

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	12
Report No	CP/32/23

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 29 November 2023

Report Title: Registration of Births, Deaths & Marriages – Annual Report

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an annual update on the work of the Registration Service across Highland, as they provide their statutory role to register life events. The report provides details of the performance for the last calendar year 2022.
- 1.2 The report will also provide information on ongoing work of the Chief Registrar and team as they continue to modernise and promote the Registration Service as a whole, and in particular Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the work of the Registration team across the Highland area
 - ii. **Scrutinise** the performance of the team for 2022, noting that this latest data has not yet been examined and finalised;
 - iii. **Note** the continued efforts to promote and modernise the service in relation to marriage and civil partnership, ensuring that the Highland Council continue to offer a professional and cost effective service to the public, whilst adapting to keep up to date with the ever changing and growing Wedding industry.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** there are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The Registration Service in Highland is integrated and provided as part of the Service Point network.

The service receives income for Registration services based on fees set by National Records of Scotland. There are also specific income targets for the service as part of the Council's approach to income generation.

3.2 **Legal:** the registration of births, still-births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships in Scotland is a statutory duty and is governed by the following main Acts :

- Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965
- Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977
- Still-Birth (Definition) Act 1992
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006
- Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014
- Immigration Act 2014
- Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2020

There are a number of other Acts which impact on areas of registration including presumption of death, human fertilisation and embryology, gender recognition, and adoption.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** The Registration Service is available in 15 locations across Highland, offering a vital service to the public in some of our more rural communities. Whilst we actively promote remote appointments we continue to meet the needs of our communities facilitating face to face appointments where requested.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** The Registration Service continues to actively promote the use of remote appointments which can now be conducted by telephone and/or teams and reduce carbon emissions associated with travel for both customers and for staff across our wide geographical area. Noting also fuel poverty and the current cost of living crisis, the move to remote offering and the option to carry out an appointment from a home address can be financially beneficial to the public.

3.5 **Risk:** There are no risks arising from this report.

3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.7 **Gaelic:** the use of Gaelic within the registers is an option with names being recorded in Gaelic, English or Gaelic and English, depending upon individual customer choice

4. Background

- 4.1 The current approach to Registration, began in 1855, and information is gathered on behalf of the Registrar General for Scotland. It is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities that all births, deaths, still-births, marriages and civil partnerships which take place in Scotland are registered in Scotland. A Registrar has a responsibility to ensure that *life events* which take place in their District are registered within the required statutory timeframes.
- 4.2 Registration Services are currently delivered from:
- 1 dedicated Registration Office serving the city of Inverness and the surrounding area
 - 14 dual role offices (our Customer Service Point team) located in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Nairn, Aviemore, Kingussie, Fort William, Kyle, Broadford and Portree
 - 1 home based (parlour) Registrar based in the Small Isle of Eigg
- 4.3 The dual role offices have a variety of opening hours to the public to meet the needs of their community who wish to pay, report and request Council services on a face to face basis. The opening hours of offices have been reviewed to ensure that they reflect both the needs of the communities that they are serving but also level of local demand. Since the covid pandemic, most offices also now have some dedicated closed-door time to concentrate on the Registration aspect of their role, which, where possible is carried out by remote appointment. Feedback from staff, through recent office by office visits, is that the dedicated time for Registration is welcome given the complexity and level of accuracy required.
- 4.4 The current staffing establishment includes:
- 1 Chief Registrar (Qualified)
 - 1 Registration Office Team Leader, Inverness (Qualified)
 - 10 Qualified Registrars (some with dual roles with Service Point duties)
 - 34 Assistant Registrars (most with dual roles with Service Point duties)
 - 22 Assistant Registrars for Ceremonies Only – as and when required basis
- 4.5 It is noted that many staff in the team work part time hours, and most have a dual role. There are currently 9.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) qualified staff, and 30.7 FTE Assistant Registrar posts in the structure, led by the Chief Registrar.
- Two Assistant Registrars are currently studying towards the Certificate in the Law and Practice in Registration, with an examination in March 2024.
- 4.6 For 2023/24, the Service Point, Service Centre and Registration Service budget is £1.458m.

5. Service Demand and Quality Assurance

5.1 In Scotland each year, Registrars record in the region of 141,000 life events.

5.1.1 In 2022 -

There were 46,959 births registered in Scotland. This is 2% lower than 2021. This is a continuing downward trend for the last 10 years (the exception being 2021 which saw a small increase).

5.1.2 The most popular names chosen in 2022 were Noah, beating Jack which had been the number one boys name for the last 14 years, and Olivia, the top girls name for the 2nd year in a row.

5.1.3 There were 62,941 deaths registered in Scotland, down by just 1% on 2021. There were 3,979 (7%) “excess” deaths, which is calculated using a 5 year average (2016-2019 & 2021) 2020 figures being discounted due to the significant increase during the pandemic).

5.1.4 Pre-pandemic Scotland saw a very small increase in the number of deaths each year. However, 2020 saw an increase of almost 6,000 additional deaths. This number decreased in 2021, and again in 2022, but still sits higher than pre-pandemic.

5.1.5 The number of deaths in Highland increased in 2022 in comparison with Scotland, up by 4%.

5.1.6 There were 15,982 more deaths than births. The last time Scotland had more births than deaths was 2014. This is sometimes known as “Natural Change”.

5.1.7 There were 30,033 marriages in Scotland in 2022 – 24% more than in 2021. The only comparable year on year rise in the number of marriages taking place were in the post war years (28% in 1919 and 31% in 1945). This is thought to be the on-going effect of the restrictions on marriage in 2020.

