

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CP/16/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 12 May 2021

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

Report By: ECO Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This first annual report describes the work of the Registration Service in its statutory role to register life events. It summarises how the service has adjusted in response to Covid. Members are asked to scrutinise performance as it is currently measured based on the most recently published data for 2019. This includes the National Records of Scotland (NRS) examination of records. Comparator data is available for 2018 on performance and cost. Data for 2020 is available but not yet verified and results of the examination will be known later in the Summer. Service risks, particularly regarding income are identified. Service development and improvements planned are described.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. The Registration team of 41.82 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) work across 22 locations recording around 6000 life events in the Highlands usually comprising around 2000 births, 2500 deaths and 1500 marriages and civil partnership each year, with around half of these marriages and civil partnerships undertaken by the team.
- ii. The team undertake other important discretionary and income generating tasks including citizenship ceremonies (96 in 2019), the Identity and Passport Service (800 interviews in 2019/20) and the Family History Search Facility (around 600 annually).
- iii. Significant disruption across all Registrar services occurred in 2020, notably the temporary suspension of birth registration, marriages and civil partnerships and other discretionary services. The backlog of 400 birth registrations built up during the first lockdown was cleared in 4 months of recommencing the service. Arrangements for marriages and civil partnerships continue to evolve. Remote death registration was introduced through statute and this has proven to be more convenient to bereaved families.

- iv. Sadly, there have been 132 deaths registered in Highland where Covid was recorded on the death certificate from 1.4.20 to 26.4.21.
- v. Staff have adjusted well to the new ways of working and ensured covid secure arrangements are in place for the safety of staff and customers. A review of incentives to encourage more staff to undertake the Certificate of Proficiency in the Law and Practice in Registration in Scotland is underway.
- vi. There are potential risks associated with achieving the £533,240 income target for 2021/22. This will be monitored in-year and any budget pressures will be reported.
- vii. Service developments underway include preparing for mixed sex civil partnerships from end June 2021 and the new requirements for marriage visas for EU citizens from July 2021. Along with other functions in the Communities and Place (C&P) Service, the team will contribute to the C&P Service Performance Framework to be developed in 2021/22 drawing on a range of data, external reports and a programme of self-evaluation.
- viii. Other potential developments may arise from legislation to enable remote or virtual appointments for both birth and death registration. A new project to digitise burial records is currently being scoped. Options for undertaking a new project to identify new products and services to celebrate and commemorate life events are being considered.

2.2 Members are asked to scrutinise performance based on the most recently published data which shows that for 2019:

- i. NRS examination of information recorded confirmed 97.4% accuracy, close to the national figure of 97.9% and is well placed within our family benchmark group. The examiner's report for each site is shown at Appendix 1. As well as providing assurance, this helps to identify good practice and areas for improvement across the region;
- ii. the Council's performance is particularly strong given the relative resource invested in the service, as we are placed in the top quartile of all Councils for low cost (ranked 3rd lowest for net expenditure and 8th lowest for gross expenditure) and ranked 2nd lowest cost within our family group of 8 Councils, based on Local Financial Returns data for 2018/19;
- iii. in the most recent survey of the Council's Citizen's Panel, the service was ranked 3rd highest for satisfaction out of 46 Council services, with a net satisfaction score of 73% and this has been consistently high for the past 5 years; and
- iv. the team continues to achieve death registration in less time than the statutory period of 8 days of the medical certificate being received from the Certifying Doctor, with 2 days usually achieved.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications:

The Registration Service generates income from a number of workstreams: marriage and civil partnerships; passport interviews; citizenship ceremonies; family history searches; and the sale of Scottish entry extracts (certificates). Increases in our discretionary charges in relation to marriage and civil partnership were agreed by the Council in March 2021. These are: £45k of additional income by an increase in the fee charge set nationally by NRS and £16k of additional from discretionary fees and some new charges. These fees had seen no previous increase since 2017. Benchmarking against other Local Authorities and the charges for services offered by Religious and

Belief Celebrants, the Council's offer is competitive and demonstrates value for money for a non-religious ceremony. The additional fees will mean an increase in our target income of £61,000 to £533,240. Confirmation of statutory fees is awaited for 2021/22 and these are set by NRS. The range of fees to be charged in 2021/22 are shown on the table below.

