COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE

Registration & Coroners Unit

ANNUAL OPERATING PLAN 2008/09

Director: Clive Bainbridge Unit Manager: Martin Alford

SECTION ONE - SERVICE PROFILE

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE SERVICE

- Register all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships occurring within the County
- Licence venues where civil marriages and civil partnerships may be solemnized
- Conduct civil marriage, renewal of vows, welcoming, civil partnership, citizenship and civil funeral ceremonies.
- Provide a Coroner's service to investigate sudden or uncertified death
- Provide the Nationality Checking Service

1.2 OPERATING CONTEXT

The Registration & Coroners Service acts on behalf of the County Council under a wide range of legislation, nearly all of which is mandatory. The schedule below details the decisions covered under formal delegated authority from KCC under which Registration & Coroners operates within.

- The Registration Service Act 1953
- The Coroners Act 1988
- The Marriage Act 1994
- The Marriages and Civil Partnership (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005
- The Immigration and Asylum Acts 2002 and 2004
- The Immigration and Asylum (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Kent Registration Scheme 2007

Registration Service

The Registration Service Act 1953 requires local authorities to prepare a registration 'scheme' for the management and delivery of the local registration service within its area. These 'schemes' dictate staffing levels, office size, location, etc and cannot be varied without Ministerial approval. The White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change" published in 2002 set out the governments agenda for a modern, effective and high quality registration service. To underpin these changes the White Paper proposed that local authorities should be given responsibility for delivering the service and that superintendent registrars and registrars should become local authority employees.

The White Paper proposals did not progress and instead the General Register Office (GRO) and the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) jointly developed proposals for a more modern governance framework

within existing legislation. These provide for a more flexible, less prescriptive 'scheme' allowing local authorities greater discretion to deliver local services that meet both national standards and local needs. In return local authorities must agree to the terms of a Code of Practice, prepare an annual Service Delivery Plan and deliver registration services to at least the national standard (as per the Good Practice Guide). Each local authority must also report annually to the Registrar General on six minimum key performance indicators (See Appendix 1). KCC applied for and was granted a new governance 'scheme' and this was implemented on 1 October 2007.

Furthermore, in November 2006 the Government published the Statistics and Registration Service Bill that contained provisions for Registrars and Superintendent Registrars to become local authority employees. The Bill received Royal Assent in July 2007 and this group of staff became KCC employees on 1 December 2007.

At both a national and local level the registration service is being modernised to take advantage of new technology via the internet and e-government enabled systems. At the national level the Government is investing in a web enabled system (RON – Registration OnLine) that permits the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships into national databases by registrars using the internet. Phase 1 (birth and death registration) was implemented in February 2007. Phase 2 was originally due for implementation in Summer 2007 but due to technical problems with Phase 1 it has been delayed.

KCC is currently developing software bespoke software entitled Ceremony and Registration Appointments (Cara) to enable the public to book appointments and carry out other registration business on-line. This will have a significant effect on the way we do business in the future and will lead to the re-engineering of many of our business processes, and to the Registration Service delivering a more efficient and effective customer led service which should also deliver staff savings.

Non-statutory personal ceremonies have been successfully introduced in many local authorities in England and Wales. The Service has provided welcoming and renewal of marriage vows ceremonies since March 2001 and introduced Civil Funerals on 1 November 2007.

In 2006/07 people applying for British nationality arranged 669 nationality checking service interviews with KCC. 665 applications were forwarded to the Home Office on the successful completion of these interviews. Nationally, approximately 40% of all nationality applications received by the Home Office are submitted via local authorities participating in the Checking Service.

Coroner's Service

Coroners are independent officers, holding quasi-judicial appointments over who little line management can be exercised. They are appointed by the County Council but may only be dismissed by the Lord Chief Justice. The service is purely demand led and as such KCC has very little control over expenditure. Over the last three years the level of spending has increased significantly due to the pressures placed upon it (a picture reflected nationally). This has resulted in the necessity for a £200k increase in the Coroners base budget for 2008-09.

