

CAMBRIDGESHIRE REGISTRATION SERVICE REVIEW – INTERIM REPORT

To: **Communities and Partnership Committee**

Meeting Date: **12 March 2020**

From: **Adrian Chapman, Service Director for Community and Safety**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To provide the Committee with an interim report on the review of the Registration Service.**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to:**

- a) Note the progress that has been made to date;**
- b) Comment on and agree the ‘next steps’ set out in this report; and**
- c) Provide any further feedback, or lines of enquiry, that will support the review process**

| <i>Officer contact:</i> | <i>Member contacts:</i> |
|---|---|
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** An introductory annual report on the Registration Service was presented to this Committee on 10 October 2019. The minutes of that meeting record that 'The Service Director of Community and Safety informed Members that it had been agreed to establish a small project team, led by himself and the Chairman, to carry out a review and examine all parts of the service, which would lead to a report that would come back to the Committee within the next year.'
- 1.2** The minutes of the November 2019 meeting of this Committee reported that: 'Members were informed that the forecast pressure on the Coroners Service, as well as the forecast over-recovery of income in the Registration Service, had led to reviews being carried out on both services ... The Committee would receive reports on the reviews at its meeting on 13th February 2020' (now deferred to March).
- 1.3** This report is an interim update on this Review, presenting the themes that have been identified, with progress updates and recommendations for next steps. The next report of the Review is currently scheduled for the May 2020 meeting of this Committee.

2. MAIN ISSUES

2.1 Staffing

- 2.1.1** Consultation on a staffing restructure of the Service took place during January and February 2020, with a view to putting in place the new structure from April. The purpose of the restructure is to ensure sufficient capacity throughout the service. The new structure seeks to provide a range of benefits including:
- More career development opportunities and capacity for staff training, meetings and communication
 - More capacity to engage and develop the relationships with venues approved for ceremonies
 - Improved pay structure for staff, in order to improve recruitment and retention
- Throughout the consultation phase, we have received a range of highly valued feedback from the staff team, which is now being considered.
- 2.1.2** The restructure is within the available resources of the service.
- 2.1.3** Next steps:
- Complete recruitment and implement the new structure
 - Ensure the anticipated benefits of the restructure are realised and monitored
 - Create a training and development plan for all Registration staff
 - Review the Ceremony Officer role

2.2 Accommodation

- 2.2.1** Since the previous report in October, the County's two million records of births, marriages and deaths have been moved from Lawrence Court (Huntingdon) and Castle Lodge (Cambridge) into the new Cambridgeshire Archives building in Ely. This is the first time since civil registration began in 1837 that all the county's registration

records have been centralised, and in archival standard storage which will better ensure preservation for the future. Our copy certificate service is now centralised and delivered from this base. The Service is also now successfully operating birth / notice / death appointments and ceremonies from the new building in Ely, which offers dedicated parking for customers.

2.2.2 In mid-February 2020, a planning application was submitted for the conversion of the Council's Roger Ascham site (currently used as the Library Service Stock and Distribution Centre) to become the new Cambridgeshire Register Office. The Registration Service is due to move out of Castle Lodge on the Shire Hall site as part of the Cambs 2020 project. The Roger Ascham building lends itself very well for registration use with the right amount of space and layout for both notice taking and ceremonies, along with dedicated parking and garden space. If planning is approved, the building will also enable some improvements to the current provision, including the ability to offer a separate area for the registration of still births and child deaths. At present ceremony bookings at Castle Lodge can be taken only until the end of February 2021, which is starting to impact on service reputation, until such time as we can confirm the new location.

2.2.3 Next steps:

- Secure and finalise plans for the relocation of the Cambridgeshire Register Office by June 2020 (this will allow bookings to be opened for ceremonies from late spring 2021 onwards for the new site)
- Relocate by the end of Spring 2021

2.3 Performance

2.3.1 Each year all Registration services are required to submit a return to the General Register Office (GRO), reporting performance against a range of national key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to the timeliness of Birth and Death registrations, the availability of appointments, customer engagement, public protection and counter fraud measures, statutory and operational service delivery standards, and progress against service plans. In addition there is regular national benchmarking of performance against KPIs which is shared with services on a confidential basis to enable identification of strengths and weaknesses and to inform improvement plans.