5.1.8 There were 630 Civil Partnerships registered in Scotland in 2022. The majority of CPs in Scotland are now mixed sex (84% in 2022) following a change to legislation in 2021. A similar picture can be seen in Highland, with a 19% increase in the number of marriages in 2022 when compared to 2021 and a 59% increase in Civil Partnerships.

5.1.9 The team across Highland registered around 6,800 events in 2022. Entries in the Registers are externally verified for accuracy by a District Examiner employed by National Records of Scotland. The examination of the 2022 Highland registers is currently under way. A final figure for accuracy is not yet available.

Calendar Year	Births	Deaths	Still Births	Marriages	Civil Partnerships	Total Life Events Registered	Accuracy
2018	2077	2769	8	1510	1	6365	97%
2019	2020	2682	1	1487	6	6196	97.39%
2020	1875	2690	6	796	5	5372	96.70%
2021	1891	2848	9	1571	32	6351	97.07%
2022	1934	2974	6	1875	51	6840	N/A

5.2 Further analysis of our 2022 figures shows a breakdown by our current geographical clusters:

Cluster Area	% of total registration
Caithness (Wick, Thurso)	10.53%
Sutherland & East Ross (Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Rosskeen)	11.82%
Dingwall/West (Dingwall, Gairloch, Ullapool)	9.74%
Inverness	36.7%
Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey (Nairn, Aviemore, Kingussie)	10.86%
Lochaber (Fort William)	10.95%
Skye & Lochalsh (Kyle, Broadford, Portree)	9.4%

5.3 A further breakdown highlights that 3 areas in particular dealt with a high volume of the Highland Marriages and Civil Partnerships. From the 1,875 Marriage and Civil Partnerships which took place across Highland in 2022, 31.73% took place in Inverness, 18.29% took place in Lochaber (Fort William office), and 18.65% took place in Skye & Lochalsh (Portree, Broadford and Kyle offices).

5.4 Marriage can be further broken down into **two** strands – a Civil ceremony (a non-religious ceremony conducted by a Registrar) or a Religious or Belief ceremony conducted by an approved celebrant – this includes many religious denominations and a wide variety of belief bodies. Belief bodies include, but are not limited to, humanist, pagan, interfaith and spiritualist. Highland had the 4th highest number of marriage registrations out of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland, surpassed only by Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dumfries & Galloway. Our Registration team are currently conducting in the region of 36% of the weddings which take place in Highland (nationally this is 43%).

6. Looking to the Future

6.1 National Records of Scotland are currently working on a project to modernise our service. Future plans include having the registration of births, deaths and still-births

processed without printing actual paper register pages. This will result in efficiencies right across Scotland as we currently arrange secure delivery of these pages to Edinburgh each year after examination, a time consuming and expensive exercise. They will continue to be available for examination across Scotland but electronically rather than a centrally held paper record.

- 6.2 **Promotion of the Registration Service** – as noted at 5.4, registration staff currently conduct around 36% of all marriages/civil partnerships across Highland. Whilst all couples require to utilise the Registration Service for the recording of marriage/civil partnerships, couples can choose different celebrants to conduct their ceremony.
- 6.3 Feedback suggests that awareness of the range of services that Registrars can provide could be higher:
- A bespoke ceremony
 - Inclusion of music and readings
 - Personal vow and ring/gift exchanges
 - Wilderness ceremony
- 6.4 Enhancements can also be provided such as:
- Hand-fasting
 - Sand Ceremonies
 - Quaich Ceremonies
- 6.5 Work is ongoing to create new opportunities to promote the Council's offering and encourage couples to select the Registrars as the provider of the ceremony element of any wedding.
- 6.6 This year staff have attended a number of wedding fairs held in Inverness in order to promote the services offered by the Registrars. As part of the Chief Registrar's planned strategy to improve information and promote the marriage and civil partnership business within Highland, we now plan to host our own Wedding Fair utilising the excellent space within the Highland Archive and Registration Centre. Not only do we hope a Highland Council wedding fair will showcase our own ceremony rooms, and our offering for civil ceremonies right across our Highland area, the event itself can generate income. Our Fair will be held on Sunday 4 February 2024 and we are now working with partners and suppliers to make arrangements for the day.
- 6.7 In addition to the range of services on offer, work is ongoing to explore the opportunity to develop our ceremony room offering. This includes new opportunities, such as the developed at the Old Man of Storr in Skye.
- 6.8 **ARoS** – The Association of Registrars of Scotland (ARoS) is a professional body established in 1865 to represent Registration Staff in Scotland. The members of the board are Registrars from a number of local authorities. The ARoS team may be involved as consultees in future developments in registration. The board work closely with National Records of Scotland and staff from Scottish Government on Registration

matters. Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Service Operations Manager for North Highland and Qualified Registrar has been nominated and appointed to position of Vice-President of ARoS. After 2 years in post as Vice-President, Annemarie will take up the prestigious mantle of President of the Association. During her time as President, Highland will look to hold the ARoS Annual General Meeting, playing host to Registrars from across Scotland.

6.9 **National Registrar's Recognition Day** – 29 February 2024 – is an online event being held next year by ARoS and our representative on the board, will be assisting in organising. This is being billed as an “Extra day in the year to recognising the contribution of Registrars and the valuable work they do in Scotland”. This has been developed based on the learning from England who have hosted an equivalent event a couple of times already.

Our teams across the network will have the opportunity to join the event to hear from the guest speakers, learn more about the work of Registrar's across Scotland and to celebrate their profession.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 10 November 2023

Author: Lesley Gray, Chief Registrar