In September 2002 the Government initiated a fundamental review of the Coroner's

Service and in June 2007 published the Coroner Reform Bill which has still to be formally presented to Parliament. In the meantime the Ministry of Justice is looking at measures that might help to improve the current system in advance of the Bill. This includes publishing a revised Charter for Bereaved People, amending secondary legislation to ensure that Coroners' powers are strengthened to make reports to prevent future deaths and working with the Press Complaints Commission to ensure their code is applied effectively in the reporting of coroners' inquests.

Both the Registration and Coroners service come into contact with, and have either a direct or indirect impact on, all residents of the County and also on a proportion of people travelling through or visiting the County.

The Service has an important link within KCC through Kent Scientific Services who provide analytical services to Coroners. Other key links with external agencies or bodies includes the National Health Service, Kent Police, District Councils, Home Office, Office of National Statistics, Ministry of Justice, commercial businesses in weddings and associated services and owners of marriage venues.

In 2008/09 the Service will be contributing £400K to the Directorate savings target and this will be achieved through £50k staff savings and increased income of £350k.

KCC Cross-Directorate Working

As part of the Communities Directorate we share its Vision "together we're better" and our services are aimed at improving, involving and impacting on the people of Kent. We have identified some opportunities for

- Making a difference: publish Bereavement Booklet which will include advice, help and guidance to the recently bereaved
- Access and modernization : plan for the relocation of Ashford Register Office to Ashford Gateway plus
- Impact: work together across services plan to relocate part-time register offices to libraries and adult education centres.

1.3 USERS

During 2006-07 the service received 6 complaints and 230 compliments against a backdrop of 28,000 births and deaths registered and 5,250 ceremonies. Of the compliments, 83% related to the high standard and content of our ceremonies and the professionalism and expertise of our staff.

No major customer surveys were carried out in 2007/08 pending the development of a new office diary and work management system (CaRA) which will include provision for semi-automatic customer feedback as part of an online appointment booking system.

However, the following minor surveys were carried out:

 Continuous customer feedback on all civil partnership registrations and ceremonies. This has enabled us to fine tune changes to ceremony content and to ensure that we are meeting customer expectations.

- Continuous customer feedback on all civil funeral ceremonies. This enables us to check how the new service is running and to ensure we are meeting customer expectations.
- A 10% analysis survey of civil marriage customers to check ceremony content expectations pending a review.
- A 25% on-line analysis survey of our service delivery through approved premises both to check customer expectations and to test the effectiveness of an on-line survey.

1.4 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE 2007/08 Key Performance Indicators

Indicator	Actual performance 2006/2007	Estimated performance 2007/08	Target 2008/09
Registration			
External venues licensed for civil marriages	166	176	190
Marriages at external licensed venues	2,152	2,250	2,250
Marriages where couples live outside Kent	1,006	890	950
Renewal of Marriage Vows ceremonies	58	88	90
New citizens naturalized	2,000	2,000	2,000
Nationality Checking Service appointments	669	610	620
Civil Funeral ceremonies (introduced November 2007)	1	10	40
Welcoming ceremonies	140	119	125
Civil Partnership Registrations/Ceremonies	253	200	200
Births and deaths registered	28,136	28,100	28,100
Notices of Marriage/civil partnership	8,776	8,700	8,700
Copy certificates produced	107,897	108,000	108,000
Coroners			
Referrals to Coroner	7,557	7,500	7,500
Post mortems carried out	4,837	4,800	4,800
Inquests held	824	820	820

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS/OUTCOMES IN 2007/08

- Introduced Civil Funerals
- Implemented Kent Registration Scheme 2007
- All plans, policies and procedures equality impact assessed and review programme agreed
- Phase 1 Cara introduced
- Works programme agreed and funding identified to create central records repository
- Bereavement booklet agreed for publication
- Marketing strategy adopted

- Registration Officers became KCC employees
- Held successful Bereavement Conference
- New ceremonies 'choices' packs agreed and published
- New website featuring all services designed and implemented
- Principle of partnership working agreed with Medway Council Registration Service

