

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	CP/23/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 16 November 2022

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

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the work of the Registration Service in its statutory role to register life events. It provides details of the performance over the course of the last calendar year including the outcome of the external quality assurance and scrutiny the service is subject to.
- 1.2 The report also provides an update on the introduction of new arrangements for Registration on a permanent basis and future areas of development for the service.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Note the work of the Registration team across Highland and the changes to work patterns and services over the last three years.
 - Scrutinise the performance of the Registration team based upon the most recently examined data from 2021 and outlined in Appendix 4.
 - Note the future developments for the service for the next year.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource implications:** there are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The Registration service in Highland is integrated and provided as part of the Service Point network.

- 3.2 The service receives income for Registration services based upon fees set by National Records of Scotland. There are specific income targets for the network as part of the Council's approach to income generation.
- 3.3 **Legal implications:** The work of the Registration service is government by 9 different Acts of Parliament including:
- The Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965
 - The Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 and 2002
 - The Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2020
 - The Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006
 - Certificate of Death (Scotland) Act 2011
- 3.4 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** The Registration Service is currently available in 18 locations across Highland, offering a vital service to the public in some of our most remote communities. However, the new parliamentary bill – Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 – enables remote registration of both birth and death appointments on a permanent basis which has increased the reach of the service, providing greater choice for the customer. The ability to register the death of a Highland resident, with the appointment being conducted with a family member who lives elsewhere in the UK or indeed even overseas, has been an invaluable addition to the service provided.
- 3.5 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications:** The introduction of remote appointments which can now be conducted by telephone and/or teams will reduce carbon emissions associated with travel for both customers and for staff across our wide geographical area. Noting also fuel poverty and the current cost of living crisis, the move to remote offering and the option to carry out an appointment from a home address can be financially beneficial to the public.
- 3.6 **Risk implications:** the Passport and Identity Service have not, to date, resumed their previous partnership with the Highland Council resulting in a loss of income post-covid.
- 3.7 **Gaelic implications:** The use of Gaelic within the registers is an option with names being recorded in Gaelic, English or Gaelic *and* English, depending upon individual customer choice.

4. Background

- 4.1 Registration in Scotland as it is recorded today began in 1855, and information is now gathered on behalf of the Registrar General for Scotland. Registration describes the process required to register *life* events; namely Births, Deaths, Still-Births, Marriages and Civil Partnerships – both Civil and Religious. It is a legal statutory requirement to register life events which take place in Scotland. Prior to 1855, Births, Deaths and

Marriages were recorded through parish records detailing baptisms, burials and proclamation of wedding banns.

4.2 Registration services in Highland are delivered from:

- 1 dedicated Registration Office serving the city of Inverness and surrounding area
- 15 dual role offices (our Customer Service Point team) in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Ullapool, Nairn, Aviemore, Kingussie, Fort William, Kyle, Broadford and Portree.
- 1 partnership office in Kinlochbervie with birth and death registration being carried out by North West Citizens Advice Bureau
- 1 “parlour” (home based) Registrar based in the Small Isles

4.3 These locations now offer a range of services using a wide variety of contact channels – face to face, telephone, virtual and via email correspondence. Further details on the changing approach to registration provision is detailed in section 6.

4.4 The current staffing establishment includes:

- 1 Chief Registrar
- 12 Qualified Registrars (some with dual role with Service Point duties)
- 37 Assistant Registrars (most with dual role with Service Point duties)
- 15 Assistant Registrars employed to conduct Ceremonies Only

4.5 It is noted that many staff work part time hours, and most also have a dual role within their Service Point location. There are 9.74 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) qualified staff, and 31.61 FTE Assistant Registrar posts in the structure, led by the Chief Registrar.

5. Service Demand and Quality Assurance

5.1 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 for service demand. The life events recorded for 2020 were heavily impacted by Covid, so examined figures for 2018 and 2019 are included in the table below to provide a comparison with more typical years. Figures for 2018, 2019 and 2020 are verified by National Records of Scotland and the figures for 2021 are currently provisional until examination has concluded.

