

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 12 MARCH 2002 at 10.30AM**

Agenda Item No.

4

RE-AFFIRMATION OF VOWS

Report of the Head of Statutory Services

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1. Purpose of Report

In response to the decision of the Community Information and Protection Select Committee on 4 July 2001 to include Re-affirmation of Vows on the scrutiny work programme, to enable members to review progress to date on the re-affirmations pilot and feedback from customers.

2. Summary

2.1 Hertfordshire is one of eight Registration authorities piloting Re-affirmations. These are ceremonies for couples who are already married and wish to reaffirm the commitment they made at their original marriage ceremony.

2.2 It is intended to continue to develop Re-affirmations in line with ongoing customer feedback and staff comments. Also to monitor the effectiveness of marketing and continue to offer Re-affirmations when the pilot ends.

3. Conclusions

The Committee is invited to review and comment on this issue and to indicate whether it wishes to make recommendations to the Chief Officer or undertake further scrutiny.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Hertfordshire Registration Service was invited by the Home Office to be part of a Re-affirmations pilot.
- 1.2 The purpose of the pilot is to examine different ways of providing Re-affirmation ceremonies, in order to assess alternative methods of service delivery and demand. The pilot is being run in partnership with a private sector business, Lifecycle Marketing, who are responsible for the administration and assessing customer satisfaction through a questionnaire (see Appendix I). Lifecycle make an administration charge direct to the customer for this aspect of the service.

2. What has happened in Hertfordshire?

- 2.1 Hertfordshire are piloting an approach that involves face-to-face contact with the customers. This is because each service is personalised and tailored to the needs of each customer. It is also the most expensive.
- 2.2 Charges for a Re-affirmation ceremony in a Register Office during the week are set at £100. At approved marriage venues the charges are in line with those levied for Civil Weddings at venues, as a Re-affirmation involves the same amount of work and is to all intents and purposes an identical service. The charges are £150 during the week, £200 on a Saturday and £250 on a Sunday.
- 2.3 The service is non-statutory i.e., has no legal basis. This means that ceremonies may be carried out at any location, both inside and outside. Should couples wish to have the ceremony at their home or in their garden, then it can be done at an additional charge of £100, this is to cover the cost of a second member of staff attending in order that Health and Safety requirements are met. Hertfordshire is the only pilot authority prepared to carry out ceremonies away from the Register Office and approved marriage venues. It is felt that this will be a popular option, saving couples the cost of hiring accommodation at hotels.
- 2.4 The service is centrally managed by one Superintendent Registrar, unlike other Registration Services in Hertfordshire which are managed on an office-by-office basis.
- 2.5 Since the service commenced in September there have been 15 enquiries and two ceremonies have taken place. Both of these ceremonies were at venues at weekends and were carried out by staff working outside of their normal hours and being paid a sessional fee.
- 2.6 A further four ceremonies are booked between 1 March and 30 June.
- 2.7 If the development of Re-affirmations follows the pattern of Civil Weddings then it could be anticipated that 50 ceremonies would take place in 2002/03.

3. Feedback

- 3.1 To date neither of the couples who had ceremonies have returned their customer satisfaction questionnaires.
- 3.2 Verbal feedback from those who have enquired about ceremonies has been very positive with a number going on to make bookings.

4. Marketing/Advertising

- 4.1 There has only been limited advertising. Re-affirmations are mentioned in our Web Pages and there is a short piece advertising the service in 'Our Marriage in Hertfordshire'.
- 4.2 For the future we are looking to place articles in Herts Direct and Herts News, as well as local newspapers. We have agreed with the 'Our Marriage in Hertfordshire' publisher that when the new brochure is produced this summer a small Re-affirmation brochure will also be produced to be given to enquiries.

5. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications as the service is self funding. The fee levels cover out of hours payment for staff performing ceremonies, travelling costs and our marketing /advertising.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

None.