

Agenda Item	15
Report No	CP/31/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 6 November 2025

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 on the work of the Registration Service across Highland, as they provide their statutory role recording life events. The report also provides details of statistics and performance for the last full calendar year of 2024.
- 1.2 The report also provides information on any ongoing areas of work for the Chief Registrar and team across Highland and highlights any developments as the team continue to promote and modernise the services on offer.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
 - i. **Scrutinise and note** the work and performance standards achieved by the Registration team across the Highland area;
 - ii. **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; and
 - iii. **Consider and note** the details of the draft marketing strategy as detailed within Appendix 1.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – there are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The Registration Service in Highland is incorporated within the wider Customer Service 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; and
- 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 within 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 The Registration of Births, Deaths, Still-births, Marriages and Civil Partnerships is a statutory function carried out by the Local Authority on behalf of the Registrar General for Scotland, and National Records of Scotland. These statutory records began in 1855, preceded by Old Parish Records. It is a requirement that any "life event" which occurs in Scotland must be registered in Scotland.

- 5.2 Whilst a birth, death or still-birth can be registered with any office in Scotland by the choice of the informant, a marriage or civil partnerships must be registered in the registration district in which the ceremony is taking place.
- 5.3 There are statutory timescales in which registrations should take place, and Registrars have a responsibility to ensure that an event which occurs in their area is duly registered.
- 5.4 Registration Offices in Highland offer a “remote” telephone appointment as the preferred appointment model for birth, death and still-birth registrations. This giving the team as a network the ability to seamlessly manage appointments between offices, therefore offering efficient and effective use of our staffing resources.
- 5.5 Our current office profile is as follows:-
- 1 dedicated registration offices covering Inverness and area.
 - 12 dual role offices located in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Rosskeen (Alness), Dingwall, Lochalsh (Kyle), Portree, Nairn, Kingussie, Fort William
 - 1 parlour registrar based on the Isle of Eigg
- 5.6 The dual role offices offer a mixture of opening hours to meet the needs of their community – carrying out a frontline customer service role. Most also have an element of closed-door time to manage the registration workload where they offer a private and confidential appointment service both in person and remotely over the telephone.
- 5.7 Our current staffing profile is :
- 1 Chief Registrar;
 - 1 Registration Team Leader, responsible for Inverness Registration Office (Qualified);
 - 12 Qualified Registrars (some with dual Service Point roles);
 - 35 Assistant Registrars (most with dual Service Point roles); and
 - 18 Assistant Registrars for Ceremonies Only – As and when required basis

Many of our staff work part time hours, and most have a dual role.

6 Performance

- 6.1 Registers are held in calendar year, running from 1 January to 31 December each year. During the year, the entries for the previous full year are examined by an independent District Examiner employed by National Records of Scotland.

The role of the District Examiner is to assess the quality of the data recorded in the registers and give feedback on an office-by-office basis. Errors are corrected and final checks carried out before any registration paperwork is transferred to Edinburgh before being uploaded to the national ScotlandsPeople system.

- 6.2 Data for the last 3 years is below. Entries recorded in Highland remain at a fairly consistent level, with a continued high standard of accuracy:-

Year	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil P/ships	Still-Births	Total Entries	Errors	Accuracy
2022	1932	2971	1194	681	1875	50	6	6834	257	96.24%
2023	1828	2861	1069	619	1688	41	4	6422	224	96.52%
2024	1787	2872	1125	586	1711	46	7	6423	218	96.61%

- 6.3 Errors in Registers are generally clerical spelling errors, with no obvious pattern. The 2024 examination also included errors in digital pages for marriage and civil partnership, which were not counted in previous years.

Feedback from the District Examiner was positive, stating rich recording of detail, and a good performance taking into account some newly appointed staff and changes to process.