2.3.2 In almost all areas the Service performs at or above the target level, and at or above regional and national averages, which is very pleasing. The notable exception to this is performance in relation to the timely registration of deaths within the statutory 5 calendar days for non-Coronial cases and 7 calendar days for Coroner cases that do not require an inquest. This failure is common to nearly all registration services across England and Wales (many of which have a lower score than Cambridgeshire for non-Coronial cases) and reflects how testing this KPI is, as well as reliance on third parties such as GPs, hospitals, medical examiners and coroners, to complete their part of the process as required.

2.3.3 For the 2018/19 annual return, the Service submitted a Performance Improvement Plan to help address and improve this area of the work, and it continues to work in partnership with other agencies to highlight the requirements, the current level of performance, and what can be done to improve. KPIs show that the Service offers full

availability of appointments, and it strives to be flexible where possible to ensure that customers can register deaths in a timely way. The challenges faced are primarily related to how soon after death a medical certificate of cause of death is completed by a doctor, and to the legal requirements required for all cases referred to the Coroner Service.

- 2.3.4 Despite overall good performance, we will take the opportunity through this review to ensure all parts of the Registration system are working effectively and well together. For example, response times from GP's and links to the Coroner service. Given the number of services involved, internal and external to the Council, this lends itself to a Think Communities-style 'deal' to be agreed between partners, so that their individual and collective responsibilities can be clearly understood, along with the implications if they are not met.
- 2.3.5 Critically, we also need to develop more meaningful ways of capturing and responding to the views of our customers, and their experiences when dealing with us. It is vital that all of our customers – members of the public, Approved Venues, partners – receive a first class service, especially so given the nature of some of the sensitivities involved. We will develop local arrangements for harnessing more qualitative feedback from customers as part of the review.
- 2.3.6 Next steps:
- Prepare for the next inspection by GRO (due within the next 12 months) so that the Service is fully 'inspection ready'. This will include ensuring that everything possible continues to be done to improve performance around timely death registrations
 - Review the end-to-end Registration system, and develop a 'deal' if necessary
 - Develop local performance targets with partners in relation to death registrations
 - Consider new and alternative ways of engaging with customers of the service and measuring satisfaction levels

2.4 Finance

- 2.4.1 As reported in the monthly finance monitoring reports a significant increase in income has been received this year due to the change in charges for certificates, and historically the service has always met its financial targets year on year.
- 2.4.2 However, whilst we recognise the need to rebalance the focus on efficiency with a greater focus on staff capacity and customer satisfaction going forward, which may reduce this surplus, there is also scope to explore again commercialisation of the service with further potential for discretionary services that will provide more choice and value to customers, as well as a more mutually beneficial relationship with approved venues.
- 2.4.3 Next steps:
- Identify, consider and evaluate potential new commercial services and income streams, drawing on best practice from elsewhere and in partnership with Approved Venues.

2.5 Service Development and Innovation

- 2.5.1 The Service has a good track record of innovation in service delivery, and is among the top Registration Services in this regard - including offering online bookings. The most recent change was opening online customer bookings for ceremonies, and associated notices. These were launched on 16 December 2019, and have already proved popular with 480 already completed (up to 9th February) since that time. The GRO regularly recommends other services to visit Cambridgeshire and we host a number of visits every year – from London boroughs to other large Shire counties.
- 2.5.2 This Review, and the increase in management capacity within the Service following the restructure, provides an ideal opportunity to consider other service innovation in place elsewhere and to see where further improvements could be made.
- 2.5.3 Registration provides a unique opportunity to engage with people from all walks of life, often at times when they may be feeling most vulnerable (following the birth of a child or death of a loved one). Before this review began, thinking had already started about how the Registration Service can align to the Think Communities approach, following a recent meeting with internal social care and public health colleagues to consider how this unique contact could be harnessed to signpost people to early help and support. Similarly, closer links could be developed with Community Safety through the Counter Fraud and Public Protection work of the Service on behalf of the Home Office. Citizenship ceremonies also provide a great opportunity to engage with new Cambridgeshire British citizens and their families, although there is potentially more we can do to make this engagement meaningful and helpful.
- 2.5.4 In addition and as referenced briefly above, we believe there is more we can and should do to support and work with Approved Venues. This will support the economic development of our county, but also improve and enhance our offer to customers.
- 2.5.5 Next steps:
- Once the new structure is in place, develop an action plan for aligning Registration to Think Communities
 - Arrange visits to other Registration services for the Service Director, Chair of Committee and newly appointed managers
 - Organise and run a series of engagement activities with Approved Venues, to better understand how we can work more collaboratively
 - Review the current model for Citizenship Ceremonies to ensure we are maximising opportunities to engage with participants and providing relevant and helpful information

