

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee**

**Cabinet**

**Date of Committee**

**8 September 2005**

**Report Title**

**Modernisation and development of Registration Services in Warwickshire**

**Summary**

This report summarises the impact of recent scheme changes in Warwickshire, the development of non-statutory services, and civil partnership services to be offered from December 2005.

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?**

No.

**Background papers**

Report to Cabinet 22.7.04: Proposal to Implement a Scheme Change for Warwickshire Registration Service

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-**

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members

Cllrs. Atkinson, Booth and McCarney

Cabinet Member

Cllrs. Cockburn, Farnell and Stevens

Chief Executive

Legal

Greta Needham

Finance

Other Chief Officers

District Councils

Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals  Funeral Directors

**FINAL DECISION**

**SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:**

Details to be specified

Further consideration by  
this Committee

To Council

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation

**Cabinet – 8 September 2005**

**Modernisation and development of Registration Services  
in Warwickshire**

**Report of the County Solicitor and Asst. Chief Executive**

**Recommendations**

- (1) That Cabinet note the impact of the Registration Service Scheme change in May 2005.
- (2) That Cabinet note and approve the plans for the introduction of Civil Partnerships in December 2005.
- (3) That Cabinet note and approve the plans to extend the range of non-statutory services offered by Registration Services in Warwickshire

**1.0 Background**

Registration Services in Warwickshire provides the statutory function of registering births, deaths and marriages in the County, and in addition, provides citizenship ceremonies for people awarded British citizenship by the Home Office, copy certificates, and a range of non-statutory services, such as naming of babies and children, and renewal of marriage vows.

**2.0 Scheme Change May 2005**

- 2.1 On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2005, Registration Service was re-organised from 5 Districts to 3, enabling a more accessible service to the public and greater flexibility of staff deployment across merged Districts in the north and south of the county. The Headquarters of the new Districts, at Nuneaton, Rugby and Warwick are now the key contact point for the service in their respective Districts.
- 2.2 Further developments in the organisation of the Service are anticipated in the future, with work being undertaken to enable Warwickshire County Council's Customer Contact Centre to be the first point of contact for the Service during 2006/7, and a greater access to the service via the County Council's website, in line with the Government's e-government agenda.
- 2.3 Outstations at Alcester, Atherstone, Bedworth, Coleshill, Shipston, Southam and Stratford upon Avon, provide access to Registration Service through an appointment booking service, and this will continue. However, the Service will be moving to a system of booking appointments at outstations via the Service Headquarters in Warwick and Nuneaton during 2005/6 (and via the Contact Centre and website when these developments are implemented in 2006/7), to

enable a more cost-effective use of staff time. "Opening hours" for the outstations in Alcester, Bedworth, Coleshill, Shipston and Southam will cease to be published once these systems are up and running, and they will operate in response to demand via the booking system.

### **3.0 Civil Partnership**

- 3.1 Registration Services are also preparing for the introduction of Civil Partnerships from 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005, in accordance with the Civil Partnership Act 2004. Same-sex couples will be able to form legal partnerships from this date in the County at any Register Office or Authorised premise currently approved for marriages. In line with our equalities policy, couples forming civil partnerships will be offered ceremonies as part of the creation of their legal partnerships in a similar way to the marriage ceremony currently offered by Registration Services. The County's Service has recently been inspected by the Registrar General's Office and is on course to offer this new service on the due date.
- 3.2 Current indications are that there are unlikely to be any resource implications, given that we have 27 initial bookings, which is equivalent to 1% of the total marriages performed during last year. Registration Services have always employed staff on an ad hoc basis to deal with the actual levels of demand for marriages, and supporting this additional activity should present no problems.

