

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Registration Service update

Committee: Performance, Finance, and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13 February 2019

Cabinet Member: Councillor Sally Haydon (Customer Focus and Community Safety)

CMT Member: Andy Ralphs (Strategic Director of Customer and Corporate Services)

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Ref:

Key Decision: No

Part: 1

Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Registration Service, specifically the successful completion of a restructure consultation, the service activity and performance.

The report also sets out and distinguishes between the statutory requirements and discretionary services provided, which will help inform decisions on how the service might best be delivered once Lockyer Street is vacated in 2020 and the land sold for a capital receipt.

Corporate Plan

In 2014 the Plymouth and West Devon Joint Plan (2014-2034) identified the Lockyer Street site for redevelopment (<https://plymswdevonplan.co.uk/policy/so3/ply27>)

In August 2017 a cross-party Place and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the disposal of the Lockyer Street site, for a capital receipt, as detailed in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan. The same Committee also recommended that proposals to relocate the registration service into the Council House were not acceptable, must be reconsidered and alternative accommodation was to be explored.

(<http://web.plymouth.gov.uk/modgov?modgovlink=http%3A%2F%2Fdemocracy.plymouth.gov.uk%2FieListDocuments.aspx%3FCId%3D1193%26amp%3BMID%3D7591>)

In December 2017 a delegated decision was made to invest £190k in the current Register Officer, Lockyer Street to facilitate a thorough investigation and identification of a new, permanent location within 3 years.

(<http://web.plymouth.gov.uk/modgov?modgovlink=http%3A%2F%2Fdemocracy.plymouth.gov.uk%2FieDecisionDetails.aspx%3FId%3D3307>)

During 2018 to support delivery of the Corporate Plan in spending money wisely, the Registration Service identified Building I as a new location for both the repository and the majority of office-based registrations. This will enable the Lockyer Street site to be freed up for a capital receipt and Building I fully utilised after being under-occupied for almost 4 years.

Also during 2018 to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan in listening to our customers, the Registration Service has consulted with customers on opening hours and locations for appointments to ensure we are delivering quality services.

On 19 November 2018, Full Council agreed to the Coroners Service moving to Customer Services to align with Registration.

(<http://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s92387/Full%20Council%20report%20181109%20Final.pdf>)

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

Revenue

- Implications on running costs for Lockyer Street and Building I
- Impact on income from non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street)

Capital

- Resource required to achieve the move from Lockyer Street to Building I including £190k capital funds already allocated
- Capital receipt from the sale of land at Lockyer Street

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

- The Register Office at Lockyer Street was built in 1982 and accessibility is poor. The level access route from the car park is impractical and very often unclear to customers.
- The majority of office based registrations have to be carried out on the first floor which is not ideal for new parents, the elderly or those with mobility issues. A platform lift is available but due to unreliability is used only when absolutely necessary.
- The Drake Suite (currently used to deliver non-statutory ceremonies) consists of two ceremonies rooms, both of which do not have level access making it difficult for customers with mobility issues.

Equality and Diversity

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No. An EIA will be undertaken on proposed new sites.

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

The Registration Service is now in a strong and stable position to drive changes forward. To enable the Registration Service to vacate Lockyer Street by December 2020 the following actions are recommended:

1. The Registration Service proceeds with plans to move the repository and the majority of office-based registrations (births/deaths/still-births/notices of marriage) to Building 1 by the end of September 2019. This will ensure:
 - that Building 1 is fully-utilised after being under-occupied for almost 4 years
 - alignment with Coroners Service already based at Building 1
 - that accessibility is improved for customers
 - closer working relationships with the Coroner's Service who share the same end-users and stakeholders
 - improved communications with Derriford Hospital to improve GRO KPIs
2. The Registration Service investigates whether it is viable to continue to provide non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street). The following points need to be considered:
 - customer demand for this type of non-statutory ceremony
 - maintaining income
 - the days of the week we might offer this type of non-statutory ceremony
 - a suitable PCC location in the city centre which will mean revisiting use of the Council House or Guildhall
 - a city centre location to support local businesses and revenue within the city
3. The Registration Service fully promotes licensing to premises across the city so more have the opportunity to be approved for ceremonies which will:
 - improve choice for those wishing to get married or enter into a Civil Partnership in Plymouth
 - increase business and revenue with the city
4. The Registration Service further investigates provision of office-based registrations (births/deaths/still-births/notices of marriage) in the city centre and other areas of the city if customer demand is proven.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Option 1 - Registration Service to remain at Lockyer Street

The land has been identified in the Plymouth Plan for redevelopment. The building is not fit for purpose with regards to accessibility or aesthetics.

