

# REGISTRATION SERVICE BRIEFING

August 2017



## I. BACKGROUND

From January to June 2015 Customer Service Transformation carried out a service review on the Registration Service. The review involved working closely with staff at all levels of the service as well as utilising insight gained through customer feedback. The review sought to understand:

- The **Customers** - who uses the service, why, when and what does the service look/feel like to customers?
- The **Organisation** - who provides the service, how is it organised and what are the costs?
- The **Processes** - which services does the Register Office provide, how and through which channels?

Following the review, the Customer Transformation programme outlined eight key improvements that should be made to the service and the benefits these would deliver:

Table 1. Improvement projects within the Registration Service

Action	Outcome
Reorganisation of Staff Roles	Refocus Registrar role on supporting customers; allow us to manage stock across multiple sites. <b>Completed August 2016</b>
Provide Birth/Death/Marriage Certificate Applications Online	Make certificate services accessible to our customers whenever and wherever they wish; create capacity in the service to improve customer service; improve processing times so that customers receive their certificates faster; support certificate production as part of the Library's Family History offer. <b>Complete and increasing in use, currently at 51.9%</b>
Implement a Concierge Service	Create capacity for the Register Office (RO) management and Registrars; provide excellent meet and greet service to customers choosing to marry at the RO; bring facilities management of the RO in line with Corporate vision. <b>This is in place.</b>
Updated Opening Hours	Improve access to our services by making them accessible to customers when they want. <b>Extended hours started Monday 21 September 2015, with registration appointments available into the evenings.</b>
Provide Death and Birth Registrations from Derriford	Minimise stress and inconvenience to our most vulnerable customers; create a focussed, caring environment for bereaved customers; improve access for customers. <b>Death Registration at the Coroner's Office in place one day per week with plans to increase to four days a week by the end of 2017. Birth registrations trialled at Children's Centres and to start at Libraries by October 2017.</b>

Improve Our Handling of Telephone Queries	Ensure that all telephone queries are addressed in a timely fashion and lead to a resolution; create capacity by automating transactions where possible; introducing 24/7 customer access to advice and services. <b>Calls to the service for births and deaths are now handled by the Contact Centre. Notices of Marriage to follow by the end of 2017</b>
Increase our Portfolio of Approved Wedding Venues City-Wide	Work cooperatively with local businesses; increase choice for customers so that Plymouth becomes their wedding destination of choice; grows the local economy. <b>We are reviewing the cost of Approved Premises Licences to make them more affordable for smaller businesses</b>
Increase our Portfolio of PCC Owned Venues Available for Celebrations	Increase choice for customers so that Plymouth becomes their wedding destination of choice; increase income generated by PCC owned assets; improve access to venues across the city. <b>Work continues to maximise the number of licensable PCC assets that become Approved Premises for marriages.</b>

A move from the Lockyer Street site supports the [Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan](#) in releasing the site for a ‘...mixed use development, including a quality hotel and housing. Provision is made for in the order of 52 homes...’ Should a decision be made to move the Registration Service from Lockyer Street, the site will be marketed for that purpose.

## 2. OPTIONS

The modernisation of the Registration Service aims to deliver a more accessible service that suits the needs of our customers. This includes continuing to develop the Hub and Spoke model which makes registration services available at a wider choice of convenient locations.

Modernising the service in this way makes sole occupation of the Register Office at Lockyer Street financially unviable, which would also negate a future Capital Investment in the region of £750k to make the building fit for purpose. In addition, a change of use of the current site at Lockyer Street would create greater overall benefit for the city. It is for these reasons that we seek a decision to relocate the Register Office (the Hub for the service) to the Council House and Taylor Maxwell House (TMH).

Suitable alternative locations for the Register Office have been considered. A key requirement was for the Hub to remain in the city centre, to maintain the attraction of ceremonies close to existing hoteliers and other supporting businesses. The three main considerations were:

1. **Location** – The proximity to major bus routes located on Royal parade. Also being equidistant between the City Centre and Waterfront it was deemed most suitable as any trade attached to celebrations attached to statutory weddings and citizenship ceremonies would remain in the proximity of the local hospitality businesses. There is also some limited outside space with access to a small garden.
2. **Accessibility** – The suggested spaces that the Registration Service would use are located on the ground floor of the Council House thus making access easy for customers with mobility issues and those choosing to bring children to birth registration appointments using buggies and strollers.
3. **Gravitas** – The Council House is the seat of democracy and the gravitas of the building and its function within the city lends itself to formality of the statutory elements of the Registration Service.