### **4.0 Non-statutory celebrations**

- 4.1 In addition to the current range of statutory functions performed by Registration Services (births, deaths, marriages, citizenship), the Service also offers some celebratory, non-statutory services, such as child naming and renewal of marriage vow ceremonies. These attract fees which help increase the Service's cost recovery.
- 4.2 Warwickshire's Registration Service is considering the introduction of a new, non-statutory service, alongside the two currently offered. Civil funerals have been successfully introduced by a number of other local Authorities, and provide an additional service for residents where the option of a traditional funeral may not, for personal or other reasons, be felt appropriate.
- 4.3 The introduction of this new service will require some investment by Registration Service, in training staff to conduct civil funerals, and in marketing to potential clients. We do not intend to introduce the civil funeral service until 2006/7, allowing time for planning, preparation and resource allocation.
- 4.4 A detailed background report of the Registration Service in Warwickshire is attached as an appendix.

DAVID CARTER  
County Solicitor & Asst Chief  
Executive  
Shire Hall  
Warwick

4 August  
2005

# Modernisation and development of Registration Services in Warwickshire

## Introduction

### Background

Much of the day to day function of the Service has remained essentially the same for many years, with almost all activity being carried out through personal contact between Warwickshire's Registration Services staff and clients. In 2003 the Government proposed a modernisation agenda intended to enable a wider range of access to Registration Services in the UK, through centralised internet or telephone accessible databases. The Regulatory Reform Order drawn up by the Government to put these changes into effect has now been withdrawn, but the move to modernise has been generally welcomed by the Registrar General's Office and by the Local Authorities charged with the responsibility for running local Registration Services.

### Scheme change May 2005

In common with most shire-based Local Authorities in the UK, Warwickshire's Registration Service was organised into 5 Districts, roughly co-terminus with the District Council boundaries. In May 2005, however, we agreed a Scheme Change with the Registrar General's office, to reduce the number of Registration Districts to 3. The aim of the Scheme change was partly to increase the flexibility of our service provision to clients and partly to develop more standardised locality management of the service, putting the Service in a better position to adapt to the modernisation agenda. Members received a detailed report to Cabinet in July 2004.

### Civil Partnerships

Civil partnerships become lawful on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005, and the Registration Service is currently preparing for the provision of this new service, in accordance with the guidance issued by the Registrar General's Office. Our state of preparedness for civil partnerships and for a change to the way in which registration data is sent to the Registrar General's Office (web-based data entry) has been the subject of a satisfactory Inspection report from the Registrar General's Office in July 2005.

### Non-statutory services

In addition to statutory services, Registration Services provides a range of non-statutory celebrations, e.g. naming and renewal of vows ceremonies. The Service is considering extending the range of services offered to include civil funerals, providing greater choice for local residents, from 2006/7.

## **1. Impact of Scheme change May 2005**

On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2005, Warwickshire Registration Services re-organised from 5 into 3 Districts:

**Warwickshire North** (combining the previous Nuneaton & Bedworth and North Warwickshire Districts)

**Warwickshire East** (Rugby District)

**Warwickshire South** (combining the previous Mid- and South-Warwickshire Districts)

Under current UK Registration rules, notices of marriage may only be given in the District in which the person(s) intending to marry reside. Births and deaths may only be registered in the District in which the birth or death actually occurred. With births in hospital, for instance, now concentrated largely in only 2 areas of the County (Nuneaton and Warwick), these restrictions resulted not only in a certain amount of inconvenience for residents, but also in an increased level of paperwork, with declarations of birth and death made in some Districts being passed to the relevant District for the event itself.

The combining of each of the 2 Districts in the north and south of the County has enabled a far higher number of direct birth and death registrations to be made in Register Offices local to people's residence, and also gives a choice of Register Offices in which marriage notices may be given. In the first quarter since the Scheme Change, the number of declarations of birth and death being passed from one Register Office to another has dropped by approx. 15%.

The scheme change has resulted in a greater concentration of the administration function for the service in the headquarters of the new Districts:

- Nuneaton Register Office for Warwickshire North
- Rugby Register Office for Warwickshire East
- Warwick Register Office for Warwickshire South

Opening hours for these Register Offices has been increased, providing a greater level of service for clients. The Superintendent Registrars based at these offices have accepted new posts, of District Manager/Superintendent Registrar, strengthening the management support for the Service as a whole.

Internally, the combining of Districts has enabled a greater flexibility in the deployment of staff within the Service, by increasing the boundaries in which staff can be deployed and developing the full range of expertise. Our aim is to ensure that our Service provision is both as responsive to the needs of our clients as possible and at the same time cost-effective.