Civil Ceremony Booking Fee (Non-Refundable out with Covid)	£50.00
For each person submitting Notice (Non-Refundable out with Covid)	£30.00
For each extract (certificate)	£10.00
Solemnisation Fee for conducting ceremony	£55.00
Accommodation Fee over 4 and up to a maximum of 30	£70.00
Accommodation Fee over 30	£100.00
Additional Fee for Saturday ceremony	£185.00
Additional Fee for a ceremony at a venue (Mon-Fri)	£215.00
Additional fee for a ceremony at a venue (Sat, Sun Pub-Hol)	£250.00
Purchase of an extract from a Register (less than 1 month from registration)	£10.00
Purchase of an extract from a Register (more than 1 month after registration)	£15.00
Scotland's People booking (per day)	£15.00
General Search conducted by a Registrar (per hour)	£30.00
Particular Search conducted by a Registrar	£5.00
Proof of Life Confirmation	£5.00

3.2 With an income target of £533,240, the Registration Service budget is required to generate a surplus of £117,572. It sits within the overall budget for Customer Services net budget of £1.1m.

3.3 To assist with new Covid services, time-limited Covid funding of £26k to support a seven-day death registration service during Lockdown 1 was awarded to the Council from the Scottish Government in Quarter 2 of 2020.

3.4 Legal implications:

The main Acts of Parliament governing registration are:

- The Registration of Births, Death & Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965
- The Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 & 2002
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006
- Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011
- Immigration Act 2014
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014
- Still-Birth (Definition) Act 1992

3.5 Community (equality, poverty, rural and island) implications:

The Registration Service is currently available in 22 locations Highland wide, offering a vital service to the public in some of our most remote communities. Changes introduced because of the need for Covid compliance included death registration moving on-line and by telephony. This made the service accessible throughout the region and to bereaved families living out with Highland. Many comments were received on the benefits and convenience of the service being accessible to families in this way.

- 3.6 Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies are inclusive, reflecting the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 and the protected characteristic of sexual orientation. The Registration service registers around 20 same sex marriages and civil partnerships annually.
- 3.7 Council Registration Offices are fully accessible for disabled access.
- 3.8 Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications:
Moving aspects of the service on-line and by telephone to be Covid compliant will have reduced carbon emissions associated with travel to and from offices where Registrars are based.
- 3.9 Risk implications:
There is a risk of not generating sufficient income to meet the income target as the service is demand led. This includes the risks around NRS not increasing the statutory fee to cover the £45k additional income target set, the Identity and Passport Service not resuming soon and the potential loss of income from the new Visa requirements for EU citizens seeking to marry in the Highlands. Income will be monitored in-year and any pressures arising will be reported to Committee. There is a risk of potentially ongoing or further Covid disruption, depending on infection rates.
- 3.10 Gaelic implications: There are no implications arising from this report. New parents can choose to record a child's name in Gaelic, English, or Gaelic *and* English in the registers.

4. Background

- 4.1 Registration as we know it today, started in 1855, and is carried out on the authority of the Registrar General for Scotland. It is a legal statutory requirement to register the event of a birth, death, still-birth, marriage and civil partnership which occur in Scotland.
- 4.2 Prior to 1855 Births, Deaths and Marriages were recorded through parish records detailing baptisms, burials and proclamation of wedding banns.
- 4.3 Due to the co-location of the Inverness Registration Office with Highland Archives the Council holds most of the Highland Registers from 1855 in its area repository.