Calendar Year	Births	Deaths	Still Births	Marriages	Civil Partnerships	Total Life Events	Accuracy
2018	2077	2769	8	1510	1	6365	97%
2019	2020	2682	1	1487	6	6196	97.39%
2020	1875	2690	6	796	5	5372	96.70%
2021	1891	2848	9	1571	32	6351	97.07%

Appendix 1 and 2 show the published 2018 and 2019 figures from National Records of Scotland. 2020 figures are not yet available due to delays as a result of covid.

- 5.2 Around 40% of the range of life events are registered in the dedicated office in Inverness with the rest spread across the Highlands, mostly in the larger centres of population, but it is recognised that the service is equally as important in our rural communities. Appendices 3 and 4 show the breakdown of events registered across the network, per office. However, with the introduction of a “remote” option to register an event, it is recognised that those in a rural community can do this from the comfort of their own home, without the added burden of travelling to an office, giving more flexibility to the customer and to the team to move workload when required.
- 5.3 National Records of Scotland promote Registration as “Preserving the Past, Recording the Present, Informing the Future”. This highlights the importance of the information captured within the registers.

Careful and sensitive questioning by our Registrars ensure that the service accurately link life events together, for historical purposes, completing a picture of a citizen’s life in Scotland. The information gathered also shapes future plans for Scotland and for the Highlands as our Vital Events branch in Edinburgh produce statistics which inform NHS, Scottish Government and Local Authorities on subjects such as causes of death linked to ethnic groups, population statistics, migration, household size, which will shape future planning such as education, housing, medical care and more.

Incorrect information recorded during a registration can cause issues with other legal documents such as passports, pensions and wills.

- 5.4 Some examples of the more complex enquiries Registrars respond to include :
- Discussions with medical professionals regarding the information provided on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD)
 - Working with Procurator Fiscals and Police Scotland for sudden death registrations
 - Change of Name enquiries
 - Change of Gender enquiries
 - Family History requests
 - Requests for information for ongoing Police enquiries
 - Scrutinising paperwork in relation to marriage (Non-UK, post Brexit)
 - Working with the Home Office on marriage referrals
 - Reporting potential sham marriage to the Home Office
 - Responding to urgent Dispensation Requests (special permission) for emergency marriage ceremonies (this may be due to terminal illness; or armed forces deployment)

5.5 *External Quality Assurance*

Each year registered events across Scotland are “examined” by a District Examiner employed by National Records of Scotland (NRS). The examiner works closely with each district office making required changes and offering advice and guidance on the law and practice of Registration in Scotland. The examiner ensures consistency in the methods of recording and gives feedback on performance for individuals and for each

office. The overall local authority performance feeds into the Registrar General for Scotland's Annual Report.

- 5.6 The most recent annual report from National Records of Scotland is from 2019. A report for 2020 will not be issued until all the Registers from across Scotland have been gathered in by General Register Office in Edinburgh, a process which has been delayed by Covid-19. The Highland registers show a confirmed accuracy rate of 97.4%. The 2020 registers have a provisional accuracy rate of 96.7%, and the 2021 registers an accuracy rate of 97.07%. During a very difficult year for Registration teams across Scotland the service are very proud of the high standard of information captured in our Registers.

6. Looking to the Future

6.1 ***Remote Registration***

During 2020 and much of 2021, registration services felt the full impact of Covid-19 pandemic. With office doors closing during March 2020, birth registration and marriages were suspended completely, and death registration processes changed by Royal Assent through the UK Emergency Bill, and the Coronavirus Act 2020, enabling this to be done remotely by phone.

- 6.2 Feedback from staff and customers has been the move to remote death registration has been a positive development, enabling greater flexibility and responsiveness to customers at a difficult period of their lives. Particularly within a remote area such as Highland, the move to remote death registration has assisted in reducing the need to travel.

- 6.3 Building on the learning from the pandemic, from 24th September 2022 the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 made provisions for the remote registration of deaths to continue on a permanent basis, and also introduced the option for a remote birth registration. Therefore, registration offices will now offer birth and death appointments both face to face, and fully remote.

