

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No.

**5**

**TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2002 AT 10.30 A.M.**

**PARTNERSHIP CEREMONIES**

*Report of the County Secretary*

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

Executive Member: Gerald Game

**1. Purpose of Report**

In response to the decision of the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on 15 January 2002 to include Partnership Ceremonies on the Scrutiny Work Programme, to enable members to review developments in this service nationally.

**2. Summary**

A number of authorities are proposing to pilot Partnership Ceremonies. Hertfordshire would be able to do likewise if it so wished.

**3. Conclusion**

The Scrutiny Committee is invited to review and comment on the report and discuss whether or not they wish to recommend the introduction of Partnership Ceremonies in Hertfordshire.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 The Hertfordshire Registration Service has participated in a number of pilots of new services. Civil Naming and Re-affirmation of Vows are already underway. A Civil Funerals' pilot commenced in April 2002.
- 4.2 Some authorities are now piloting a Partnership Ceremony.
- 4.3 The Greater London Authority already offers something similar which it calls the 'London Partnership Register'. It commenced on the 1 September 2001. In its first year of operation 305 couples went through a ceremony.
- 4.4 Elsewhere, Manchester have carried out 20 ceremonies and Brighton have their first one booked for October 2002.
- 4.5 Other authorities remain interested in offering the ceremonies but have not carried any out. Bath and North East Somerset, Bradford, Liverpool and Sutton began to offer the ceremonies on the 1 September. Luton, Richmond and Suffolk will begin to offer ceremonies from the 1 October.

#### **5. What is a Partnership Ceremony?**

- 5.1 A Partnership Ceremony is a ceremony open to all those who wish for some form of recognition of their partnership but cannot, or do not wish to be, married.
- 5.2. The ceremony is open to heterosexual couples who do not wish to be married, as well as those in single sex relationships.
- 5.3 The ceremony has no legal status.

#### **6. Where can a Partnership Ceremony be held?**

- 6.1 Ceremonies can be held at Register Offices, Approved Marriage Venues or private houses.

#### **7. Who conducts a Partnership Ceremony?**

- 7.1 The ceremony is conducted by a celebrant who will meet with the couple prior to the event to offer advice and discuss requirements (exactly as happens in the planning of the other celebratory services we offer).

**8. What is the purpose of the Pilot?**

- 8.1 The authorities who are piloting Partnership Ceremonies run it in conjunction with a private sector business, Civil Ceremonies Limited, who are responsible for the administration and assessing customer satisfaction through a questionnaire. Civil Ceremonies make an administration charge direct to the customer for this part of the service.

**9. Likely Demand**

- 9.1 There is no evidence available to indicate what the level of demand in Hertfordshire might be.

**10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1 Those authorities who seek to pilot the ceremonies would make the service self-funding; fee levels would cover out-of-hours payments for staff performing ceremonies, travel costs and any marketing/advertising.

*Background papers used by the author in compiling this report:*

None