5. Assets and resources

- 5.1 Office based Registration services are delivered from:
- 1 dedicated Registration Office serving the city of Inverness
 - 19 dual role offices (our Service Point team) in Wick, Thurso, Bettyhill, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Ullapool, Gairloch, Nairn, Grantown, Kingussie, Aviemore, Fort Augustus, Fort William, Kyle, Broadford and Portree
 - 1 partnership office in Kinlochbervie which runs from the North West CAB
 - 1 "parlour" (home based) part-time Registrar based in the Small Isles
- These are used for face to face services although Registrars undertake events in many locations around the Highlands and provide on-line and telephony services to people across and outwith the region.
- 5.2 The current staffing establishment includes:
- 1 Chief Registrar;
 - 12 Qualified Registrars (some dual role with Service Point duties);
 - 40 Assistant Registrars (most dual role with Service Point duties); and
 - 14 Assistant Registrars for Marriage only.

As well as some staff having a dual role, not all staff work full time. There are 10.43 (FTE) Registrar posts and 30.39 FTE Assistant Registrar posts in the structure, led by the Chief Registrar.

- 5.3 For 2021/22 the Registration Service budget requires £533,240 of income and has planned expenditure of £415,668. It is required to generate a surplus of £117,572 within the overall customer services net budget of £1.1m.
- 5.4 Comparing the Council's costs to other Councils, using the Local Financial Returns (LFR) data for 2018/19 shows we are place in the top quartile for low cost on gross and net revenue budgets (ranked 8th and 3rd respectively). Within our LFR family group we are placed 2nd lowest on cost out of 8 Councils.

6. Service demand and quality assurance

- 6.1 In Scotland each year, Registrars record in the region of 140,000 life events. With around 6,000 events recorded annually in Highland this places us in the top quartile of service demand (ranked 7th). The life events recorded for 2020 were impacted by Covid as described in section 7 below, so figures for 2018 and 2019 are included in the table below to provide a comparison with more typical years. Figures for 2018 and 2019 are verified by NRS and the figures for 2020 are currently provisional until examined.

Calendar Year	Births	Deaths	Marriages	Civil Partnerships	Total Life Events
2018	2085	2769	1510	1	6365
2019	2021	2682	1487	6	6196
2020*	1880	2688	796	5	5369

* To be verified

- 6.2 Registrars are involved in the administration required for all marriages including those conducted by a religious or belief celebrant. Registrars and Assistant Registrars also conduct civil ceremonies. In both 2018 and 2019 around 700 marriages were conducted by the Registration team, just under half of all marriages in Highland.
- 6.3 Around 40% of the range of life events are registered in Inverness with the rest spread across the Highlands, mostly in our centres of population, but the service is equally as important in our smaller rural communities.
- 6.4 An important level of assurance is from staff competence and skills. To become a fully qualified Registrar requires attaining the Certificate of Proficiency in the Law and Practice in Registration in Scotland. This is awarded by the Registrar General for Scotland at the Association of Registrars Annual General Meeting. It requires participation in a study programme for a year with exams scheduled in November or March annually. All 14 Registrars and the Chief Registrar are fully qualified, and 4 Assistants are working towards the certificate; their commitment is highly commendable given their current workload. Staff are encouraged to study and gain the certificate and we are reviewing incentives to encourage more staff to undertake the qualification.
- 6.5 There are many benefits to the Council and employees in gaining the Certificate. A qualified Registrar will have the ability and confidence and in-depth legislative knowledge to respond to the varied and complex enquiries received. They will also have the knowledge and ability to mentor and support Assistants across our area. Every register page produced should, wherever possible, be checked by a qualified Registrar before completion. This is often done remotely using a variety of IT systems. This is done to

offer support to our single staffed offices, improve accuracy and provide consistency in our records across such a wide geographical area. All Assistant Registrars are trained and supported.

- 6.6 Examples of the more complex enquiries Registrars respond to include:
- discussion with medical colleagues around information provided on Medical Certificates of Cause of Death;
 - complex paperwork in relation to marriage (visa requirements, foreign documents and reporting of a potential sham marriage);
 - dealing with dispensations (special permission) for urgent marriage ceremonies (this may be due to terminal illness; or armed forces personnel being deployed to a war zone etc);
 - change of Name or Declaration of Paternity enquiries;
 - dealing with requests for information for Police enquiries;
 - dealing with difficult registrations where there has been relationship breakdown in households/families; and
 - adoption enquiries.