- 6.4 The 2024 statistics have also been shown below in a breakdown by cluster area:-

Cluster	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriage	Civil Marriage	Total Marriage	Civil P/Ship	Still-Birth	Total Entries
Caithness	214	344	46	39	85	3	2	648
Sutherland & East Ross	207	434	40	33	73	5	1	720
Dingwall & West Ross	142	335	87	56	143	5	0	625
Inverness	841	971	274	235	509	14	4	2339
Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey	152	333	129	61	190	7	0	682
Skye & Lochalsh	92	174	223	78	301	9	0	576
Lochaber	139	281	326	84	410	3	0	833

As can be seen above in some cluster areas we are not the first-choice celebrant for marriage and civil partnership, mainly in areas most popular with elopement style ceremonies. This is an area we will work to improve on by raising our profile and continuing to modernise the services we offer. A marketing strategy to support this approach has been drafted and is detailed below at section 7.

- 6.5 Scotland-wide data for 2024 is also shown for interest and comparison below:-

Births	45,763	This is the lowest annual live birth total since records began in 1855 - 23,429 boys, 22,334 girls , with the most popular names in Scotland for 2024 being Noah and Olivia
Deaths	62,291	The leading cause of death being Ischaemic Heart Disease followed by Dementia and Alzheimers Disease
Marriages	26,955	On average, 46% were Civil Ceremonies conducted by a Registrar
Civil Partnerships	796	Highest number of CPs since 2006. 83% of these were mixed sex relationships

- 6.6 During 2024 The Registration Service also welcomed 186 new British Citizens, who attended a ceremony where they were presented with their Certificate of Naturalisation, allowing them to participate fully in day-to-day life in the United Kingdom and apply for a British Passport.

7 Service Update

7.1 **Paper Records** - In March 2024, after producing paper registers since 1855, a change in process meant that Registrars no longer produce a paper register page for signature during an appointment. Register pages are now digital and signatures of informants are transcribed electronically into the system used by Registrars across Scotland.

7.2 **Marketing Strategy** - A draft Marketing Strategy has been developed to further promote Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies carried out by our team of Registrars across Highland. The draft strategy details the proposed approaches to target messaging and the approaches to be utilised to promote the work of the Registration team. Building on learning from Registration teams in other Local Authority areas, a specific Highland Registrars presence on Social Media will be developed and work is ongoing to ensure that the web pages on the new website better reflect the services we can offer.

Staff will continue to attend wedding fairs in their own areas and Highland Registrars will hold their own event again in February of next year, using the Inverness Office at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre, continuing to create positive working relationships with suppliers from the wedding industry, whilst promoting civil ceremonies across Highland as a whole.

A draft Strategy is detailed within **Appendix 1** and work will proceed to refine and finalise this, including the development of an action plan, in advance of the new website going live.

7.3 This year saw 2 Assistant Registrars successfully pass their examination in the Certificate in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland.

Carol Littlewood, Fort William and Claire Lyall, Inverness were awarded their certificates from Alison Byrne, the Registrar General for Scotland at the Annual General Meeting of ARoS in May of this year held in Renfrew. Photographs are detailed within **Appendix 2**.

The study programme for Assistants wishing to gain the qualification has now moved to a modular examination with paper sittings at 3 different times throughout the year which will better support learning. Highland currently have 3 candidates studying the new programme.

7.4 In May 2025, Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Services Operations Manager (North), took up the prestigious role of President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland (ARoS). She will remain in this position for 2 years. During Annemarie's time as President, Highland will now host the Annual General Meeting of the Association on 13 May 2026, and work is now underway to secure a venue in Inverness. It has been many years since Highland hosted, and we look forward to welcoming fellow Registrars from across Scotland, colleagues from National Records of Scotland and the Registrar General for Scotland to the Highlands. Photograph is detailed within **Appendix 3**.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 2 October 2025

Author: Lesley Gray, Chief Registrar

Background Papers: None

Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Draft Marketing Strategy
Appendix 2 – Successful examination candidates
Appendix 3 – Annemarie MacAlpine, President of ARoS



DRAFT Marketing Strategy - Civil Ceremonies by a Registrar

Background

The Highlands of Scotland have some of the most beautiful locations in which to hold a Marriage or Civil Partnership ceremony. We are blessed with some fantastic venues, from castles, hotels and stately homes, to beaches, lochside or hillside scenic outdoor locations.

The number of weddings and civil partnerships taking place in Highland remains consistently over 1500 each year.