- 6.4 There are benefits to both ways, as face to face gives personal contact and in certain circumstances can make communication easier, whereas remote registration is often more convenient for the customer, and can give greater flexibility to the Service, allowing us to move appointments from office to office if necessary without any disruption to the customer. This is very important in order to balance the different demands across the network and ensure the service is operating effectively and efficiently.

6.5 ***Popularity of Highland as a Wedding Location***

2021 and 2022 have been particularly popular for weddings; many having been postponed as a result of the pandemic. Highland continues to be a popular choice for marriage, and areas such as Lochaber and Skye & Lochalsh experience a high volume of couples who are from outwith Highland, and indeed outwith the UK. Images shared

in appendix 5 show why our stunning landscape is so popular with visitors with couples getting married.

- 6.6 The Registration team do their best to accommodate all requests, taking into account the health and safety of staff, and the resourcing required to meet some of our more unusual locations. However, this also brings challenges that need to be managed including the remoteness of locations which may require a member of the team to be out of the office for the best part of the day – often travelling to a remote location by car, boat and foot.
- 6.7 Some of our popular outdoor locations are:
- The Quiraing on Skye – this involves a narrow single track roads and a walk to the chosen spot.
 - The Old Man of Storr – this is a walking boot walk of around 45 minutes.
 - Loch Coruisk – a boat trip from Elgol Pier
 - The Nevis Range – accessed via the Gondola
 - Castle Tioram – a walk across a causeway – Wellies required and tide time dependent
 - The beaches at Morar, Camusdarach and Arasaig – the best part of a day out of the office
 - Glencoe – taking in a vast geographical area and any number of possible locations such as The Lochan, The Study and Ralston Cairns
 - The Bone Caves at Inchnadamph – a hike of around 45 minutes to a remote spot.
 - Jacobite Cruises - Sailing on Loch Ness to Urquhart Bay
 - Glenfeshie Bothy, an on-foot river crossing and a 4km walk
- 6.8 The popularity of Highland for couples from outwith the UK poses particular challenges for the service with new regulations for non-UK nationals wishing to marry in the UK. Registrars perform an important role in referring couples to the Home Office and collating the necessary paperwork prior to any wedding proceeding. Overall the complexity of the process and paperwork associated with weddings has increased, which places particular time demands on the service.
- 6.9 ***Developing the Registration Service Offering***
Whilst the core role of the Registration Service is statutory, the team provide a wide offering particularly for weddings. Staff encourage couples to personalise their day in many different ways, incorporating:
- Music
 - Readings
 - Personal Vows
 - Additional enhancements such as Handfastings, Quaichs, Candle Lighting, Ring Warmings, Oathing Stones and many more.
- 6.10 Amongst the priorities for the service moving forward is the aim to develop a more cohesive package for Civil Marriage. An improved website, the use of different Social

Media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, would assist in raising the profile and offering of the services as couples plan their special day.

- 6.11 In addition to the online offering, the service aims to start re-attending Wedding Fayres around the Highland area as a further opportunity to promote the service. Attendance at such events also helps to improve working relationships with other wedding suppliers such as venues, photographers and musicians within a local area.
- 6.12 A further area of development is to offer tailored ceremonies for other life events such as commitment ceremonies, renewal of vows and baby naming ceremonies.
- 6.13 During 2022, the service has concentrated on re-establishing itself post-covid, adapting to the new approaches and the re-arranged ceremonies. It is planned that for 2023 the focus will be on identifying opportunities for developing the service, offering new products and services and considering the potential for further income generation. It is important there is a focus on awareness raising of the range of services the Council's Registration team can offer across the Highland area; utilising technology in order to advertise and promote the service.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 28 October 2022

Author: Lesley Gray, Chief Registrar
Alison Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement

