

**SUBJECT: Monmouthshire Registration Service 2021/22
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

MEETING: Performance & Oversight Select Committee

DATE: 17th January 2023

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 Scrutiny of the Registration Service and its performance during the 2021/22 year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 To consider and comment on the content of this report. The report serves to outline the services provided by the Registration Service, provided in Appendix One, describes current performance and highlights future challenges.

2.2 An annual performance report, to be presented to this Committee in future years. In this way, Members can assess performance over time for this crucial element of the Authority's work. Ideally the annual report would come to Committee earlier in the year, for example, June 2023 to receive and scrutinise the 2022/23 performance of the team.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 To maintain a high level of customer satisfaction for our residents whilst managing and responding to public demand and providing an excellent, value-for-money service.

4. PERFORMANCE DURING 2021/22:

4.1 The General Register Office (GRO) sets targets and key performance indicators on statutory time frames and customer service priorities. Each month GRO publishes the performance data for each District on our system so we can monitor our own performance and compare it to similar districts and nationally. Any District that is perceived to be failing to meet the standards will have meetings with their Compliance Officer to look at ways to improve performance. We have had two meetings with our Compliance Officer this year to discuss Monmouthshire's approach to pandemic recovery and to highlight and discuss legislative changes which are in the pipeline. These meetings have been productive with no performance issues causing concern. It is recognised the pandemic had an adverse effect on overall performance, but Monmouthshire District performed well in very difficult circumstances. The table below summarises 2021/22 performance –

Type of appointment	Total for year 2021-2022	% within statutory time-frame	Last year's figures for comparison
Births (births registered for another district – not in KPI)	704 (77 for another district)	78% (below target of 98%)	1308 total (49% within target)
Deaths	1104 (796 within criteria for KPI)	77% (below target of 90%)	1330 (84% within target)
Still-births	0	N/A	4
Register Office & Approved Premises Marriages (all marriages registered in Monmouthshire)	486 (602 including all church/religious building weddings)	N/A	137
Civil Partnerships	13	N/A	20
Notices of marriage/Civil Partnerships	874	N/A	289
New British citizens	31	N/A	19
Customers seen within 10 mins of appointment/arrival time	All customers	100%	100%
Appts offered within time-frame guidelines	All types	100%	100%

Marriages: 486 registered between 36 approved premises and the register office.

Births taking place within Monmouthshire have now dropped significantly, particularly during the pandemic there were times when the maternity unit closed temporarily due to staff shortages across Gwent which meant that staff were moved to the Grange. A figure for birth registrations completed for other Districts has been included to reflect our partnership working across Gwent/Aneurin Health Board region.

Also included is the total number of marriages registered within Monmouthshire. Since the change from registers to the schedule (or marriage document) system, all marriages must be registered on the national system, whether they are religious or civil, so couples no longer receive their marriage (or civil partnership) certificate on the day of their ceremony. Each schedule or marriage document must be checked and individually registered on the system before a certificate can be issued. Over the summer, due to the high number of ceremonies, the service struggled to register ceremonies within the 7 day target set by the General Register Office. This will be monitored more closely going forward to ensure sufficient time is allocated to staff to manage this task.

- 4.2 Customer feedback – the digital solution has been delayed, unfortunately, because of other pressures within the digital team, so we are not formally receiving feedback. Traditionally feedback has been excellent, with our customers being very grateful for the efficient and compassionate service they receive. A couple of examples of positive feedback are as follows –

'We just wanted to say a big thank you for all being so lovely in the run up to and on our wedding day. You helped to make it special.' Thank you card, November 2021.

*'I called this morning to convey our appreciation for all your help with organising the paperwork for the late *****. Mr ***** is most grateful, along with the family. Thank you again.'* By email, March 2022.

5. CHALLENGES/FUTURE PROOFING:

- 5.1 Partnership working continues across Gwent for birth registrations. Although we had hoped to begin discussions regarding extending this to include death registrations, due to the ongoing pressures on the service it has been impossible to do so up to this point. The hope is that we can begin to plan how this will work over the winter when the ceremony programme is lighter.
- 5.2 The role of Medical Examiner and Medical Examiner Officers has been continuing to roll out nationally. Although they have started to scrutinise deaths elsewhere in Aneurin Bevan they have not as yet started in Monmouthshire. The scheme will become statutory in due course but the only information we have so far is that it will be from April 2023.
- 5.3 There have been several legislative changes for ceremonies since the last report to Members. Marriage registers became obsolete and we moved to a schedule system, plus outdoor ceremonies (in the grounds of licensed venues) have now become legal. All Register Offices also became 'designated' register offices, meaning that notices for marriage or civil partnerships for residents of any nationality must be taken within District. It has been a very pressured time, adapting to the new legislation and undergoing training to ensure that we understood and were prepared for the changes.
- 5.4 We have to be very flexible, to meet the demand for registration appointments, which can change on an almost daily basis. The biggest challenge within Registration is to keep on top of the constant developments in legislation and changes in the local environment.

