

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	CP/29/24

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 27 November 2024

**Report Title:** Registration of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Annual Report

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Place

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an annual update of the work of the Registration Service across Highland, as they provide the statutory role of recording the details of life events. The report also provides details of the statistics and performance for the last full calendar year of 2023.
- 1.2 The report also provides information on any ongoing work of the Chief Registrar and team and highlight any developments as the team continue to modernise and promote the services on offer.

## 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 based on the most recent available data from 2023; and
  - iii. **CONSIDER** and **NOTE** the continued efforts to modernise and promote the registration service, ensuring Highland Council offer a cost effective, efficient but professional service to the public in all aspects of registration business.

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - there are no direct resource implications as a result of the report. The Registration Service in Highland is incorporated within the wider Customer Service and Service Point network.
- 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 **Risk** – there are no identified risks arising from the report.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Outdoor and lone working is considered part of the Registrar’s role, attending outdoor locations to conduct Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies. All bookings for remote locations are discussed with couples before being confirmed, taking into account the safety and wellbeing of the member of staff involved.

3.5 **Gaelic** - The use of Gaelic with in the registers is permitted, with the ability to record names in Gaelic, English, or Gaelic **and** English, depending on customer choice.

#### 4. **Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

#### 5 **Background**

5.1 Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages is a statutory function carried out by the Local Authority on behalf of The Registrar General for Scotland. The current approach began in 1855. It is a requirement that any “life event” (birth, death, still-birth, marriage or civil partnership) which occurs in Scotland must be registered in Scotland.

5.2 A birth, death or still-birth, regardless of where it occurs in Scotland can be registered at any registration office in Scotland, this is a personal choice for the informant. Births and deaths can now be registered remotely, over the telephone or video call. A marriage or civil partnership must be registered in the registration district in which the ceremony is taking place.

5.3 There are statutory timescales which must legally be adhered to, and Registrars have a responsibility to ensure that events which occur in their area are duly registered.

5.4 Registration services are currently delivered from:-

- **1** dedicated Registration Office covering the city of Inverness and surrounding area.
- **13** dual role offices located in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Kyle, Broadford, Portree, Nairn, Kingussie and Fort William
- **1** “parlour” home-based Registrar on the Isle of Eigg

5.5 The dual role offices operate a mixture of opening hours to manage both their face-to-face Service Point duties and Registration. Whilst open, offering walk in customers the opportunity to Pay, Report or Request council services. Whilst closed to the public, staff carry out Registration duties, offering private and confidential appointments both remotely and face to face as required.

5.6 The current staffing profile is:-

- **1** Chief Registrar, managing the service Highland wide (Qualified)
- **1** Registration Team Leader, supervising the dedicated service in Inverness Registration Office (Qualified)
- **10** Qualified Registrars (some with dual roles with Service Point duties)
- **35** Assistant Registrars (most with dual roles with Service Point duties)
- **21** Assistant Registrars for Ceremonies Only – as and when required

5.7 Many staff across our network work part-time hours, and most have a dual role. There are currently 10.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) qualified Registrars, and 31.4 FTE Assistant Registrar posts in the structure.

5.8 There are currently 4 staff studying towards the Certificate in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland, due to sit an examination in March 2025.

## 6 Performance

6.1 The registers run for a calendar year from 1 January to 31 December. During the year the previous years entries are examined by an independent District Examiner.

6.2 Data for the last 3 full years is below. Whilst numbers of entries for each type of event do fluctuate over the years, Highland maintain a consistent high level of accuracy in the detail recorded within the registers.

Year	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil P/ships	Still-Births	Total Entries	Errors	Accuracy
2021	1790	2704	848	573	1421	37	10	5964	210	96.48%
2022	1932	2971	1194	681	1875	50	6	6834	257	96.24%
2023	1828	2861	1069	619	1689	41	4	6423	224	96.52%

6.3 Corrections to the Registers are for the most part, simple clerical errors when transcribing details, minor spelling errors or transposing numbers in dates or times. These errors are “corrected” after examination to ensure that future issue of certificates are completely accurate.

## 6.4 Area Breakdown

The table below shows registration statistics broken into geographical cluster areas for entries recorded in 2023.