Appendix 1: Registration Service Performance Indicators 2018

Appendix 2: Registration Service Performance Indicators 2019

Appendix 3: Highland Registration Offices 2020 Entries and Accuracy Rates

Appendix 4: Highland Registration Offices 2021 Entries and Accuracy Rates

Appendix 5: Registration Wedding Locations in Highland

APPENDIX 1

Registration Service - Performance Indicators 2018 (by Council Area) ¹

Council Area	2018 Events ⁴										2019 Council Area Data ³ (As at 30/10/2019)		
	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil Ptnr'ships	Still-births	All Events	% of Entries Without Corrections	No of Entries with Errors	Dedicated Registration Offices	Integrated Customer Service Offices	Number of Certificate Holders
Aberdeen City	2,682	2,179	286	423	709	2	10	5,582	99.30%	39	1	0	6
Aberdeenshire	2,378	2,628	769	480	1,249	1	9	6,265	97.59%	151	8	0	8
Angus	898	1,329	167	267	434	0	1	2,662	98.91%	29	3	0	7
Argyll & Bute	651	1,124	573	505	1,078	1	1	2,855	97.34%	78	3	10	4
Clackmannanshire	507	586	74	106	180	0	1	1,274	99.61%	5	1	0	4
Na h-Eileanan Siar	203	356	53	58	111	0	0	670	94.48%	37	0	4	1
Dumfries & Galloway	1,224	1,970	1,558	2,496	4,054	8	4	7,260	97.95%	149	6	13	11
Dundee City	1,751	1,958	137	375	512	3	9	4,233	98.70%	55	1	0	3
East Ayrshire	1,242	1,496	326	223	549	0	5	3,292	98.94%	35	0	2	11
East Dunbartonshire	1,419	1,907	133	89	222	2	8	3,558	95.50%	160	0	4	2
East Lothian	1,030	1,303	356	211	567	0	4	2,904	97.28%	79	3	0	11
East Renfrewshire	1,295	1,795	165	118	283	2	1	3,378	97.01%	101	0	2	4
City of Edinburgh	5,042	4,105	1,222	1,583	2,805	23	24	11,999	96.73%	392	2	1	13
Falkirk	1,514	1,728	447	268	715	0	4	3,961	98.84%	48	1	0	3
Fife	3,409	3,862	784	691	1,475	1	18	8,765	98.05%	171	0	8	8
Glasgow City	5,724	4,387	1,322	1,147	2,469	11	23	12,614	97.53%	312	1	0	18
Highland	2,077	2,769	788	722	1,510	1	8	6,365	97.00%	191	1	20	14
Inverclyde	688	1,002	106	62	168	0	3	1,861	98.23%	33	1	0	4
Midlothian	697	670	239	187	426	2	1	2,196	96.49%	77	1	0	2
Moray	821	769	172	176	348	0	3	1,940	98.66%	26	1	0	3
North Ayrshire	1,136	1,793	369	295	664	0	1	3,594	95.74%	153	1	4	6
North Lanarkshire	3,564	3,885	480	390	870	1	10	8,330	99.40%	50	0	6	15
Orkney Islands	187	220	45	50	95	0	0	502	98.21%	9	1	1	2
Perth & Kinross	1,194	1,652	519	540	1,059	4	6	3,915	99.26%	29	7	0	7
Renfrewshire	1,749	2,028	418	253	671	1	2	4,451	98.29%	76	1	2	2
Scottish Borders	1,081	1,555	231	412	643	1	6	3,286	98.17%	60	8	0	5
Shetland Islands	213	211	16	50	66	0	1	491	98.78%	6	2	0	2
South Ayrshire	913	1,526	513	346	859	0	3	3,301	99.67%	11	2	0	9
South Lanarkshire	3,191	3,256	666	379	1,045	1	16	7,509	97.30%	203	2	3	16
Stirling	801	1,054	350	329	679	0	0	2,534	98.46%	39	2	4	5
West Dunbartonshire	933	1,291	178	91	267	1	6	2,498	98.36%	41	2	0	7
West Lothian	1,876	1,918	487	257	744	0	5	4,543	98.39%	73	2	4	2
Grand total	52,290	58,511	13,947	13,579	27,526	66	193	138,586	97.90%	2,914	64	88	215

¹ Reported by the District Examiners

² Includes all events registered in 2018 (including Re-registrations).