1.5 SERVICE COMPARISON

There is no established national mechanism for comparison of service performance between local authority registration services. In 2005 LACORS published a 'voluntary completion' benchmarking form but this has not been widely adopted as a number of authorities voiced concern over the structure and make up of the form. No shire authorities of the same approximate size as Kent have participated in the benchmarking exercise so there is no comparative data available. However Surrey and Hampshire County Councils have agreed to provide details of their performance indicators for 2006/07 – see below:

Indicator	Kent Actual Performance 2006-07	Surrey Actual Performance 2006-07	Hampshire Actual Performance 2006-07
Registration			
External venues licensed for civil marriages	166	80	143
Marriages at external licensed venues	2152	1541	2169
Income from external licensed venue marriages	£867997	N/A	N/A
Marriages where couples live outside Kent	1006	N/A	N/A
Renewal of Marriage Vows ceremonies	58	N/A	27
New citizens naturalised	2000	270	1352
Nationality Checking Service appointments	669	N/A	1357
Civil Funeral ceremonies	0	N/A	73
Welcoming ceremonies	140	N/A	36
Civil Partnership Registrations/Ceremonies	253	216	
Births and deaths registered	28136	25570	11974
Notices of Marriage/civil partnership	8776	7738	9899
Copy certificates produced	109897	114118	49806
Coroners			
Referrals to Coroner	7557	N/A	N/A
Post mortems carried out	4837	N/A	N/A
Inquests held	824	N/A	N/A

A pilot peer review process for the registration service is currently underway involving five local authorities. This is being co-ordinated by LACORS. The peer review process aims to identify improvements from within and enable authorities to target their planning for service delivery improvement, and for those authorities seeking approval for a 'scheme' under the new governance arrangements, it will assist in the preparation of their annual service delivery plan. LACORS will produce further guidance and frameworks and set up a working group of representatives

from the pilot authorities to manage, review and improve the process. It is understood that following the pilot, peer review will be formally launched sometime in 2008 at which point the service will participate.

SECTION TWO - PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SERVICE

Key Corporate / Directorate Targets									
PLAN	TARGET	LEAD OFFICER							
Directorate Priority	Develop recruitment and retention practices which improve the % of disabled Provide work placement for the disabled at Tunbridge Wells Register Office	Sharon Birch							
Directorate Priority	Achieve ISO 14001 EMS roll-out by 31 December 2008 Develop proposals for reducing the service's carbon footprint	Sharon Birch							
Directorate Priority	Develop and demonstrate cross-unit and partnership working	RMT							

Towards 2010 detailed action plans can be found at http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/council-and-democracy/towards-2010-action-plans.htm

2.2 OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To provide and develop a modern and responsive Registration Service able to meet the needs of the people of Kent
- To develop the Registration Service, particularly the provision of civil marriages and civil partnerships and other celebratory services in a business environment
- To build and foster close partnerships with Kent businesses providing wedding and other celebratory services
- To establish a businesslike approach to the provision and funding of those services provided for the Coroners over which the County Council is able to exert some control e.g.: mortuary provision and the removal of bodies.

These business objectives are monitored to ensure they will be delivered. Risks associated with potential non-delivery, and the controls in place to mitigate those risks, have been assessed and documented as part of the annual operating plan process. Separate risk management plans, including separate business continuity plans, have been developed as necessary.

2.3 CORE SERVICES AND FORECAST ACTIVITY LEVELS Core Services - Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages

- Register all births and deaths occurring within the County of Kent
- Take notices of marriage for civil marriages and marriages at non-conformist churches, chapels etc.
- Conduct civil marriage ceremonies
- Register civil marriage ceremonies

- Promote civil marriage ceremonies
- Register civil partnerships
- Conduct civil partnership ceremonies
- Promote civil partnership ceremonies
- Register non-conformist marriage ceremonies
- License venues where civil marriage ceremonies may be solemnized
- License venues where civil partnerships may be registered
- License venues where civil partnership ceremonies may be held
- Receive and store safely all registers of births, deaths and marriages occurring within the County of Kent
- Conduct Citizenship ceremonies
- Provide copies of entries in birth, death and marriage registers
- Provide and equip offices within agreed property strategy
- Promote Kent as the premier location for ceremonies
- Promote "A Kentish Wedding and Civil Partnership Ceremony" in KCC ceremony venues and licensed ceremony venues
- Promote ceremonies for couples to renew their marriage vows
- Promote ceremonies for parents to welcome babies and children into families
- Provide Nationality Checking Service