2.6 Summary

- 2.6.1 As described above, the Registration Service is delivering good quality services to our citizens, although, as with any service, we recognise there is potential to do more. The foundations to achieving this are being set, through for example the restructure of the staff team. The review will therefore continue to focus on the key areas summarised in this report, and will further update Committee in the coming months.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

The Service impacts directly on the well-being and quality of life for all customers and their families, the majority of whom are Cambridgeshire residents, by ensuring that appointments are available in a timely manner and carried out in accordance with legislation:

- the recently bereaved are able to complete the death registration process thereby facilitating funerals and signposting to relevant services – important as part of the grieving process. Completing Tell Us Once stage 1 makes the process of notifying relevant agencies easier for the recently bereaved
- babies are registered, giving them a legal identity and families access to a range of services e.g. childcare, tax benefits, healthcare
- completion of the legal preliminaries, and ceremonies where relevant, for marriage and civil partnerships – important occasions for the couple and their wider circle, with legal changes and financial benefits as a direct result

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

The provision of timely registration services has a direct positive benefit on the suppliers of goods and services across Cambridgeshire e.g. funeral directors (where delays in issuing paperwork would create capacity issues for body storage and delays to funerals), and wedding suppliers (from Approved Venues to florists, caterers and bridal shops).

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's Children

Babies are registered, giving them a legal identity and families access to a range of services e.g. childcare, tax benefits, healthcare. The confirmation e-mail for all birth registration appointments also provides details of the Library Service offer.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

The staff restructure is essential to ensure the appropriate level of resources for future service delivery, and in improving the recruitment and retention of staff. Although it will cost a modest amount more, this is well within the additional income being achieved by the Service.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications in this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide the necessary resources to deliver the Registration Service, with any discretionary services generating additional income. This is also a high profile service and therefore carries both financial and reputational

risk implications. Any changes to the service delivery model requires formal approval by GRO.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications in this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

Local engagement and communication with key stakeholders is being carried out in relation to the proposed relocation of the Cambridgeshire Register Office. This has included drop-in events, plans and FAQs displayed in the local library, and social media. Officers have also offered to meet with stakeholder groups on request.

Staff and union consultation and engagement has been carried out in relation to the staff restructure, as well as discussion with the GRO.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Local members have been engaged and communicated with in relation to the proposed relocation of the Cambridgeshire Register Office. The Chair of this Committee is involved in steering the Service Review group.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The Service is looking to explore further benefits that could be realised from the service and other CCC services working more closely together, notably Public Health.

| Implications | Officer Clearance |
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| Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? | Yes Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade |
| | |
| Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Monitoring Officer? | Yes Name of Officer: Gus de Silva |
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| Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Monitoring Officer? | Yes Name of Monitoring Officer: Fiona McMillan |
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| Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? | Yes Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman |
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| Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? | Yes Name of Officer: Eleanor Bell |
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| Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? | Yes Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman |
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| Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health | Yes Name of Officer: Liz Robin |

| Source Documents | Location |
|--|---|
| Report and Minutes of the Communities and Partnership Committee meeting on 10th October 2019 | https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1039/Committee/44/Default.aspx |