Option 2 – move the entire service to the Council House with the repository housed in the basement of Taylor Maxwell House

This option was rejected in 2017 by a cross-party Place and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Published work / information:

The Proper Officer’s Guide to Registration Service Delivery version 3.10

Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan

Background papers:

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Sign off: comment must be sought from those whose area of responsibility may be affected by the decision, as follows (insert references of Finance, Legal and Monitoring Officer reps, and of HR, Corporate Property, IT and Strat. Proc. as appropriate):

Fin	pl.18. 19.19 8	Leg	ALT/ 3050 8/31	Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the contents of the report? Yes / No													

1.0 Introduction

In line with departments across Plymouth City Council, there is a continuing demand for the Registration Service to increase income and improve efficiency and performance. For many years the unstable management of the Registration Service has hampered the ability to drive necessary changes forward.

In 2009, as part of the Accommodation Strategy, Cabinet agreed to the move of the Register Office from Lockyer Street but no substantial progress has been made.

However, in July 2018 a restructure consultation was launched with the purpose of providing a management and staffing structure that would support much needed changes including the move from Lockyer Street to new premises.

2.0 Restructure outcomes

The consultation (in agreement with Unions) has now closed and the outcomes are as follows:

- There is now a clear management structure to lead service change and support staff in their roles. Meaningful annual performance discussions and regular 1:1s are now in place to support personal and professional development and the wellbeing of staff.
- The management team are embedding a training and development ethos with a training matrix implemented to identify skills gaps.
- Action plans are in place to review results of the Corporate wellbeing and staff surveys. This will allow the team and managers to fully understand and address any areas of concern.
- A Service Manager has been appointed who has retained responsibility for the Coroner's Service. The Registration Service and Coroners' Service are intrinsically linked with interdependent processes and shared stakeholders so this is a positive move.
- Two Team Leaders have been appointed. One is leading on the 'office-based' registrations offer and the other on our ceremonies offer.
- As a result of consultation with customers the opening hours for the Register Office will change from 1 April 2019. This ensures that staff resource is better allocated and means we can offer greater appointment availability including on Saturdays; this will improve the customer experience and helps the service to improve on KPIs set by the GRO. New opening hours are:

Monday	9am – 5pm
Tuesday	9am – 5pm
Wednesday	9am – 5pm
Thursday	9am – 5pm
Friday	9am – 5pm
Saturday	9am – 5pm
Sunday	CLOSED

- A new rota has been agreed with the team to ensure we have the staffing levels to provide good appointment availability and the delivery of more ceremonies.
- Recruitment for Ceremonies Officers is underway to add resilience to the service and enable us to extend our current offer and ability to bring in extra income.
- A new registration system is being scoped and is due for implementation within the next quarter. This will support the service in dynamic diary management to ensure good appointment availability and the better planning of ceremonies. More importantly it will allow our customers to book appointments and pay online.

The service is now in a strong and stable position to move forward with the move from Lockyer Street.

3.0 Service delivery

3.1 Statutory obligations

The Registration Service has a statutory obligation for the registration of:

- births
- deaths
- still-births
- marriages and civil partnerships (basic statutory ceremony at the Register Office for the couple and 2 witnesses, and attendance at licenced premises within jurisdiction)
- corrections and re-registrations
- the taking of notices of marriage/civil partnerships

The Local Authority is also obliged to deliver Citizenship ceremonies as part of the nationality journey for new British citizens.

The service provides a copy certificate service.

3.2 Discretionary services

The service can also offer discretionary services either through cross-governmental working (e.g. Tell Us Once, Nationality, Passport and Settlement Checking Services) or as a means of enhancing celebratory services (e.g. Naming Ceremonies, Renewal of Vows, Civil Funerals and Memorial Ceremonies).

The service can offer marriage or civil partnership ceremonies like the non-statutory ceremonies currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street.

4.0 Current service provision

4.1 Office-based appointments

At present the service delivers the following number of office-based appointments each year at Lockyer Street and at Building I, Derriford:

Appointment type/duties	Average per annum	Appointments required per week
Birth	4099	79
Stillbirth	18	1
Death - MCCD (no coroner involvement)	1853	36
Death - Part A (coroner involvement)	903	17
Death - Part B (coroner involvement)	457	9
Notice of marriage	2273	44
	9602	185

In addition there are a number of re-registrations, corrections and conversions made each year.