6.7 External Quality Assurance

Another level of assurance is from an external scrutiny and/or regulation. Each year the Registers are 'examined' by a District Examiner employed by National Records of Scotland (NRS). The examiner works closely with each district making any required corrections and offering advice or guidance on the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland. The examiner also gives feedback about the performance of each office and the overall local authority area performance which feeds into the Registrar General for Scotland's Annual Report.

- 6.8 The most recent examiner's report for Highland is for the 2019 registers and that confirmed 97.4% accuracy of information recorded. This is based on a review of all registered events and not a sample. The 2019 result is a slight improvement from 97% accuracy reported for 2018 records.

- 6.9 The 2019 examination results for accuracy by Area Committee geography is shown Appendix 1. This is helpful data providing assurance on quality and to understand internally where to provide additional support and where to learn from good practice.

- 6.10 Publication of the comparator data for 2019 has been delayed by Covid and the registers are yet to be transferred to NRS. The examination of the 2020 records is underway and results are expected in the Summer.

- 6.11 The most recently published comparator data is for 2018. In that year the Scottish average for all Local Authorities was 97.9% accuracy. This figure is not benchmarked as part of the set of Statutory Performance Indicators, but our family group for Local Financial Returns (LFRs) comprises: the three island authorities, and the Councils for Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders. In 2018 the range of accuracy recorded across this group was confirmed from 94.48% to 98.21%, so the Council's accuracy at 97% is well placed.

In reviewing the LFR returns for 2018/19 year, we can compare our costs of the service.

- 6.12 This shows:
- our Gross Revenue Expenditure (GRE) on Registration as a percentage of Total Local Authority GRE places us 8th lowest cost in Scotland;

- our Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE) as a percentage of Total Local Authority NRE places us 3rd lowest cost in Scotland (reflecting our income generation);
- Within our family group, we are placed 2nd lowest cost (of 8) for both GRE and NRE.

The relative low cost of our service makes our relative performance even better.

- 6.13 Customer feedback is gathered as part of the Council's annual survey of performance and attitudes from the Citizens' Panel. The last survey in 2019 recorded the Registration service with 73% net satisfaction (the % of respondents satisfied minus the % dissatisfied). This was the 3rd highest net satisfaction score out of 46 Council services surveyed. Net satisfaction scores have been consistently above 70% for the Registration Service over the past 5 years, with the highest score of 74% in 2015.
- 6.14 Members will note from the Service Plan report that one of the priorities in 2021/22 is to develop a performance framework for the whole C&P Service. The framework will cover the range of data we need to collect to help us identify where improvement is needed, how this relates to resourcing and how performance compares across different teams in the Service and with other Councils as well as a system for reporting that data for scrutiny by Members and the public. The performance framework will include data from a range of sources and include quantitative, qualitative data and the results of audits, inspections and regulatory feedback as well as self-evaluation. The framework will include the service provided by the registration team.

7. Service Continuation During COVID-19 Pandemic

- 7.1 Prior to the Covid pandemic, Registration was a face-to-face and sometimes an appointment-based service. Staff take pride in offering a personal, professional and empathetic service to customers. Covid compliance disrupted the face-to-face service as described below.
- 7.2 On the 24th March 2020 as Scotland went into the first lockdown NRS instructed that the Registration of Births and Marriages were suspended. This meant cancelling weddings including some on the very day they were due to take place.
- 7.3 Many services are paper based within Registration. This includes:
- certificates required to be printed on particular quality of paper;
 - registers are required to be stored at all times in fireproof safes; and
 - much of the Council's burials administration, also carried out by many in the registration team in their Customer Services role, is paper based.

Although restrictions meant offices could not be opened for face to face contact, the reliance on manual paper processes meant that staff had to attend offices for part of their working week and using telephony and on-line platforms. This has resulted in many staff lone working as colleagues from other services were required and enabled to work from home.