Cluster	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriage	Civil Marriage	Total Marriage	Civil P/Ship	Still-Birth	Total Entries
Caithness	212	356	51	30	81	4	1	654
Sutherland & East Ross	219	438	47	40	87	3		747
Dingwall & West Ross	140	377	95	69	164	3	0	684
Inverness	846	945	280	248	528	12	2	2333
Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey	168	342	129	60	189	3	0	702
Skye & Lochalsh	89	152	197	111	309	9	1	560
Lochaber	154	251	270	61	331	7	0	743

- 6.5 Marriages remain heavily concentrated around Inverness, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh. Lochaber and Skye & Lochalsh areas in particular, continue to see a high proportion of “Elopement” style weddings with couples who reside out with the Highland area and that take place in outdoor locations (*Appendix 1 – image – Carol Littlewood, Assistant Registrar, Lochaber conducting a ceremony at the Nevis Range*).
- 6.6 In 2023 82% of death registration appointments were conducted remotely.
- 6.7 Citizenship Ceremonies – The Highlands continue to be a popular area for new British Citizens to settle. 2023 saw 145 new British Citizens take an Oath of Allegiance and be presented with their certificate of naturalisation at a ceremony held in Highland.
- 6.8 Citizenship ceremonies can be held in Inverness, Dingwall, Wick, Fort William or Portree at the choice of the citizen. They can opt to join a pre-arranged group ceremony or book a private ceremony on a date of their choice.

## 7. Service Developments

- 7.1 **Highland Registrars Wedding Fair 2024** – The team held their first Wedding Fair in February 2024 at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre in Inverness. Work with the Highland Council’s Corporate Communications team ensured the day was widely promoted over different social media platforms to encourage attendance from suppliers and the public.
- 7.2 With over 30 suppliers and a high level of public attendance, the event was extremely successful, and feedback from visitors and suppliers alike, very positive. Plans are already underway to host another Wedding Fair on Sunday 9 February 2025. The day gave the Registrars the opportunity to speak to couples during the early stages of their ceremony plans, raising the profile and promoting the services offered by the Registration team. Even if plans had already been made, it was an opportunity to highlight the importance of the legal preliminaries and discuss the necessary paperwork required from all couples.

- 7.3 Equally as important as raising the Registration profile with prospective couples, was the opportunity to network with a wide variety of Highland suppliers.
- 7.4 **National Registrar’s Day of Recognition** - February 2024 saw the first National Registrar’s Day of Recognition. Staff across Highland were able to participate, with many teams coming together in hub locations, joining in an online Scotland-wide event. The format of the session looked back over the history of Registration, and a celebration of the valuable work Registrars do in capturing details of life events.
- 7.5 Staff enjoyed the opportunity to see colleagues from other local authority areas across Scotland.
- 7.6 **Digital Register** – 2024 also saw the introduction of a “digital” register. Paper register pages have been produced and signed in “wet ink” since 1855. However, in March of this year, Highland printed and signed their final paper register pages. From March, Registrars across Scotland no longer need to print a paper register page for the “informant” to sign. Signatures are now captured electronically and transcribed into the system used to capture details of registration events.
- 7.7 This is a progressive move to a more modern and digital service and supports offering remote appointments over the telephone or video call.
- 7.8 The only paper pages which now require a wet signature is that of the Marriage or Civil Partnership Schedule which must be signed by all parties at the end of a ceremony.
- 7.9 **Staff Achievements** – the service continues to support and encourage the team to undertake their Registration Qualifications as part of professional development. Moyra MacLeod, Inverness Registration Office, qualified in the Certificate in the Law & Practice of Registration in Scotland after sitting her exams in March 2023 and was awarded her certificate at the AGM held in Stirling in May. (*Appendix 2 – image – Moyra MacLeod being awarded her Certificate from the President of ARoS*).
- 7.10 The North Customer Services Team Leader, Annemarie MacAlpine, will next year become President of the Association of Registrars for Scotland (ARoS). Annemarie will take up this role at the Annual General Meeting in May and will hold the position for 2 years. Annemarie is the current Vice President.

Designation: Chief Officer, Housing and Communities

Date: 8 November 2024

Author: Lesley Grey, Chief Registrar

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Image of a Remote Ceremony  
Appendix 2 - Moyra MacLeod – Awarding of Examination Certificate

Image of a Remote Wedding Ceremony conducted by Carol Littlewood, Assistant Registrar



Image supplied by – Abrightside Photography



Moyra MacLeod, Registrar – being awarded her Certificate in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland – May 2024