6. REASONS

- 6.1 It is good practice to report on performance internally to a scrutiny committee. The Registration Service is governed nationally by the General Register Office, which should provide Members with further assurance of good governance.

7. CONSULTEES:

Public Protection service managers
Chief Officer, Social Care, Safeguarding & Health

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

9. AUTHORS:

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Appendix 1:

Register office remit and purpose

1.1 Civil registration has been mandatory in the UK since 1837. Initially Registration Officers were employed by our Head Office, the General Register Office but that changed in 2007 and we are now employed by the Local Authority. Monmouthshire became the District that it is now for the purposes of registration in 1996 as part of the Local Government restructure, prior to that it was Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow and was occasionally partly in England. Boundaries historically have changed regularly which has often resulted in registers moving around between Offices, and Churches and Hospitals suddenly reporting to a different area. We are the custodians of the records of all Births, Deaths and Marriages which have taken place in Monmouthshire since 1837. They are all stored and safeguarded within our strong room.

1.2 The Registration Service currently sits within Public Protection, under Social Care and Health and this fits well with our remit, which has expanded over the years to become more customer focussed, and to take on additional duties on behalf of the Home Office, for example reporting possible sham marriages, vulnerable persons within the community, fraudulent applications for the issue of certificates, and sending statistical information to the Office for National Statistics about births and mortality. All of this information allows the Council to make informed decisions about priorities for the future, be it school provision, or targeting specific health issues in specific areas, which in turn allows the council to contribute directly to the well-being goals in Wales.

1.3 Each year we prepare an annual report to GRO and a Seasonal Variance Plan as well as our Monmouthshire Service Improvement Plan and Business Continuity Report.

2. The purpose of the Registration Service is as follows:

- The registration of all births, deaths and stillbirths occurring within the County
- Taking notices of intended marriages and civil partnerships from persons resident within the County
- Conducting and registering all civil marriages and civil partnerships (including conversions from civil partnership to marriage) taking place in any venue registered or licensed for the purpose, including prisons and hospitals or private residences in certain circumstances
- Registering religious marriages where required
- Conducting citizenship ceremonies for Monmouthshire residents who make successful applications for British nationality
- Safe custody of all historic records of births, deaths, civil partnerships and marriages dating back to 1837 and issue of certified copies of these records on demand
- Inspection and registration of new venues for marriage and civil partnership
- Giving assistance and advice to all customers on all aspects of registration, citizenship and nationality
- Providing data for vital work on population statistics and medical research
- Management of data; including protection of both physical and electronic data and assisting with public protection and counter fraud by reporting suspicious applications and sham marriages as well as suspicions about immigration abuse and other crimes
- Safeguarding secure stock and accounting for fees
- Promote and contribute to the Home Office priorities

3. Premises & staffing

- Registration Services are based next door to MCC's County Hall, in the Old Parlour. There is a team of 17, 11 on a casual basis for ceremonies only. The staff are made up of the Superintendent Registrar, one Registrar and 5 Deputies who can all register births, deaths and marriages and also take notices of marriage. Most also conduct ceremonies. The staff are all deliberately trained to the highest level to provide the maximum flexibility and resilience to the service.
- As well as the Old Parlour we have 3 out-stations, at Nevill Hall and at the Hubs in Chepstow and Monmouth, to help us provide the best possible service to residents. During the pandemic the service ceased at the out-stations with all appointments being in the Register Office. This was to ensure could control our environment, ensure safe social distancing, reduce travel risk, etc. The service has now reverted to attending Monmouth and Chepstow and will hopefully soon return to Nevill Hall.
- Our Approved Premises, which are venues which have chosen to licence rooms for marriages and civil partnerships, cover the length and breadth of Monmouthshire, there are 36 in total at the present time, and there is a very good relationship with them all. Covering such a large area, and striving to provide the chosen days and times for each couple, can be a challenge but it is vital that we all work together to give each couple the best service possible and promote Monmouthshire at every opportunity.

December 2022