- 7.4 Remote Death Registration became a legislative requirement in March 2020 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. Highland Registrars offered this service, following instruction from NRS. Whilst this presented challenges in a completely new way of working, staff adapted immediately and remained committed to providing a service to their community during what was a very stressful and extremely worrying time. Deaths continue to be registered using the remote service, and the UK legislation remains in place until mid-2022.

- 7.5 An appointment interview to register a death now takes place over the telephone, using telephony and email to ensure the accuracy of the record. The team works closely with colleagues in the NHS and Funeral Directors to ensure deaths are registered within the required statutory period of 8 days; although Highland deaths are in general registered within 2 days of the medical certificate being received from the Certifying Doctor to offer a higher standard of service.
- 7.6 Whilst staff were worried, they may not be able to offer the same quality of service as they would face to face, the real feedback from bereaved families has been all extremely positive. They can register a death from the comfort of their own home, perhaps with loved ones alongside them, or from anywhere in the country, or indeed even from overseas. At a time where travel has been difficult or impossible for some, this has ensured that in many cases the most appropriate person has been able to do the registration.
- 7.7 The team continues to offer the 'Tell Us Once' service on completion of a death registration. Tell Us Once is a free, optional service which will inform central and local government bodies that a death has occurred. It means the bereaved family do not need to deal with any services or entitlements the deceased person may have received. On behalf of bereaved families, the team notifies:
- Department of Work and Pensions and other Benefits
 - Personal Tax
 - Council Tax
 - Passport
 - Driving Licence
 - Blue Badge
 - Electoral Register
 - Public Sector Pensions
- 7.8 Since March 2020 and prior to the first lockdown the Chief Registrar has participated in the cross service and partnership Additional Deaths Coordinating Group. This has ensured Registrars have been ready to deal with any increase in death registrations. The total deaths registered where Covid was included in the death certificate from April 2020 to 11.4.21 is 132; with 54 recorded during 2020 and 78 recorded from January to 26.4.21.
- 7.9 Further change was announced on 29th June 2020 with an instruction to recommence birth registration and the registration of Marriages and Civil Partnerships. This brought new Health and Safety issues to address as both functions require face to face contact with the public. Work was done to risk assess both processes in order that our staff and our customers felt safe and protected during contact and in association with Health and Safety colleagues and Trade Unions.
- 7.10 With birth registration initially suspended a backlog of around 400 birth registrations existed. Across the network Registrars set about a plan of appointments recording births in date order, so in years to come the Registers of 2020 would make chronological sense. Registrars worked with partners such as Health Visitors to ensure no new babies were missed. By the end of September 2020, the backlog was cleared. Currently birth registration uses a "hybrid" model as agreed by NRS, where the appointment is carried out in two stages; an initial telephone capture of the details to be registered, followed by a very short face to face appointment for signing the register in the local office most convenient to the new parents.