### **Further organisational developments following Scheme Change**

#### **Out-stations**

In addition to the main Register Offices at Nuneaton, Rugby, Warwick and Leamington Spa the Registration Service is delivered through outstations at:

- Atherstone

- Alcester
- Bedworth
- Coleshill
- Shipston
- Southam
- Stratford upon Avon

Service at these outstations has been by pre-booked appointment only for some time, but each of the outstations currently has their opening hours published. To facilitate the most flexible and effective use of staff time, the Service proposes to publish opening hours only for the main Register Offices and the outstations at Atherstone and Stratford upon Avon.

The level of service in terms of the number and availability of appointments at outstations will be maintained at its current level, but it will mean that staff will be able to return to their main office to work when they have no appointments, rather than having to stay on at the outstations until the end of the currently publicised opening times.

Outstations have far fewer facilities than the main Register Offices, and staff are often only able to undertake a limited range of work there. Enabling them to spend time not needed for outstation appointments at their main Register Offices will help with workload management.

### **Access for clients**

Registration Services staff are currently working with the Customer Contact Centre team and CAMS on developing two new ways for clients to access the Service more effectively:

- a) During 2006/7 it is anticipated that all calls to Registration Services will in the first instance, be routed through the Customer Contact Centre. The aim will be to cut down on time spent by Registration Service staff on routine enquiries (such as straightforward enquiries about booking appointments, obtaining copy birth certificates, etc.), and also by having a central number to call, help clients who may be unsure which Register Office to contact.
- b) CAMS and Registration Service staff are working on developing a greater level of access to the Service via the County Council's website. At present, the Registration Service pages on the website provide detailed information about the services offered, location of Register Offices, contact details, copy certificate application forms etc. Appointment booking direct via the website is currently not available. We aim to introduce this facility during 2006/7, saving Registrars' time and providing greater access to the public, in line with the Government's e-government agenda.

## **2. Civil Partnerships**

The Civil Partnership Act 2004, which allows same-sex couples to register their partnership legally, received Royal Assent on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004. The provisions of the Act will be implemented on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005 and from that date, those wishing to enter into a same-sex civil partnership will be able to give

notice to do so. This will allow the first civil partnerships to be formed on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2005.

In accordance with guidance issued by the Registrar General's Office, Warwickshire Registration Services is in the process of preparing for the introduction of civil partnerships in December 2005.

- Registrar General's Office have been notified that the Registration Services Manager is the responsible officer for the introduction of this new service
- Authorised premises have been notified that they will be deemed to be licenced both for marriages and for civil partnerships from 5<sup>th</sup> December.
- Registration Service staff who may officiate at civil partnerships have been identified
- Nuneaton Register Office has been identified as the office where civil partnership notices are to be displayed (only one Register Office per authority is required)
- Provisional bookings have been made with 27 couples who have expressed an interest in forming civil partnerships
- Booked places on Regional training events taking place during October 2005

Detailed guidance on the form of the ceremonies, fees to be charged and technicalities of registering partnerships are yet to be issued by the Registrar General.

### **3. Non statutory ceremonies**

In addition to the statutory services of birth, death, marriage registration and citizenship, the Service also offers two celebratory, non-statutory ceremonies:

- Naming ceremonies for children
- Renewal of marriage vows

In addition to the 2 celebratory services above, Registration Services is considering the introduction of a new non-statutory service, civil funerals. This service has been successfully introduced by a number of local authorities, and early soundings indicate that there is a demand for this alternative to funerals traditionally conducted by clergy.

The introduction of this new service will require careful consideration and planning. Staff will need to be trained in undertaking preparatory work and the conducting of funerals, and marketing material prepared. We do not therefore envisage introducing this new service until 2006/7.

We will obviously be consulting with a number of relevant agencies and individuals on the introduction of this new service, for instance, District Council Bereavement Services, Funeral Directors and denominational Authorised Persons (e.g. vicars, ministers). Registration Services already works closely with these agencies and individuals through our death registration service.