

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Customer Services Board** held in the Education and Learning Centre, Highland Archive and Registration Centre, Bught Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 21 May 2014 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr D Millar	Mr B Lobban
Dr I Cockburn	Mrs D Mackay
Mrs M Davidson	Dr A Sinclair
Mr R Laird	Mr H Wood

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development
Ms T Page, Customer Services Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

Mr I Murray, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms D Minty, Chief Registrar, Highland Archive and Registration Centre

Mr D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr H Morrison and Mr J Gordon.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last Meeting held on 24 April 2014 which were **NOTED** – subject to clarification of the amendment which had been made at the Highland Council meeting on 8 May as follows –

Item 6 (v) – last sentence to read – (d) the aforesaid Inverness and Moray Firth grouping be divided into two groups as follows – Hilton, Fort Augustus & Ardersier and Muir of Ord, Invergordon and Fortrose.

4. Presentation – Registration Service

Ms Diane Minty, Chief Registrar, undertook a Presentation on the Registration Service during which she highlighted Registration Delivery procedures and confirmed that Local Authorities were responsible for the appointment of staff, training of Registrars and providing suitable accommodation and technology. In this regard, the Registrar General was responsible for appointing District Examiners, the statutory Registers and all associated records, approving the hours of business and any other proposals which might affect the provision of the service.

It was noted that across the Highlands there were 91 staff delivering registration at 31 locations, comprising 1 Chief Registrar, 1 Senior Registrar, 19 Registrars (Qualified), 58 Assistant Registrars and 21 Assistant Registrars (Ceremonies only). In terms of location, Qualified Registrars were currently based in Fort William, Inverness, Dornoch, Wick, Thurso, Aviemore and Dingwall. In addition to the statutory functions (births, deaths and marriages), other registration activities included providing extracts for customers, ancestry research, Citizenship Ceremonies, monitoring and reporting on 'sham' marriages, changes of name, civil marriages and civil partnerships.

It was also confirmed that the co-location of Inverness Registration Office with Archive colleagues had presented the opportunity to provide the ScotlandsPeople Hub which was now a much valued initiative which delivered a self service facility for customers to conduct their own ancestry research. This service was fully funded by the Council and generated a small but very welcome income and whilst it had been in operation since October 2013, the official launch date was 17 June 2014.

Future initiatives included the Death Certification Bill and E-Registration, as well as the 'Tell Us Once' service which would be of considerable benefit to both the Council and customers once introduced.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- distance to travel, particularly in terms of registering a death, would be an important consideration as part of future discussions;
- training of Registration staff was an on-going process in offices across the Highlands and this should be borne in mind when taking future decisions on the service to be provided;
- Qualified Registrars were currently located in Fort William, Inverness, Dornoch, Wick, Thurso, Aviemore and Dingwall and the confirmation that the Registration Service had been commended for levels of accuracy which had been improving over time was welcomed;
- the future introduction of the 'Tell Me Once' Service would enable a much more efficient and streamlined service to be delivered for customers;
- there was a need for more detailed information to be provided on the opening/closing times of Registration offices across the Highlands;
- consideration should perhaps be given to having designated offices in rural areas which could be used for registration purposes as and when necessary on an 'approved location/appointment' basis;
- the option of making more use of Parlour Registrars was not feasible in view of the reducing nature of this service; and
- the registration of deaths in time limited cases was fast tracked wherever necessary and it was reassuring to know that this would be continued.

Thereafter, the Board otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the presentation.

5. Presentation – High Life Highland – Potential for Partnership

Mr Ian Murray, Chief Executive of High Life Highland (HLH), undertook a Presentation on the Potential for Partnership during which he highlighted the existing joint service arrangements, including the HLH run joint Library/Service Points (Ardersier, Bonar Bridge, Helmsdale and Kinlochleven), the Council run joint Library/Service Points (Bettyhill, Broadford and Kyle) and the co-located and separately operated Library/Service Points (Alness, Brora, Invergordon, Lochcarron and Mallaig).

In summary, it was confirmed that there were currently 20 communities with a separate Library/HLH building and Service Point, 4 communities where Library and Service Points were co-located, 7 communities which had an existing joint Library/Service Point, 10 communities with a Library and no Service Point and 4 communities with a Service Point but no Library/HLH building (namely Acharacle, Durness, Fort Augustus and Lochinver).

It was therefore suggested that there could be good opportunities for the sharing of buildings and staff in future through combining small Service Points/Libraries (at little additional cost to the Libraries budget and with savings on Service Point buildings), combining medium sized Service Points/Libraries (saving building costs but with smaller staff savings) and co-locating large facilities (which would save building costs only). The benefits of this approach would be retaining specialist Service Point Hubs which would be moved into Library buildings where possible, retaining sufficient Service Point staff within the Council for service development and training, shifting the focus of savings to buildings (and therefore efficiencies) rather than access to services, focusing on customer service with better co-ordinated services, creating the potential for positive public relations and saving jobs.

In summary, it was confirmed that there were obvious synergies between Libraries and Service Points and therefore excellent opportunities for future partnership working arrangements, perhaps through an examination of each Library on a case by case basis and working with the Service Point management team.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- consideration should be given to the feasibility of making use of the Mobile Library Service where possible;
- in terms of co-location of services, privacy and sensitivity had to be paramount at all times;
- if services were to be co-located, each community would need to be considered separately as what worked in one location might not be feasible for another;
- there might be a need for limited capital investment in some instances and this should be discussed where necessary;
- in terms of the registration process and the future service to be provided, it was imperative that this commenced with a face-to-face meeting which could be followed up by electronic means if necessary, perhaps through Skype;
- there was a need for innovative thinking in order to produce solutions for the future;
- it would be helpful if copies of the presentations could be forwarded to Members of the Board following the meeting;

- every opportunity for partnership working with High Life Highland should be explored; and
- current arrangements for co-location of services were working well across the Highland area and offered good examples of best practice which could perhaps be replicated as part of future proposals.

The Board otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the presentation.

Thereafter, a Tour of the Archive and Registration Service was undertaken to allow Members of the Board to view the facilities and the services provided.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm.