

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

3

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2002 AT 10.30 A.M.

RE-AFFIRMATION OF VOWS

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 a decision of the Community Information and Protection Scrutiny Committee on 4 July 2001 to include Re-affirmation of Vows on the scrutiny work programme.

2. Summary

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. The pilot began on 1 October 2001 and ended on 30 September 2002.

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 Re-affirmations pilot.
- 4.2 The purpose of the pilot was to examine different ways of providing Re-affirmation ceremonies, in order to assess alternative methods of service delivery and demand. The pilot was run in partnership with a private sector business, Lifecycle (now Civil Ceremonies Limited) who were responsible for the administration, and assessing customer satisfaction through a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Civil Ceremonies Limited make 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 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.
- 5.2 Charges for a Re-affirmation Ceremony in a Register Office during the week are set at £100. At approved marriage venues the charges are £150 during the week, £200 on a Saturday and £250 on a Sunday.
- 5.3 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, though no re-affirmations have taken place at private homes.
- 5.4 Initially the service was centrally managed by one Superintendent Registrar, unlike other Registration Services in Hertfordshire which are managed on an office-by-office basis. From 1 June demand for the service meant there was 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 development to meet local needs.
- 5.5 Between September 2001 and March 2002 5 took place.
- 5.6 To date in this financial year 17 ceremonies have taken place with a further 8 booked.
- 5.7 The latest statistics provided by Civil Ceremonies show that of the 43 authorities now offering Civil Naming and Re-affirmation Ceremonies, Hertfordshire have done more than any other, 24 in total (see Appendix ii).

5.8 If the development of Re-affirmations follows the pattern of Civil Weddings then it could be anticipated that 40 ceremonies would take place in 2002/03

6. Feedback

6.1 To date only one customer satisfaction questionnaire has been returned.

6.2 Verbal feedback from those who have enquired about ceremonies has been very positive with a number going on to make bookings.

7. Marketing / Advertising

7.1 There has only been limited advertising. Re-affirmations are mentioned on our Web Pages and there was a short piece advertising the service in the "Our Marriage in Hertfordshire 2001/2" brochure.

7.2 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 those who request it.

7.3 A press release produced to coincide with Valentines Day attracted considerable interest. We intend to repeat the exercise next year.

7.4 A 12 page Re-affirmation brochure is being produced for the Autumn.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 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.