

Appendix 5: Report on the work of the General Register Office for Northern Ireland (2015)

Introduction

The General Register Office for Northern Ireland (GRO) is the part of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) that administers civil registration. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland has overall responsibility for the work conducted by the GRO. The registration functions of GRO stem mainly from the statutory responsibilities placed on the Registrar General and include:

- administration of the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships through District Registration Offices;
- registration of adoptions;
- formalities relating to marriage and conduct of civil marriages;
- formalities relating to civil partnership registration;
- maintenance of records of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions and production of certified copies to applicants on request; and
- the provision of online access to historic records of births, deaths and marriages.

The Registrar General has additional statutory duties relating to the production and publication of vital statistics. Demography and Methodology Branch within NISRA manage these duties in partnership with GRO.

Aims

The work of GRO is wide ranging including policy development, oversight and regulation of registration work undertaken by the District Registration Offices, advice on marriage procedures, casework relating to change of name, procedures relating to legal adoptions, production of certified copies of vital events and maintenance and storage of archive records. This is reflected in the fundamental aims of GRO, which are:

- to register all births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions;
- to ensure that all information collected is relevant, accurate, complete and updated in such a way as to maintain public confidence in the records;
- to support the production of accurate vital statistics to assist policy development and research;
- to preserve birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and adoption records permanently and to store them securely;
- to produce certified copies of records efficiently and promptly on demand and manage the Family History website.

The aims of GRO staff are to carry out these statutory obligations, to give accurate and unbiased advice to the public, to act with integrity at all times and to respect the confidentiality of all information contained in registration records or given by the public in confidence.

Main Activities / Performance Against Key Targets during 2015

Over 50,000 vital events (births, re-registered births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships) were registered in District Registration Offices and a corresponding number of certificates were issued. In addition, during 2015, GRO staff:

- produced over 60,000 certificates and of those, over 7,000 priority certificates;
- welcomed 1,200 visitors to the Public Search Room facility in Oxford House;
- verified 90 births, deaths and marriages for government departments;
- provided all death notifications to the Business Services Organisation, Electoral Office for Northern Ireland and Department for Work and Pensions;
- dealt with 4,200 registration related cases; and
- facilitated 1.5 million searches were carried out on the Family History website
- attended the Who Do You Think You Are? live exhibition in Birmingham in April 2016 and met over 1,000 visitors.

Each year the Registrar General sets a number of key targets for GRONI. During 2015 these included:

- To process 98 per cent of postal, online and telephone certificate applications within 5 working days.
Achieved: over 98 per cent were processed within target.
- To process 98 per cent of personal certificate applications within 3 working days.
Achieved: over 98 per cent were processed within target.
- To process 97 per cent of birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and adoption registration casework within 15 working days.
Achieved: over 97 per cent were processed within 15 days.

(i) Annual review of civil registration fees

Each year GRO review the statutory fees charged for registration services against costs. The review indicated that an increase in fees in relation to birth, death, marriage and civil partnership certificates was not necessary.

(ii) GRO Northern Ireland Registration Office System (NIROS) Project

GRO has commenced planning for the next stage in the modernisation programme, which is the replacement of the current electronic registration system. A Supplier for the NIROS project was selected in 2014, with the delivery of the replacement system due in early 2016.

The project team has engaged with the system designers throughout the year to ensure that the new system will embrace the most up-to-date technology and deliver a registration system both fit for purpose now and in the future.

All project milestones have been met and the delivery of the new system is expected by the end of February 2016.