As per the KPIs set by the GRO, appointment availability is good at 99%.

There is a requirement for births to be registered within 42 days and the service achieves 99% of this target.

There is a requirement for deaths (MCCD) to be registered within 5 days (includes weekends) and our target is 75%. The service is currently running at 69% working hard to achieve this but delays at Derriford are hampering our ability to achieve this. Delays in the issuing of MCCDs and also some poor quality MCCDs mean that despite good appointment availability we do not see the bereaved until after the 5 days have passed. We are working hard to strengthen the relationship with the Bereavement team at Derriford to improve this situation. Offering appointments on Saturday is just one of the other measures we are taking to improve performance.

Since November 2018 we have been consulting with customers on availability of appointments, location of appointments and travel methods. This consultation will continue for throughout January and February but some key points are:

- 99% of users said their appointment time was suitable.
- 88% travelled to their appointment by car, with 9% travelling by bus and the remainder walked or travelled in a taxi.
- 96% of users said they were happy with the location of their appointment although some attending birth appointments commented that accessibility was not good at Lockyer Street.
- 58% of users said they didn't mind where the appointment was, 29% were content with a city centre location and 13% preferred Derriford as a location.

Notice of marriage needs to be given 30 days prior to the event. Offering appointments on a Saturday will improve the experience for users.

4.2 Marriages/Civil Partnerships

At present the service delivers marriages/civil partnerships as follows:

	Total no. of ceremonies	Mon-Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
2018					
Basic statutory ceremony (couple plus 2 witnesses)	190	188	2	0	0
Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street)	358	102	76	180	0
Attendance at approved premises	161	13	36	104	8
2017					
Basic statutory ceremony (couple plus 2 witnesses)	207	134	73	0	0
Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street)	377	77	101	199	0
Attendance at approved premises	183	4	36	132	11
2016					
Basic statutory ceremony (couple plus 2 witnesses)	160	105	55	0	0
Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street)	430	72	119	239	0
Attendance at approved premises	223	21	40	149	13
2015					
Basic statutory ceremony (couple plus 2 witnesses)	187	135	52	0	0
Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street)	420	82	110	228	0
Attendance at approved premises	263	21	54	166	22

Only the basic ceremony and attendance at approved premises is statutory.

4.2.1 Basic ceremonies

Basic ceremonies charged at £46, are conducted in a licenced office at Lockyer Street with the couple and 2 witnesses and last for approximately 15 minutes. Many couples choose this option if they are planning to subsequently have a ceremony abroad or at a venue that is not licenced.

4.2.2 Non-statutory ceremonies

Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street) are also on the decline but there appears to be an appetite for this type of ceremony in Plymouth. Non-statutory ceremonies (currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street) take approximately 30 minutes with up to 50 guests and generate income of between £50k and £60k per annum. Most are held on Fridays and Saturdays and we can deliver up to 7 per day.

4.2.3 Attendance at approved premises

Requirement for registrars to officiate over ceremonies at approved premises in Plymouth is declining year on year. Costs are based on providing two members of staff to officiate at venues.

5.0 Future service provision

5.1 Office-based appointments

The service can continue to fulfil the statutory requirements for office-based appointments at Building I with minimal impact for our customers. Registration events for end-users occur infrequently so constant repeated access to services is not a consideration. The vast majority of customers drive to attend an appointment and there is car parking available on site in addition to good bus routes. Being situated nearer to Derriford Hospital will allow us to strengthen relationships and communications with Derriford Hospital with the aspiration of registering within the hospital in the future.

The service will continue to investigate delivering appointments through outstations such as libraries, 1st stop shop or Ballard House.

5.2 Marriages/Civil Partnerships

The service can continue to fulfil the requirements for statutory basic ceremonies at Building I with minimal impact for our customers. This type of ceremony is office-based and is limited to the couple and 2 witnesses.

Attendance by registrars at approved premises will remain unchanged, however the service will actively promote licensing of more premises in Plymouth.

The Drake Suite, Lockyer Street (where we currently deliver non-statutory ceremonies) will no longer be available so the following options need to be considered:

- Do not offer non-statutory services
- Find an alternative to provide couples in Plymouth with the choice of a relatively inexpensive ceremony to share with family and friends (an equivalent to the non-statutory ceremonies currently delivered in the Drake Suite, Lockyer Street).