- 7.11 Risk assessments for a civil marriage ceremony in a registration office, outdoors, or at a venue, were also carried out and shared with the Council's Health and Safety team. This resulted in ceremony protocols being put in place, referring to the Scottish Government guidance, ensuring Covid compliance and safety for staff and customers. The team has had to work with couples to set expectations that their planned day may have to look very different.
- 7.12 National guidance on marriage has changed multiple times over the last 12 months and every change in guidance means an increased workload for the Registration team as couples continue to change plans. The team has adapted each time, working with couples to ensure compliance with Scottish Government guidelines, whilst giving them the best experience possible in the circumstances.
- 7.13 There has been no restriction to travel for the purposes of marriage during 2020 and in 2021. This meant continuing to see couples travel from across the UK and from overseas for a ceremony in the Highlands, with the region becoming even more popular as a marriage destination. While we welcome visitors for this purpose, this has understandably caused some concern throughout the team given personal worries of the virus, whilst continuing to provide a service. Risks are mitigated through our risk assessment process.
- 7.14 The team is responsible for ensuring that all ceremonies which go ahead on Council premises:
- do not exceed maximum permitted numbers;
 - adhere to the use of face coverings;
 - ensure physical distancing in place;
 - involve gathering contact tracing information;
 - involve discussion of these restrictions with couples prior to a ceremony going ahead.
- The team also advise venues, visitor accommodation and religious and belief celebrants on the restrictions and of their responsibilities for compliance.
- 7.15 With further "lockdown" restrictions the number permitted at a ceremony was further reduced to 4 plus the celebrant/registrars and any foreign interpreter if required. This involved the team working with all couples who have again chosen to postpone or cancel their planned ceremony, helping them secure other dates/times or venues or obtaining refunds in order that we do not cause any financial hardship. Numbers are expected to increase at a ceremony to a maximum of 50 in attendance from the 26th April onwards as restrictions are lifted.
- 7.16 Whilst Marriage continues to be a challenging element of the team's workload, it is also extremely rewarding. A selection of photographs from some of the ceremonies undertaken by the Registration team is attached at Appendix 2. Unfortunately, we do not have any photographs of same sex ceremonies to include but we will seek to gain permission from couples to hold and share these to demonstrate inclusivity. The photographs appended show the beautiful surroundings offered in a Highland wedding.
- 7.17 When time and budget allow, the team tries to engage with customers by attending Wedding Fayres. This provides the opportunity to speak to couples at the outset of their plans, advising them what the Council can offer as part of a modern-day civil ceremony – suggesting Handfastings, Quaich, Candle or Sand ceremonies, and incorporating music and readings into their special day.

8. Other Registrar Services

8.1 Citizenship Ceremonies

The Registration Service has provided Citizenship Ceremonies since 2006. In 2019, 96 were conducted. In 2020 72 were conducted. From March to July the service was suspended, and ceremonies re-commenced in August 2020. So far in 2021 there have been 40 undertaken and new certificates continue to arrive weekly from the Home Office. These prestigious ceremonies previously took place monthly, mainly held in the Town House with the Provost and other members in attendance, and also offered in other outlying areas such as Fort William, Portree and Wick.

8.2 After lockdown ceremonies were moved to be held in the Council's marriage ceremony suite in the Registration Office in Inverness, and in Fort William, Portree and Wick offices. In line with social distancing requirements the numbers in attendance have been greatly reduced, and no guests or dignitaries are currently permitted. Whilst this is disappointing, the most important thing is that the ceremony goes ahead, and the new citizen receives their Certificate of Naturalisation and can move forward with their life as a citizen of the Highlands.

8.3 Following guidance from the Home Office we now also offer our new citizens the option of a "virtual" ceremony from their own home. This is set up using IT systems such as Microsoft Teams. These are individual ceremonies, and the citizen can of course then have family members in attendance. These have proved to be very successful.

8.4 The Home Office pay the local authority £80.00 per citizenship. This generated an income in the region of £7k to The Highland Council. Citizens so far this year have come from the following countries of origin: South Africa; Malawi; Liberia; Morocco; India; Bangladesh; Indonesia; Thailand; Australia; New Zealand; USA; St Lucia; Spain; Lithuania; Serbia; Romania; Latvia; Poland; Denmark and Liberia.

8.5 Identity and Passport Service

Inverness, Wick, Portree, Ullapool and Fort William offices previously worked in partnership with the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) facilitating online face to face interviews for first time passport applicants. This area of work was suspended in March 2020 and has yet to re-start. IPS are invoiced quarterly by the Council, at a charge of £50.00 per interview conducted. In the 2019/20 financial year we facilitated just over 800 interviews on behalf of IPS, generating income in the region of £40K.

8.6 ScotlandsPeople Hub - Family History Search Facility

Prior to Covid-19 the Inverness Registration Office previously offered 4 seats daily for searchers at our ScotlandsPeople Hub. This is usually a supervised service by a member of the Registration team. This service is currently suspended to minimise callers to the building, and whilst we focus on the statutory business of Births, Deaths and Marriages This is a popular service which we hope to resume as soon as guidance allows. Over a year we can see in the region of 600 bookings, at a charge of £15.00 per user per day. Generating income in the region of £9,500.