³ Excluding offices operating from another location.

APPENDIX 2

Registration Service - Performance Indicators 2019 (by Council Area) ¹

Council Area	2019 Events ²										2020 Council Area Data ³		
	Births	Deaths	Religious Marriages	Civil Marriages	Total Marriages	Civil Ptnr'ships	Still-births	All Events	% of Entries Without Corrections	No of Entries with Errors	Dedicated Registration Offices	Integrated Customer Service Offices	Number of Certificate Holders
Aberdeen City	2,533	2,284	257	394	651	5	11	5,464	98.99%	55	1	0	4
Aberdeenshire	2,177	2,598	741	423	1,164	1	8	5,948	98.34%	99	9	0	11
Angus	890	1,243	149	242	391	2	2	2,528	98.86%	34	3	0	8
Argyll & Bute	639	1,084	525	470	995	1	4	2,722	98.99%	82	1	10	2
Clackmannanshire	426	648	98	88	186	0	1	1,261	99.60%	5	1	0	5
Na h-Eileanan Siar	200	342	53	85	118	0	2	662	97.43%	17	1	3	2
Dumfries & Galloway	1,175	1,933	1,824	2,284	4,132	5	3	7,248	98.01%	144	8	11	14
Dundee City	1,711	1,984	118	324	440	2	5	4,142	98.31%	70	1	0	3
East Ayrshire	1,199	1,459	294	199	493	0	4	3,155	98.86%	36	0	4	12
East Dunbartonshire	1,358	1,799	117	81	198	0	3	3,358	95.80%	141	0	3	1
East Lothian	983	1,301	327	194	521	0	1	2,806	97.61%	67	3	0	8
East Renfrewshire	1,254	1,887	181	111	292	0	4	3,437	97.38%	90	0	2	4
City of Edinburgh	4,870	3,935	1,044	1,575	2,619	23	21	11,468	97.42%	296	2	2	21
Falkirk	1,462	1,752	373	262	635	1	6	3,856	99.07%	36	1	2	9
Fife	3,273	3,942	825	665	1,490	2	21	8,728	98.13%	163	0	8	9
Glasgow City	5,799	4,451	1,222	1,074	2,296	17	30	12,593	96.29%	467	1	0	21
Highland	2,020	2,682	784	703	1,487	6	1	6,196	97.39%	162	1	24	17
Inverclyde	611	1,039	103	65	168	0	0	1,818	96.75%	59	1	0	5
Midlothian	900	949	216	166	382	0	1	2,232	97.31%	60	1	0	1
Moray	794	854	158	143	301	1	2	1,952	97.28%	53	1	0	4
North Ayrshire	1,135	1,726	360	273	633	1	6	3,501	96.54%	121	1	4	14
North Lanarkshire	3,552	4,000	409	341	750	1	11	8,314	99.17%	69	1	7	18
Orkney Islands	183	225	43	34	77	0	0	485	95.26%	23	1	1	1
Perth & Kinross	1,140	1,661	535	424	959	3	4	3,767	99.26%	28	7	0	7
Renfrewshire	1,725	1,955	385	238	603	3	9	4,295	98.35%	71	1	2	4
Scottish Borders	995	1,391	242	434	676	1	2	3,065	98.43%	48	10	0	7
Shetland Islands	210	191	23	47	70	0	0	471	99.36%	3	1	0	2
South Ayrshire	850	1,545	470	323	793	1	1	3,190	99.50%	16	0	2	10
South Lanarkshire	3,149	3,181	670	368	1,038	2	8	7,378	97.67%	172	1	4	22
Stirling	775	1,066	277	277	554	2	3	2,400	98.46%	37	2	4	5
West Dunbartonshire	921	1,270	153	115	268	1	4	2,464	98.21%	44	2	0	8
West Lothian	1,850	1,759	426	229	655	2	2	4,268	98.20%	77	2	4	3
Grand total	50,759	58,116	13,380	12,631	26,035	83	180	135,172	97.90%	2,845	65	97	262

¹ Reported by the District Examiners

² Includes all events registered in 2019 (including Re-registrations).