Core Services - H.M.Coroners

- Appointment of Coroners
- Payment of Coroners expenses
- Ensure provision of postmortem and mortuary facilities
- Ensure provision of body removal services and monitor performance of contractors against contract specification

2.4 PROJECTS, DEVELOPMENTS AND KEY ACTIONS IN 2008/09

Where necessary, the Managing Director is authorised to negotiate, settle the terms of and enter the following agreements/projects:

Project/development/key action	a/c manager	Links to Corporate/ Directorate targets	Deliverables or outcomes planned for 2008/09	Target dates
Develop proposals for schools/young people to participate in citizenship ceremonies	Giles Adey	CMY Vision	Schools/young people incorporated into ceremony timetable	March 2009
Plan and implement the re-location of Ashford Register Office prior to the expiry of the lease of Elwick House in December 2008	Giles Adey		Office temporarily re-located pending construction of Ashford Gateway+	December 2008
Develop proposals to co-locate registration part time offices to Communities Directorate premises (Libraries, Gateways and Adult Education Centres)	Giles Adey	CMY Vision	All part time offices relocated to Communities Directorate premises	March 2009
Develop proposals for major structural review in the light of key services developments for central records repository and implementation of Cara	Martin Alford		Programme of structural review agreed for implementation and delivery of savings in 2009-10	March 2009
Continue to develop Cara software (Phase 2) for on-line booking of appointments and ceremonies administration	Leonard Thomas	CMY Vision	Web based system and associated ceremonies administration system introduced	December 2008
Develop proposals for partnership working with Medway Council for birth declarations at Sittingbourne Register Office	Giles Adey		Service Level Agreement signed and births registered at Sittingbourne Register Office for babies born to Kent residents at Medway Maritime Hospital	April 2008
Develop proposals for reducing the service's carbon footprint	Sharon Birch	CMY Vision	Achieve certification to ISO 14001 Environment Standard	October 2008
Review the funding arrangements for the Medway Towns area of the Mid Kent and Medway Coroners jurisdiction	Giles Adey		Formal Service Level Agreement with Medway Council established and implemented	December 2008

Implementation of government sponsored internet based system (RON) for taking notices of marriage and civil partnership	Len Thomas		Staff trained and new system introduced	March 2009
Work with LACORS to review and develop the Good Practice Guide and Quality Management System	Martin Alford		Revised Good Practice Guide and Quality Management System issued by LACORS	March 2009
Maximise income generation in accordance with KCC budget requirements	Martin Alford		Revised fees introduced and income level maintained	March 2009
Develop the Registration Services sign posting to other services and enhance working with local communities, religious and faith groups	Martin Alford	CMY Vision	Programme of measures agreed and implemented	March 2009
Business Continuity Plan & Risk Assessment	Martin Alford		 Plan tested and updated every six months Risk assessments checked and updated every six 	Sept 2008 March 2009 Sept 2008
			months	March 2009
Equality Impact Screening and Assessing	Martin Alford		 All new policies, practices and procedures screened and impact assessed as necessary 	March 2009
Investors in People	H Planner		 IIP action plan reviewed and updated every six months 	Sept 2008 March 2009

