The Highland Council

Agenda Item	**12**
Report No	**CP/34/26**

Committee: **Communities and Place**

Date: **5 November 2026**

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, providing a statutory role recording life events. The report provides details of statistics and performance for the last full calendar year of 2025.

1.2 The report also provides information on any ongoing improvement areas for the Chief Registrar and the team across Highland, highlighting 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 achieved by the Registration team across the Highland area; and
ii. **Consider** and **note** the continued efforts to modernise and promote the registration service in a competitive Marriage and Civil Partnership industry.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – There are no direct resource implications as a result of the report. The function of Registration 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 areas of Registration including the presumption of death, human fertilisation and embryology, gender recognition, and adoption.

3.3 **Risk** – There are no risks identified from the report.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Outdoor working and lone working is considered part of a Registrar's role, attending outdoor remote locations to conduct Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies by request. Booking requests in these circumstances are considered and discussed with the couple to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff is taken into account.

3.5 **Gaelic** – The use of Gaelic is permitted within the registers, with the ability to record names in Gaelic, or English and Gaelic, at the choice of the customer.

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 and were preceded by Old Parish Records. It is a legal 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 at any registration office in Scotland at the choice of the qualified informant, marriages and civil partnerships must be lodged and registered in the district (office) closest to the couples chosen ceremony venue.

5.3 There are statutory timescales in which registrations should take place, and Registrars have a duty to ensure that events which occur in their district are duly registered. Births and Still-births should be registered within 21 days, and deaths within 8 days.

5.4 During the COVID-19 pandemic, legislation was amended to permit registrations to be completed remotely via telephone or video appointment. Remote registration appointments are now the preferred method of service delivery for both customers and the service, providing greater flexibility for both customers and the Service, as appointments can be conducted from any suitable location without the need to attend an office.

In 2024, Registrars ceased printing and signing paper register pages following the move to fully digital registration records. As a result, there is no longer a requirement for informants to attend in person for a birth, still-birth or death, as physical signatures are no longer required as part of the registration process.

The continued use of remote appointments supports the efficient and effective use of staff resources across our network, enabling greater flexibility in service delivery while providing a seamless service to the customer.

5.5 Our current staffing profile is:-

- 1 Chief Registrar (Qualified).
- 1 Registration Team Leader, responsible for Inverness Registration Office (Qualified).
- 14 Qualified Registrars, most with dual service point roles.
- 34 Assistant Registrars, most with dual service point roles.
- 14 Assistant Registrars for Ceremonies, employed on an as and when required basis.

Many staff within the team work part-time hours, and most have a dual role of registrar and customer service assistant.

5.6 Registration currently operates from the following locations – Inverness (dedicated registration office), Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dornoch (by request), Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Kyle, Portree, Nairn, Kingussie and Fort William.

6 Performance

6.1 Registers are held in calendar years running from 1 January to 31 December each year. During the year, the previous full years registers are examined by a District Examiner employed by National Records of Scotland.

6.2 The role of the Examiner is to assess the quality of the detail recorded in the registers, highlighting errors or inconsistencies, and giving feedback on an individual and office by office basis. Errors are then corrected and entries are finalised before being uploaded to the Scotland's People website which can be accessed by the general public on payment of search fees.

6.3 Feedback from the District Examiner remains positive, with staff commended for a good performance taking into account the relatively small number of entries per Registrar in some offices. Staff continue to make every effort to record rich and informative detail into the entries.

6.4 Data for the last 3 years is below.

Year	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil P/ships	Still-Births	Total Entries	Errors	Accuracy
2023	1828	2861	1069	619	1688	41	4	6422	224	96.52%
2024	1787	2872	1125	586	1711	46	7	6423	218	96.61%
2025	1834	2780	1130	607	1737	55	6	6412	207	96.80%

As can been seen Highland's performance continues to be strong. Whilst the number of errors fluctuate, the total number of entries remains fairly static. A continuous high standard of accuracy is shown in the final column.

6.5 2025 data is also shown with a breakdown by our Customer Service cluster area below. As can be seen, outwith Inverness, each cluster has seen a similar number of total entries. We continue to work on promoting marriage and civil partnership, particularly in some cluster areas where elopement type ceremonies are more popular.

Cluster	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriage	Civil Marriage	Total Marriage	Civil P/Ship	Still-Birth	Total Entries
Caithness	183	365	41	39	80	2	2	632
Sutherland & East Ross	223	436	47	49	96	2	0	757
Dingwall & West Ross	172	310	105	43	148	3	0	633
Inverness	876	948	274	278	552	23	4	2403
Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey	143	353	134	46	180	9	0	685
Skye & Lochalsh	95	152	203	93	296	10	0	553
Lochaber	142	216	326	59	385	6	0	749

6.6 2025 data for Scotland as a whole is also shown below for comparison.

