

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION & PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2002 AT 10.30AM

CIVIL NAMING

Report of the County Secretary

Author: Tom Hawkyard - Head of Statutory Services - Tel. 01992 555499

Executive Member: Gerald Game

1. Purpose of Report

To enable Members to review progress to date on the service and feedback from customers following the decision of the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee to include Civil Naming on the scrutiny work programme.

2. Summary

Hertfordshire was one of eight Registration Authorities piloting Civil Naming Ceremonies. These are effectively civil christenings but have no legal status. The pilot commenced in February 2001 and ran for a year. The pilot was a success and Hertfordshire continues to offer the service.

3. Conclusions

The Committee are invited to consider whether to comment on the service at this time or undertake further scrutiny of this issue.

4. Background

4.1 The Hertfordshire Registration Service was invited by the Home Office to be part of a Civil Naming pilot.

4.2 The purpose of the pilot was to examine different ways of providing Civil Naming Ceremonies, in order to assess alternative methods of service delivery and demand. The pilot was run in partnership with a private sector business, LifeCycle Marketing (now Civil Ceremonies limited) who were responsible for the administration and assessing customer satisfaction through a questionnaire (see Appendix i).

Civil Ceremonies made an administration charge direct to the customer for this aspect of the service.

5. What has happened in Hertfordshire during the pilot?

5.1 Hertfordshire piloted an approach that involved more face-to-face contact with the customers than elsewhere but was also the most expensive – “the Rolls Royce Service!”.

5.2. The service was centrally managed by one Superintendent Registrar, unlike other Registration Services in Hertfordshire, which are managed on an office-by-office basis.

5.3 In the first 6 months (April 2001 – September 2001) there were 100 enquiries but only 8 actual ceremonies. Seven 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. The other ceremony took place in a Register Office during the week and was fitted in as part of the normal working day, with no additional staffing required.

5.4 Initially our charges were set at £50 less than the cost of civil weddings - £225 during the week, £275 on a Saturday, and £325 on a Sunday for events at venues, the charge for a civil naming ceremony at the Register Office during the week being £100.

5.5 Verbal feedback from those who enquired about ceremonies had been that although they liked what was on offer the price was too high. As a result prices were reduced for ceremonies from 1 September 2001

The prices are now set at £150 during the week, £200 on a Saturday and £250 on a Sunday for events at venues. The charge for a Civil Naming Ceremony at the Register Office during the week remains £100.

5.6 Between 1 September and 30 March a further 19 ceremonies took place suggesting that more enquiries were being turned into bookings, giving a total of 27 from the 2001/02 financial year

5.7 If the development of Civil Naming follows the pattern of Civil Weddings, then we would anticipate having carried out 100 ceremonies by March 2003.

6. The Present Situation

6.1 The service has proved to be very popular. Since 1 April a further 47 ceremonies have taken place with an additional 4 booked. The latest statistics provided by Civil Ceremonies show that of the 43 authorities now offering Civil Naming Ceremonies, Hertfordshire have done more than any other, 74 in total (see Appendix ii).

6.2 The service is no longer being centrally managed by one Superintendent Registrar. Demand for the service has meant there is too much work for one person so responsibility for the selling and delivery of the service now rests with each office. This will also allow further ceremony developments to meet local needs.

6.3 Hertfordshire is the only authority offering this service at peoples homes. To date 3 families have used this facility. We are able to do this, because it is a non statutory service, with no legal limitation on the venue or time at which the ceremony can take place. It is also an opportunity for staff to get used to working regularly in private houses, given that the Registration White Paper proposes that marriages will be able to take place in private houses in the future. There is an additional charge for this service to cover the cost of a second member of staff in order that Health and Safety requirements can be met.

7. Feedback

7.1 To date 14 couples have returned Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires. They are all very positive. The full results can be seen at Appendix (iii).

8. Marketing / Advertising

8.1 We have had articles on Civil Naming in Sticks, Herts Direct and Primary Times (a magazine produced for Primary school children in Enfield and Herts). The last two have resulted in enquiries. There have also been articles in local newspapers.

8.2 Currently there are billboards at Harlow and Luton Railway Stations advertising Civil Naming. This is its second year. These went up at the beginning of September, they replaced our previous billboards at these stations which had advertised Hertfordshire weddings. By advertising outside of the County in this way we are attracting customers who do not live in Hertfordshire and whose Authorities do not offer this service.

8.3 A Civil Naming brochure has been produced. The brochure is being handed to anyone registering a birth in Hertfordshire and is also available at maternity units, libraries, etc. We are now on the second version, 15,000 of which have been printed.

9. 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, travel costs and our marketing/advertising.

Background papers used by the author in compiling this report:

None