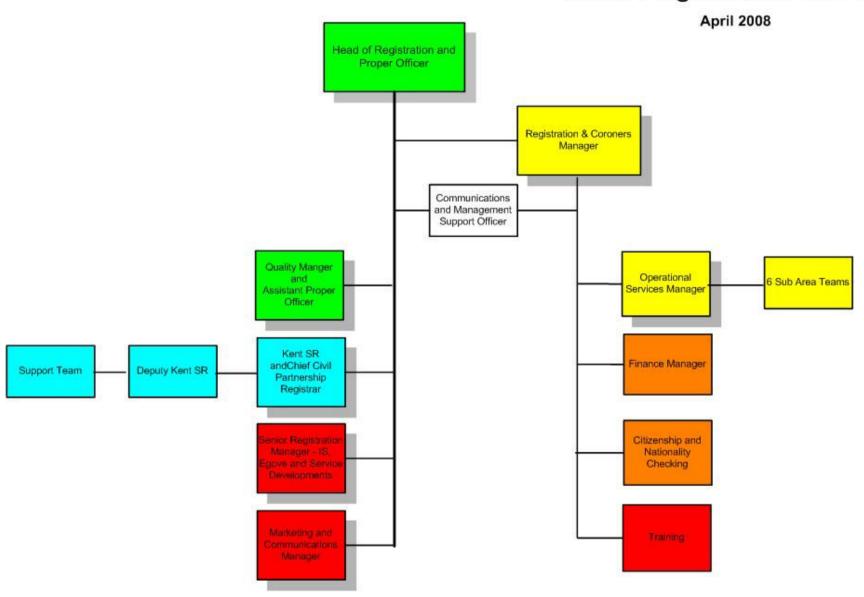
In line with financial regulations, capital projects will be subject to a review by the Project Advisory Group prior to approval to spend by the Leader.

USER/RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT PLANNED FOR 2008/9

(See section 1.3)

Continuous customer feedback is gathered throughout the year. An office diary and work management system is in development in 2008/9, which will include provision for semi-automatic customer feedback as part of an online appointment booking system.

Kent Registration Service



4.2 STAFFING

	2007/08	2008/09
Grade KS13 and above or equivalent (FTEs)	1	1
Grade KS12 and below (FTEs)	87.2	78.2
TOTAL	88.2	79.2
Of the above total, the FTE which are externally		
funded		

Notes:

- (1) These figures do not include 172 casual staff employed on ceremony work.
- (2) The four Coroners are not included in the budgeted headcount because they are not KCC employees.

4.3 CAPACITY, SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

The Unit's training needs are identified through the appraisal process. These are collated into the Unit's Learning & Development Plan. The Registration Management Team then determines the training priorities for all staff groups for the year ahead.

There is a need to continually update 'technical' knowledge to take account of legislative and procedural changes and there is a programme of regular updates and refreshers.

The Unit has undertaken an audit of IT skills in order to identify gaps in preparation for the implementation of Cara.

Staff turnover is normally very low. When several vacancies arose in 2007/08, the Unit used the opportunity to fund the posts necessary to create the new Central Records Repository at Tunbridge Wells Register Office which is due to open in 2008.

SECTION 5: REVENUE BUDGET

REGISTRATION

2007-08 Controllable Expenditure	FTE	Activity/Budget Line					2008-09				
			FTE	Employee Costs	Running Costs	Contracts & Projects	Gross Expenditure	External Income	Internal Income	Controllable Expenditure	Cabinet Member
£'000				£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
849.6	16.1	Service Management	15.8	673.9	349.0	2.3	1025.2	2785.7	52.3	-1812.8	МН
172.2	10.3	Ashford & Shepway	10.1	398.3	81.4	0.7	480.4	1.2		479.2	MH
193.7	10.6	Canterbury & Swale	10.6	411.5	97.6	1.0	510.1	0.3		509.8	MH
116.8	10.8	Gravesend	9.4	415.5	130.9	1.2	547.6	0.3		547.3	MH
85.0	11.4	Maidstone	12.8	463.4	227.5	0.8	691.7	1.9		689.8	MH
123.5	10.0	Thanet with Dover	10.6	385.1	77.8	1.2	464.1	1.2	11.0	451.9	MH
235.2	11.1	Tunbridge Wells	9.9	429.1	176.0	8.0	605.9	0.6		605.3	MH
1776.0	80.3	Controllable Totals	79.2	3176.8	1140.2	8.0	4325.0	2791.2	63.3	1470.5	
		Memoranda Items:									
		Central Overheads Directorate					0.0			0.0	
		Overheads					0.0			0.0	
		Capital Charges					0.0			0.0	
1776.0	80.3	Total Cost of Unit	79.2	3176.8	1140.2	8.0	4325.0	2791.2	63.3	1470.5	

