

Key Messages from the Registration Services public and service user consultation during winter 2013/14

This report is available on the Registration Service page of the Somerset County Council web site and as paper copies in each of the 12 Registration Offices.

The report summarises the key messages from the feedback received in the three consultation questionnaires which ran from 4th November 2013 to 3rd January 2014. The questionnaires were:

- A Somerset County Council on-line public consultation questionnaire
- A Registration appointments (births and deaths) questionnaire handed to service users at Registration Offices during the consultation period
- A Ceremony appointments (including notice of marriage and civil partnerships) questionnaire handed to service users at Registration offices during the consultation period

The results have been grouped under the following headings:

1. Booking appointments
2. Location of Registration Offices and Ceremony Rooms
3. Ceremony Room Fees
4. Current Use
5. Other comments or suggestions

321 people completed the questionnaires as follows: 23 on-line questionnaire responses, 48 ceremony appointments service user questionnaire responses, 250 registration appointments service user questionnaire responses. We are grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to do this. Thank you.

Full responses to the questionnaires are available by contacting Genevieve Branch, gbranch@somerset.gov.uk, Tel: 01823 282251.

The Key Messages

1. BOOKING APPOINTMENTS

The questionnaire asked respondents to select their preferred method for booking appointments from the following options:

- Online through a website
- By phone
- Face to face at a dedicated Registration office
- Face to face at another council location, ie a library
- Through another professional service, eg hospitals

The majority of people said they preferred to book appointments by phone (50%). The second most popular option was to book an appointment online (41%).

2. LOCATIONS OF REGISTRATION OFFICES AND CEREMONY ROOMS

A staffed reception facility (46%), on site car parking (49%) and a private waiting area (41%) were all considered to be important facilities.

A town centre location was seen as more important for general appointments (29%), but less so for ceremony rooms (17%).

An attractive outside area for photographs was felt to be an important factor for the location of a ceremony room (41%).

In general, most people favoured the current locations, while many also thought locating within a library or a District Council office would be beneficial.

The majority of people thought it acceptable to travel no more than 10 miles to a Registration Office for an appointment (63%), while many others thought 10 to 20 miles would be appropriate (34%).

The majority of people felt that travelling between 10 and 20 miles to a ceremony room was acceptable (56%).

3. CEREMONY ROOM FEES

The vast majority of people (75%) thought that it would be acceptable to pay more than the £49 fee set by the government for a ceremony room with seating for more than 10 guests.

Nearly two thirds (62%) of the respondents thought an acceptable charge for a larger ceremony room would be around £100 and nearly a quarter (21%) felt that a fee of around £150 would be acceptable.

4. CURRENT USE

Nearly half (48%) of the on-line responses were from people who had not used Registration Services recently.

The majority of paper questionnaires were completed by service users at the Williton, Taunton and Bridgwater Registration Offices.

The vast majority of those who completed the ceremony appointments service user questionnaire used Taunton and Yeovil Registration Offices. Over half of the responses to the Registration appointments service user questionnaire were from people using the Taunton Registration Office.

5. OTHER COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS

The following is a summary of comments or suggestions made by the respondents:

- Phones should be answered in person and not by an answer phone
- There were no reception staff and no one to answer the phone
- Phone booking was easy with a range of appointment times offered
- Don't change what is working well
- Good information is available
- A very good service with friendly, pleasant, helpful, compassionate and professional staff
- Saturday opening please
- Increase Council Tax rather than keep cutting services
- Lack of communication between staff dealing with a pre-ceremony appointment and the actual ceremony
- A microphone is needed as service user couldn't hear
- Facilities and professionalism should be of the highest standard for events as important as births, deaths and marriages
- Ceremony rooms shouldn't be subsidised by Council Tax payers
- Charges for ceremony rooms need to depend on the actual room size and standard
- An increase in ceremony room charge should only be for rooms taking 20 guests or more
- The waiting rooms are stark, cold, depressing, old fashioned and scruffy
- Smartening up, redecoration, relocation were all described as desirable
- Town centre locations are important, plus dedicated, nearby and free parking, as well as public transport
- Importance of offices local to where people live, especially for the elderly, disabled, bereaved and those who don't drive
- Support for multi-agency hub location for a Registration Office
- Part time offices mean making long trips to full time offices in order to meet required timescales for registration appointments
- Quiet and private waiting areas are essential due to difficult and emotional appointments
- Request to register birth at a hospital

END

11th February 2014