Highland is such a diverse area and in some districts Registrars conduct almost 50% of ceremonies that take place. However, in other areas this is as low as 20%.

We can see that in these areas we are not meeting our target audience.

The Wedding industry is vast, and extremely competitive. Our Registration Service in Highland are looking to ensure we are considered as the first choice for couples looking for a Celebrant to conduct their legal ceremony.

Objective

To increase visibility, engagement, and bookings for civil ceremonies conducted by the Registrar through targeted **digital and local marketing** efforts.

Target Audience

- Couples planning legal weddings or civil partnerships
- Couples arranging vow renewals or commitment ceremonies
- Families organising naming ceremonies
- Individuals seeking non-religious ceremonies
- Local event planners and venues

Key Messages

- Bespoke, professional ceremonies tailored to your wishes
- Conducted by experienced Registrars in beautiful Highland locations
- Legal and memorable ceremonies with a human touch

www.highland.gov.uk

Social Media Advertising

- Platforms:

Facebook, Instagram

Suggested content :

- Targeted advertising: featuring real ceremony photos, testimonials, and venue highlights.
- Video Content: Short clips showcasing ceremony setups, Registrar introductions, and behind-the-scenes moments.
- Stories & Reels: Quick tips on planning a civil ceremony, FAQs, and countdowns to local wedding fairs.
- Meet the Staff
- Celebrate good news stories
- Share practical advice and highlight changes in guidance or legislation
- Hashtag Strategy: #HighlandCeremonies #CivilLoveInScotland #SayIDoInTheHighlands

Frequency:

3–5 posts per week, with monthly ad campaigns around peak booking seasons.

Website Upgrade

- Goals:

Improve user experience, increase interactions, and provide clear ceremony and legislative information.

- Key Improvements:
- Dedicated Civil Ceremonies Page
- Photo Gallery & Testimonials
- Interactive Booking Calendar
- Optional Enhancements
- Blog section with planning tips
- Downloadable ceremony guides
- Venue partnership listings

Local Promotion

- Tactics:
 - Partnerships with Venues
 - Wedding Fairs & Community Events
 - Improved Printed Materials
 - Press Releases
 - Special Campaigns:
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- Meet Your Registrar open days
- Ceremony of the Month spotlight
- Seasonal promotions

Ceremony Room Improvements

- Assess current ceremony room provision across Highland
- Replace the office furniture with ceremony room style
- Offer a range of room décor
- Music system availability

Budget Overview

- Social Media Ads: resource required
- Website Development: resource required to create a bespoke webpage for Civil Ceremonies in Highland
- Local Promotion: resource required to attend wedding fairs and improve ceremony rooms

KPIs & Success Metrics

- Increase in website traffic and ceremony page views
- Growth in social media followers and engagement
- Number of ceremony enquiries and confirmed bookings
- Feedback from couples and partners

Timeline

- Discovery and Analysis : complete
- Strategy Development : March 2026
- Implementation Planning : May 2026
- Launch and Communication : June 2026
- Monitoring and Review : Annual



Why choose the Highlands of Scotland for a ceremony?

The Landscape – whether it's our rugged coastline, or our inland lochs and mountains, the breathtaking scenery of the Highlands offer a backdrop that's hard to match – a photographer's joy.

The Ancestry – a connection to Scotland can be a major pull to visitors looking for their own heritage, at the same time taking steps into the future by holding their own ceremony in the Highlands

Historic and Unique Venues – with an array of Castles, Halls, Barns, Bothies and so much more, couples can choose a venue to suit their budget and their plans, whether it be a large celebration or an intimate family gathering.

The Legal Preliminaries – Scotland has some of the most flexible laws in the world when it comes to arranging a marriage or civil partnership. You can marry almost anywhere!



2025 Successful Examination Candidates

Successful Highland examination candidates being awarded with the Certificate in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland

Presented by Alison Byrne, Registrar General for Scotland, and Annemarie MacAlpine, President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland

Carol Littlewood
Fort William Registration Office



Claire Lyall
Inverness Registration Office



Appendix 3

Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Service Operations Manager. Presented with the chains of office, as President of The Association of Registrars of Scotland at the Annual General Meeting held in May 2025.