The General Register Office defines the statutory requirements and guidelines for a Register Office and these were also built into the specification; the statutory elements of the Register Office do not necessarily need to be located in one building but must include facilities for:

- The display of notices of marriage and civil partnership;
- The solemnising of marriage and the formation of civil partnership;
- Public searching of register indexes;
- The safe keeping of deposited registers and for the public to obtain certificates
- The secure storage and safe keeping of stock of secure forms and blank certificates and
- Protecting customer confidentiality in relation to record storage

The services offered by the Registration Team are almost exclusively by appointment. Birth/Death Registrations and notices of marriage are carried out in private interview rooms and ceremonies take place in either the Register Office or an approved venue, giving notice of at least 28 days in most cases. The majority of requests for the team to produce copies of certificates are taken online, with few customers presenting at the Register Office and making a paper application.

For each of the appointments listed below there are usually at least two people arriving and a baby if it's a birth registration, even though it is not a statutory obligation to bring the child.

Event	No per year	No per year at RO	Per day	Comments
Births	4,452	2,226	8.6	Estimate that half of all birth/deaths will be at the RO, the remainder will be offered from spoke locations
Still births	14	7	0.03	
Deaths	2,986	1,493	5.7	
Notices of Marriage	2,347	2,347	9	100% of these appointments will be at the RO
Marriages at RO	120	120	0.5	
NCS appointments	308	308	5.9 (only currently available one day per week)	

Taking the above into account, the potential locations identified for the Register Office were:

- I. Basement of Taylor Maxwell House (TMH) for the Repository along with
  - a. Council House and/or
  - b. Guildhall

The table on the following page summarises each option and the costs/savings associated:

Table 2. Options appraisal for Register Office locations

Option	Annual Revenue Cost Avoided	Annual Income	Capital Receipt/Investment
Option 1 - Remain at Lockyer Street	£0	£55K	Capital Investment Required
Option 2 - Conduct statutory ceremonies from Council House and use Guildhall as alternative to Drake Suite at Lockyer St.	£30K	23.7K	Capital Receipt Possible
Option 3 - Conduct statutory ceremonies from Council House and use Reception Room or Council Chamber as alternative to Drake Suite at Lockyer St.  Overall revenue benefit of £59.8K. This option offers an overall preferable annual benefit of £6.9K	£36K	£23.7K	Capital Receipt Possible
Option 4 - Statutory Ceremonies delivered from both Guildhall Charter Room plus Council House, Reception Room  Overall revenue benefit of £52.9K	-£2.1K	£55K	Capital Receipt Possible
Option 5 - Conduct statutory ceremonies from Council House – convert Leaders room	£36K	£20K	Capital Receipt Possible

**Option 1) Retain the Hub at Lockyer Street**

This option is rejected as it considers maintaining the services as they currently are and requires approximately £750k of investment at the current site. This is not the preferred option as it would neither represent an improvement for customers nor an opportunity to reduce costs.

**Option 2) Operate from the Council House for statutory elements and the Guildhall for low cost/high volume ceremonies (currently offered in the Drake Suite). Conduct statutory ceremonies in the Leader's Room**

This Option is rejected as it is not possible to offer a similar number of low cost/high volume ceremonies from the Guildhall despite this option requiring additional capital investment.

**Option 3) Operate from the Council House for statutory elements and low cost/high volume ceremonies from the Reception Room and/or Council Chamber (currently offered in the Drake Suite). Conduct statutory ceremonies in the Leader's Room**

This Option is recommended

**Option 4) Operate from the Council House for statutory elements and a combination of the Guildhall and Council House Reception Room and/or Council Chamber for low cost/high volume ceremonies (currently offered in the Drake Suite). Conduct statutory ceremonies in the Leader's Room**

This option is rejected as there is additional cost and operational pressure involved in running two locations simultaneously

**Option 5) Operate from the Council House for statutory elements and offer a new low cost/small occupancy offer from the Council House (no like-for-like alternative offer replacing Drake Suite). Conduct statutory ceremonies in the Leader's Room**

This offer is rejected as it excludes a group of customers who will no longer be able to afford a larger ceremony which enables them to share their celebration with the friends and families they wish to.

**3. RECOMMENDATION**

The relocation of the Register Office promotes best utilisation of existing Plymouth City Council assets, provides improved access for customers and allows best use of the Lockyer Street site for the city, attracts a sizeable capital receipt, ongoing revenue income from business rates and council tax and provides in the region of 75 new jobs.

Option 3 is recommended for the new locations, to operate from the Council House and house the repository in TMH. This option involves reconfiguring the Temeraire room to provide registration offices and the Leader's Room, Deputy Leader's Room, associated lobby and entrance area to provide the reception facilities and small ceremonies space. The Reception room would continue to be used for larger ceremonies, as an alternative to the Drake Suite currently available at Lockyer Street. Plans for the proposed arrangements are included as Appendix I.

Appendix I – Proposed layout for Register Office in Council House



Floor Plan for  
Registration Area Grc