

Report to: **Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **9 November 2011**

By: **Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services**

Title of report: **Registration Service**

Purpose of report: **To consider progress with the service review of the Registration Service**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is asked to note the report attached, and to consider how scrutiny can play a role in engaging with the Registration Review.

1. Financial Implications

1.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

2. Background and reasons for recommendation

2.1 The attached appendix is a report of the progress of the Registration Review, which was initiated in July 2011. The Committee is asked to consider how scrutiny can play a useful role in engaging with the Registration Review.

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Local Member: All

Background Documents

None

Background

Civil registration was set up in 1837 and was concerned with registering births, marriages and deaths. Until 2008 all registration services were under the control of the General Register Office (GRO), based in Southport, near Liverpool. East Sussex was divided into four districts, each reporting directly to GRO. In recent years, the Registration Service has added a variety of non-statutory ceremonies and functions concerned with citizenship to its portfolio. However, some of the working practices have not changed in line with these developments. In 2008, responsibility for the service transferred to the County Council and the four districts became one.

The Review

As the Registration Service has not been subject to review since becoming the responsibility of the County Council, it will benefit from the opportunity to engender a culture of 'one registration district' with working practices that reflect a modern registration service. Since beginning the Review we have had the Project Initiation Document approved, visited neighbouring registration authorities, gathered information on business activity, held a Managers Away Day and secured external challenge for the review by a representative of GRO.

As part of the Review, the Registration Service has developed the following overall aims:

- to provide an exceptional, personal, caring and professional service to our customers at key moments in their lives.
- to deliver this service by staff who are polite, well-informed, highly trained and customer-focussed.
- to provide a high quality customer environment for our ceremonies and functions.
- to improve customer service and to improve customer access to that service.
- to deliver an efficient service at no cost to the local taxpayer, where income covers the cost of service delivery.

The Review covers all aspects of the Registration Service including accommodation, staffing, information technology, finance, records, marketing and partnership working.

Accommodation

Recognising the need to have accessible accommodation in the best locations to meet the needs of our customers, we have begun to review our accommodation portfolio. The leases on three of our four offices expire in 2012 – 2013. We are developing a business case to see how we can best utilise space in Southover Grange in Lewes and consideration is being given to whether the Registration Service can be part of the upgrade of Hastings Library. Discussions are underway with the Property Section about premises in Crowborough. We have ceased the lease on the office in Uckfield Civic Centre and moved the outstation to Uckfield Library, which has recognised cost savings. We will explore the further use of outstations in existing ESCC accommodation (for example libraries) in rural areas, particularly where there are poor transport links.

Staffing

Registration Service staff are professional practitioners, who have to undertake a number of administrative roles. We are reviewing the administrative function of the service with a view to developing administrative support. We will review working practices and re-design them for a modern service, introducing team working and shared responsibility. We will identify and remove any artificial barriers that inhibit customers accessing our services and those that exist between offices and between our district and neighbouring registration districts.

Information Technology

Each Registration Office has its own telephony system and, having received complaints from customers who cannot get through to offices, we are introducing to the Service the NGN phone system, which is used throughout the authority. This will link up offices, enabling staff in one office to answer calls for another when their lines are busy, improving customer service. The system has been installed in Eastbourne, is about to go live in Hastings and will be introduced in both Crowborough and Lewes. We are working with colleagues in ICT to review our existing IT systems and to help move us from paper-based systems to electronic. As part of the Review we will evaluate the best available technologies to provide increased choice of access channels for the customer.

Finance

We aim to be self financing by accessing un-tapped areas of income generation and have asked staff to suggest new ceremonies or other ways to generate income. We are beginning to review our pricing model to ensure that it is fair, suitable and justifiable and examining business processes, to ensure that we have lean, efficient working practices. We will analyse income and expenditure and identify where we are not maximising potential to create a surplus.

Records

The Registration Service holds registers from 1837 in four separate offices. We are exploring with the Archives and Records Service the potential to centralise our records in one location in suitable temperature and humidity conditions. We will also explore the digitization of indexes with a view to publishing them on-line.

Marketing

Under registration legislation, births and deaths have to be registered in the registration district in which they occur. However, couples can choose to marry anywhere in the country and so there is a key opportunity for business development by attracting marriages and civil partnerships to East Sussex from both this country and abroad. We are evaluating our existing advertising strategy, reviewing our web presence with a view to creating dynamic webpages and identifying other partners (for example, Tourism South East) with whom we might work to promote East Sussex as the ideal location for ceremonies.

Partnership working

We are negotiating with our neighbouring authorities to see how we can assist each other with cross- registration district boundary working. For example, we are in discussions with Brighton & Hove about registering births for East Sussex residents that take place in Brighton. This offers improved customer service, which will be the key goal in all our discussions with partners.

Timescales

We are circulating the first draft of the Review to Managers and will present an interim report to the Board by December 2011, followed by consultation, with a Final Report submitted by February 2012. We aim to start implementing some of the recommended changes by March 2012.

**Registration Service
Activity 2010 - 2011**

	Crowborough	Eastbourne	Hastings	Lewes	Total
Birth registrations	458	2064	1996	125	4643
Outgoing birth declarations	202	47	23	170	442
Death registrations	530	2353	2231	749	5863
Outgoing death declarations	16	19	13	5	53
Notice of Marriage	434	1066	1019	700	3219
Notices of Civil Partnership	8	45	29	36	118
Register Office Marriage (Eastbourne)	0	1	0	0	1
Decommissioned Registration Office Marriages	78	366	222	314	980
Licensed venues - Weddings	341	251	277	119	988
Civil Partnership Register Office Ceremonies (Eastbourne_	0	1	0	0	1
Civil Partnership Decommissioned Registration Office Ceremonies	0	17	5	16	38
Licensed venues - Civil Partnerships	3	5	10	3	21
Superintendent Registrar Certificates	332	1965	2706	411	5414
Additional Registrar and Registrar of Births and Deaths Certificates	5151	17041	15489	5676	43357
Nationality Doc Checks	151	270	239	71	731
Private Ceremonies	3	29	24	2	58
Adults @ group Ceremony	41	317	119	58	535
Civil Funerals	43	6	9	34	92
Naming Ceremonies	2	9	7	5	23
Commitment Ceremonies	0	0	0	2	2
Renewal of Vows	4	8	10	6	28
Change of Name Deed	18	60	72	13	163
SR Certificates - certificates issued from registers that are 'closed' - certificates bought for personal or family history reasons (no registration associated with them)					
AR & RBD Certificates - certificates bought when the event is registered					