³ Excluding offices operating from another location.

APPENDIX 3**Highland Registration Offices – 2020 Entries**

2020	BIRTHS	DEATHS	RELIGIOUS (Celebrant)	CIVIL (Registrar)	TOTAL MARRIAGE	CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	STILL BIRTH	TOTAL ENTRIES
WICK	106	169	4	14	18	0	0	293
THURSO	101	161	5	10	15	0	1	278
BETTYHILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GOLSPIE	27	54	1	1	2	0	0	83
DORNOCH	16	71	12	12	24	0	0	111
KINLOCHBERVIE	5	12	0	0	0	0	0	17
TAIN	62	85	1	3	4	0	0	151
ROSSKEEN	121	160	5	10	15	0	0	296
DINGWALL	145	259	32	19	51	0	0	455
ULLAPOOL	19	19	3	3	6	1	0	45
GAIRLOCH	1	9	3	7	10	0	0	20
KYLE	24	58	19	10	29	0	0	111
BROADFORD	6	9	26	13	39	1	0	55
PORTREE	53	93	39	37	76	1	0	223
INVERNESS	862	968	106	165	271	1	4	2106
FORT AUGUSTUS	6	3	1	4	5	0	0	14
KINGUSSIE	29	62	12	10	22	1	0	114
AVIEMORE	58	90	33	15	48	0	0	196
NAIRN	85	196	21	15	36	0	0	317
GRANTOWN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FORT WILLIAM	149	212	82	43	125	0	1	487
SMALL ISLES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1875	2690	405	391	796	5	6	5372

**Accuracy Rate
96.7%**

APPENDIX 4**Highland Registration Offices – 2021 Entries**

2021	BIRTHS	DEATHS	RELIGIOUS (Celebrant)	CIVIL (Registrar)	TOTAL MARRIAGS	CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	STILL BIRTH	TOTAL ENTRIES
WICK	100	225	24	22	46	0	0	372
THURSO	95	136	23	16	39	1	0	271
BETTYHILL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GOLSPIE	32	91	7	4	11	0	0	134
DORNOCH	18	71	19	31	50	0	0	139
KINLOCHBERVIE	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	8
TAIN	57	108	13	5	18	1	0	184
ROSSKEEN	106	178	21	11	32	1	0	317
DINGWALL	168	309	65	42	107	4	1	589
ULLAPOOL	4	4	9	8	17	1	0	26
GAIRLOCH	0	0	11	11	22	0	0	22
KYLE	39	55	39	17	56	1	0	151
BROADFORD	8	5	46	9	55	1	0	69
PORTREE	63	92	118	47	165	8	0	328
INVERNESS	879	1012	231	253	484	6	8	2389
FORT AUGUSTUS	0	0	2	4	6	0	0	6
KINGUSSIE	20	45	17	20	37	2	0	104
AVIEMORE	76	104	65	17	82	1	0	263
NAIRN	85	184	36	30	66	1	0	336
GRANTOWN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FORT WILLIAM	136	226	221	57	278	4	0	644
SMALL ISLES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1891	2848	967	604	1571	32	9	6351

Accuracy Rate
97.07%

Registration Wedding Locations in Highland

Journey to Scoriag



Glencoe – luckily the couple were content to be married on slightly lower ground by one of our Registrars, but we find the hope of that perfect photo opportunity often leads us to be asked to go that extra mile



Elgol - This area is Elgol shoreline, a regular ceremony spot for our Skye Registrars

Torrison – the most stunning spot chosen by this happy couple



Loch Coruisk - is a beautiful spot, but for our Registrar it means a boat journey and a bit of a hike



Wailing Widow Falls - at the end of Loch na Gainmhich in Assynt where one of our team will marry a couple this month



Kildermorie Estate



Applecross Bay



The Isle of Ewe

