1837 to 1900 in the first release.

## 4.9 Legislative Changes

In October 2012, as a result of the Protection of Freedoms Act, restrictions on the times that ceremonies can take place was removed and districts were able to set their own policies on the times that registrars will attend ceremonies. The Service consulted local venues licensed for ceremonies on their preferences and the consensus was 8am to 8pm. Ceremonies are offered within those times, but other requests are considered on an individual basis in consultation with the venue. To date, no requests have been made for ceremonies outside those times.

Changes are proposed in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill to allow same-sex couples to get married in both civil and religious ceremonies and couples who had previously entered into civil partnerships to convert their relationship into a marriage.

Changes nationally to the Death Certification Processes and the introduction of a Medical Examiner, have been delayed until April 2014 but Local Health Boards are to commence the process of appointment of Medical Examiners from April 2013.

All these changes will impact on the Registration Service. Ensuring registration officers and administrators are trained and engaged in the change processes is vital as is ensuring partners are also making the necessary provisions in a timely manner.

## 5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Registration Service impacts on all sections of the community, mainly at critical life events and is sensitive to the requirements of specific groups, particularly around different cultural customs. Particular emphasis is placed on the core services of the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.
- 5.2 The Service also has a statutory duty to administer Citizenship ceremonies and are required to be aware of issues surrounding Forced Marriages when conducting ceremonies.
- 5.3 Currently, the service is able to offer English, Welsh and British Sign Language services to the public and is the lead authority regionally in being able to offer language choice.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None directly arising from this report.

## 7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None directly arising from this report. The General Register Office has strict deadlines for core registration service functions. The introduction of the Tell Us Once service has had an impact on the time taken to register a death and will continue to be monitored.

## 8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 This report has been sent to the Consultees listed below and there are no responses that have not been reflected in the report.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That members note the contents of this report and proposed legislative changes that will impact further on service provision.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To keep members informed of the work of the Registration Service and steps taken to improve customer service.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 The Registration Service Act 1953.

Author: Della Leigh Mahony, Superintendent Registrar  
Consultees: Cllr. Dave Poole, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services  
Cllr. D.T. Davies, Chair Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny  
Cllr. E.M. Aldworth, Vice-Chair Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny  
Sandra Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive  
Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection  
Jacqui Morgan, Trading Standards & Licensing Manager  
Jonathan Jones, Democratic Service Manager  
David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language)  
Mike Eedy, Finance Manager  
Lynne Donovan, HR Services Manager, Customer Services