Births	45,067	The lowest annual total since records began in 1855 23,087 Male – most popular name - NOAH 21,980 Female – most popular name - FREYA
Deaths	61,726	31,152 – Male 30,574 – Female Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease were the leading cause of death in 2025 followed by Ischaemic Heart Disease (Cancers are divided into several different causes. If all cancers were grouped together it would be the leading cause).
Marriages	27,191	Mixed sex couples – 26,083; Same sex couples 1,108 Highland records the fourth-highest number of marriages of any local authority in Scotland, ranking behind only Dumfries & Galloway, the City of Edinburgh, and Glasgow City
Civil Partnerships	994	The highest number since 2006 (the first full year where CPs were available). In 2025 82% of CPs were for mix-sex couples

6.7 On behalf of the Home Office the Registration team across Highland also conducted ceremonies for 133 new British Citizens during 2025. Our new citizens have come from countries such as South Korea, Trinidad and Tobago, Pakistan, Fiji, Namibia, Canada and the United States to settle and make their home in the Highlands. Group ceremonies are held monthly in a number of suitable offices, or privately at the request of the citizen.

7 Service Update

7.1 2026 saw Highland host the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Registrars of Scotland. Registrars from around Scotland attended the meeting held at Inverness Town House in May, where the Registrar General for Scotland, was also in attendance. This marks Highland Registrar Annemarie MacAlpine's second year as President of the Association. She will hand over the mantle to the Vice President at next year's AGM in Glasgow.

7.2 This year a further 2 Highland Assistant Registrars were awarded with the Certificate of Proficiency in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland. Congratulations to Caroline Hunt and Kenna Burd, both Portree Registration Office.

7.3 **Promotion of the Service -** The Registration team continue to update and modernise their approach to conducting ceremonies, offering couples the opportunity to enhance the content of their ceremonies to give them a unique and personal feel. Work is ongoing to promote and raise awareness of the services and the offering of the team.

7.4 Inverness Registration Office hosted their annual Wedding Fair at the Highland Archive and Registration Centre earlier in 2026, hosting around 40 suppliers and welcoming couples planning their ceremony in the Highlands. This continues to be a successful date in our calendar, giving the team the opportunity to network with other industry suppliers. The 2027 event is planned for Sunday 7 February.

7.5 Following approval and the completion of staff training, the Registration Service have now launched dedicated Facebook and Instagram accounts under the banner **"Highland Registrars."** Going forward these platforms will be managed by a small team of staff who produce and maintain content, providing regular updates, practical guidance, service information and legislative changes for all aspects of our service.

The social media channels also play an important role in promoting the wide range of services offered by our team in relation to marriage and civil partnerships, sharing customer experiences, and showcasing all the Highlands have to offer. This has been a positive and valuable development for the team, supporting ongoing efforts to raise the profile of the service, improve public engagement, and increase awareness of the services available.

7.6 Images from the 2026 AGM and the 2026 Wedding Fair are show at Appendix 1 as well as a few images from ceremonies and venue locations from throughout this year to date.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Date:	28 September 2026
Author:	Lesley Gray, Chief Registrar
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – 2026 Images

Appendix 1



Ruth & Gerry who married at Inverness Registration Office in July, with family tuning in to the ceremony from overseas (image supplied by couple)



Inverness large ceremony room complete with new floral arrangements in 2026 bookable Monday – Saturday, accommodating parties of up to 100



May 2026 – Balnakeil Beach, Durness – wedding party all the way from Germany (images supplied by Tartan Portraits Photography)



Annual General Meeting of the
Association of Registrars of Scotland

Held May 2026 – Inverness Town House

Highland Registrar,
Annemarie MacAlpine,
President of the Association





Above - Highland Registrars Wedding Fair held in Highland Archive and Registration Centre – we can accommodate around 35-40 suppliers. Now a firm favourite in our own calendar of events

Left - Highland Registrars attending the Eden Court wedding fair in 2026, alongside over 70 other industry suppliers – a great opportunity to network and meet couples!



Kenna Burd (left) and Caroline Hunt (right) were awarded their Certificates of Proficiency in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland at the Annual General Meeting at the Inverness Town House in May 2026.



Sometimes we really do get to do something extra special – Elaine Miller, Wick Registrar had the privilege of conducting the marriage ceremony for her daughter Angela and partner Bobby at their family home in Caithness earlier this summer.