CORONERS

2007-08 Controllable Expenditure	FTE	Activity/Budget Line	2008-09								
			FTE	Employee Costs	Running Costs	Contracts & Projects	Gross Expenditure	External Income	Internal Income	Controllable Expenditure	Cabinet Member
£'000				£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
70.9		Strategic Management			54.0	15.0	69.0			69.0	МН
400.5		North West Kent		118.4	30.4	311.4	460.2			460.2	MH
228.2		Mid-Kent & Medway		142.7	79.5	450.4	672.6	322.0		350.6	MH
466.3		Central & South-East Kent		96.0	60.8	603.2	760.0			760.0	MH
576.1		North East Kent		125.3	55.5	142.4	323.2			323.2	МН
1742.0	0.0	Controllable Totals	0.0	482.4	280.2	1522.4	2285.0	322.0	0.0	1963.0	
		Memoranda Items:									
		Central Overheads Directorate					0.0			0.0	
		Overheads					0.0			0.0	
		Capital Charges					0.0			0.0	
1742.0	0.0	Total Cost of Unit	0.0	482.4	280.2	1522.4	2285.0	322.0	0.0	1963.0	

CORPORATE THEMES

6.1 Equality & Diversity

<u>The Directorate Equality Strategy</u> is being updated but will include the following objectives for individual services:

- Build on current intelligence to develop a more complete picture of current service users, and non-users, in terms of the national equalities strands and use this to inform service planning.
- Ensure that consultation for planning and decision making processes involves all sections of the community.
- Develop a better understanding of the groups of people whose views are seldom heard and find ways of engaging with them.
- Continue with the process of ensuring that all new policies, procedures, decisions and practices are screened for their impact.
- Complete the review of contracts and SLAs with external providers in order to ensure that equalities requirements are embedded and a monitoring system in place.
- Where possible ensure the service contributes to the Directorate's targets for disability employment.
- Introduce a pragmatic approach to monitoring equalities issues relating to complaints, building on the pilot that is being introduced for 3 months in February 2008
- Respond to any equalities issues arising from the corporate inspection.
- Continue to provide Equality & Diversity training for staff and managers.

The Community Safety & Regulatory Services Division has an Equalities Group with representatives from each of the 6 service units. The purpose of this group is to ensure information from the Directorate Equalities Group is disseminated throughout the Division. Members of the group lead on equality issues for each service unit, e.g.: Equality Impact Assessments. Screening for Equality Impact Assessments has been led by members of this group. In addition, some members of the Division Equalities Group are Directorate Equality Champions – Age, Gender and Faith.

6.2 Corporate Environmental Performance and Climate Change Adaptation The Communities Directorate recently published an Environment Policy which commits it to achieving ISO 14001 compliance – implementing, maintaining and improving an environmental management system across the organisation.

The Community Safety & Regulatory Services Division has an Environment Group with representatives from each of the 6 service units. The purpose of this group is to support the Directorate's commitment to achieving ISO 14001 compliance by sharing experience and best practice. They have already identified some initiatives:

- Car sharing
- Working from home
- Venues for meetings

6.3 Investors in People

All service units in the Community Safety & Regulatory Services Division support Investors in People and have action plans which are updated on a regular basis.

IIP principles are taken into account in business planning and management, e.g.:

- Objectives in the business plan are translated into individual work plans

- Strong commitment to appraisal and development
 Strong commitment to equal opportunities in training, etc
 Recognition of good work
 Evaluation of training
 Celebration of success

Appendix 1: GRO Key Performance Indicators

Indicator	2006-07
 Events registered within statutory timeframe % of births registered within 42 days Total number of births registered % of still births registered Total number of still births registered % of deaths registered within 5 day Total number of deaths registered 	99% 1,5731 100% 58 98% 1,2857
 Waiting times for appointments Birth registration/declaration Still births registration/declaration Death registration/declaration Marriage and Civil Partnership notice % of customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment time 	1-5 days 1-5 days 1-5 days within statutory time limits
Certificate applications • % of applications dealt with within 5 days of receipt	95%
Customer satisfaction surveys ■ % of satisfied customers ■ No. of survey forms returned	Work in progress to analyse
Complaints Total number of formal complaints received of all registrations	6 0.0002%