9. Service learning, developments and improvements

9.1 Continuation of Blended Working

Since the start of 2021, as a network we have looked more closely at the working arrangements of our staff, minimising staff contact wherever possible. The Inverness team are working in 2 separate groups, offering resilience to the service should either team have an issue with a positive case or be linked as close contacts. We have

encouraged all offices to work in different ways, to allow for some home working and some office working to carry out statutory duties. This requires flexibility and continual communication throughout our widespread network, enabled by ICT.

9.2 In addition to maintaining our service throughout the pandemic, we have two new areas of work to plan over the next few months:

- EU exit changes for marriage and civil partnership
The immigration and visa requirements for couples from out with the UK choosing to marry in Scotland since EU exit is changing. Previously EEA citizens could marry in Scotland without requiring a Marriage Visa from the Home Office. This will no longer be the case. From July 2021 any party from out with the UK will now require a Marriage Visa to travel for this purpose. The legal preliminaries to marriage in Scotland for non-UK citizens are complex, and we are responsible for referring couples to the Home Office for investigation if they do not meet the required visa requirements.
- Mixed sex civil partnership
The introduction of mixed sex civil partnerships. From 1st June couples in a mixed sex relationship can submit notice to enter into a civil partnership. After giving the legal minimum of 29 days' notice, the first ceremony for this could be on the 30th June 2021. This is an entirely new area of work and we await guidance from NRS on this.

9.3 Modernisation of the registration service through use of IT

Ideally remote or virtual appointments for both death and birth registration can be considered by NRS as a way of modernising the service provided in the future. Whilst this requires changes to legislation, in a geographical area such as Highland it has proved to be an invaluable way of offering a seamless service to some of our more remote communities. This has been tried and tested successfully throughout the last year. It also helps reduce carbon emissions associated with travel.

9.4 Another ICT transformation project currently being scoped is around digitising burials records. In some offices the burial records and books still in use date from the 19th century. These records are important to our cultural heritage and the documents need to be protected and archived. Digitising this information will make access to records easier for staff, for customers and researchers. As well as efficiency gains this would also make the service more resilient to any future disruption associated with reliance on paper bases systems or should there be any problems accessing buildings. The Registrar, Customer Services and Bereavement teams take great care with these records and there will be a role for them in this digital project.

9.5 Another area of service development to explore in 2021 is around further commercial and income generating opportunities. Identifying new products and services to celebrate and commemorate life events and marketing these will be explored in 2021.

Designation: ECO Communities and Place

Date: 24.4.21

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2019 HIGHLAND REGISTRATION EXAMINATION 1.1.19 to 31.12.19, by Area Committee

Area Committee geography	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil Partnerships	Total Entries	No. of Corrections	Accuracy %
Caithness	216	303	41	25	66	1	586	17	97.10%
Sutherland	54	119	27	23	50	0	223	5	97.76%
Easter Ross	208	269	29	37	66	0	543	14	97.42%
Mid Ross	137	250	60	43	103	1	491	17	96.54%
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	44	96	48	52	100	0	240	17	92.92%
Skye and Raasay	58	89	123	83	206	0	353	9	97.45%
Inverness city and area	960	1019	265	286	551	3	2533	37	98.54%
Badenoch and Strathspey	86	122	68	50	118	0	326	16	95.09%
Nairn	98	211	35	48	83	1	393	8	97.96%
Lochaber	160	204	88	56	144	0	508	21	95.87%
Total	2021	2682	784	703	1487	6	6196	161	97.40%

Civil Ceremony – Balnakeil Bay, Durness
Conducted by Lesley Gray, Registrar



Civil Ceremony – Town House, Inverness
Conducted by Sara Krzyzanowski, Assistant Registrar



Civil Ceremony, Kinlochewe
Conducted by Gillian Morrison, Assistant Registrar





Civil Ceremony,
The most unusual delivery of “the rings”
Conducted by Kathleen Campbell, Registrar