

Shropshire Council's Registration Service Lessons Learnt from the Pandemic

January 2023



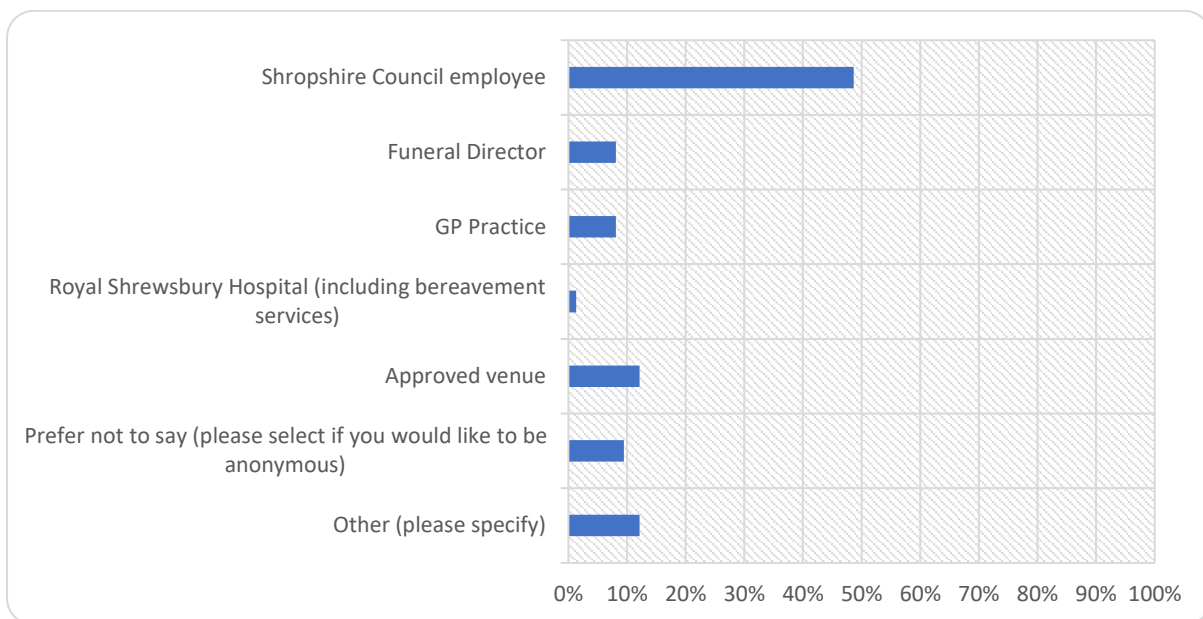
1 Background and Methodology

- 1.1 In March 2020 it became increasingly apparent that Covid-19 had spread from China to the UK and more locally it had arrived in Shropshire. On 15th March the first death attributed to Covid-19 occurred in Shropshire. On 20th March the Prime minister issued the instruction to stay at home if possible. As key workers, the registration service had to plan for the registration of deaths. Birth and ceremonies registrations were to continue. On 24th March 2020, the announcement was made that face-to-face services were suspended including death registrations, births and ceremonies and the Coronavirus Act providing emergency powers to a range of public services was passed.
- 1.2 In addition to the above the entire process of registering deaths had to be remodelled, and this included setting up processes with GPs and Hospitals for the electronic transmission of medical cause of death certificates, with funeral directors and crematoria for the electronic delivery and return of body disposal paperwork. Additional emergency staff had to be trained in registration and equipment and processes which would allow the registration of deaths over the telephone had to be quickly modelled and introduced.
- 1.3 Public buildings were closed, and in some cases repurposed, this included the libraries, out of which most of Shropshire Council's registration service operated. It was necessary to invoke business continuity emergency plans for a pandemic situation. The recent survey has been an opportunity to find out whether the response was adequate and a chance to reflect on learning.
- 1.4 Gathering feedback from those who worked with Shropshire Council's Registration Service was important. Only from learning and reflecting on what happened will the registration service be prepared should the worst happen, and Shropshire experience another emergency situation.
- 1.5 To inform business continuity and pandemic planning, both now and the future, it is important to look back on the period between 24th March 2020 to 31st March 2022 to examine Registration Service's actions and reactions to situations and to instructions provided by Government.
- 1.6 Shropshire Council's Registration Service wanted to look at how they dealt with Ceremonies customers and any decisions which they took unilaterally which may have impacted them. This is in order to assess whether, on balance, these were the correct decisions or whether they should have acted differently. Communication with a wide variety of stakeholders and partners, as well as the public, helped determine whether the overall response was adequate, whether the best channels were used, or whether things should have been done differently. It is the purpose of this report to inform Shropshire Council's Registration Service in future planning activities

- 1.7 Responses to multiple-choice questions were converted to and presented as graphs and tables. Postcodes were fed into an instance of Power Bi and placed on a Microsoft Bing map. Open-ended questions were analysed by theme and summarized before presenting the actual response set or, occasionally, representative samples.
- 1.8 The report analyses two surveys: one for partners and stakeholders (1), the other for members of the public (2). The report is broken down into various sections:
- Background & Methodology (this section)
 - Demographics (covering Q 1, 2 and Q20–end of survey 1 and Q11–end of survey 2)
 - Staff views (covering Q3–8 of survey 1)
 - General views from partners/stakeholders Part I (covering Q9–13 of survey 1)
 - General views from partners/stakeholders Part II (covering Q14–19 of survey 1)
 - Views from members of the public (all non-demographic questions from survey 2)
 - Conclusions
- 1.9 This engagement report has been designed to be shared with Shropshire Council's Registration Service, and, on approval, published as a public document.

2 Demographics

- 2.1 76 partners and stakeholders and 14 members of the public opted to complete the survey.
- 2.2 Nearly half (49%) of the partners and stakeholders who responded were Shropshire Council employees. With an approximately even split between council employees and other types, this provided the registration service with a valuable range of responses.

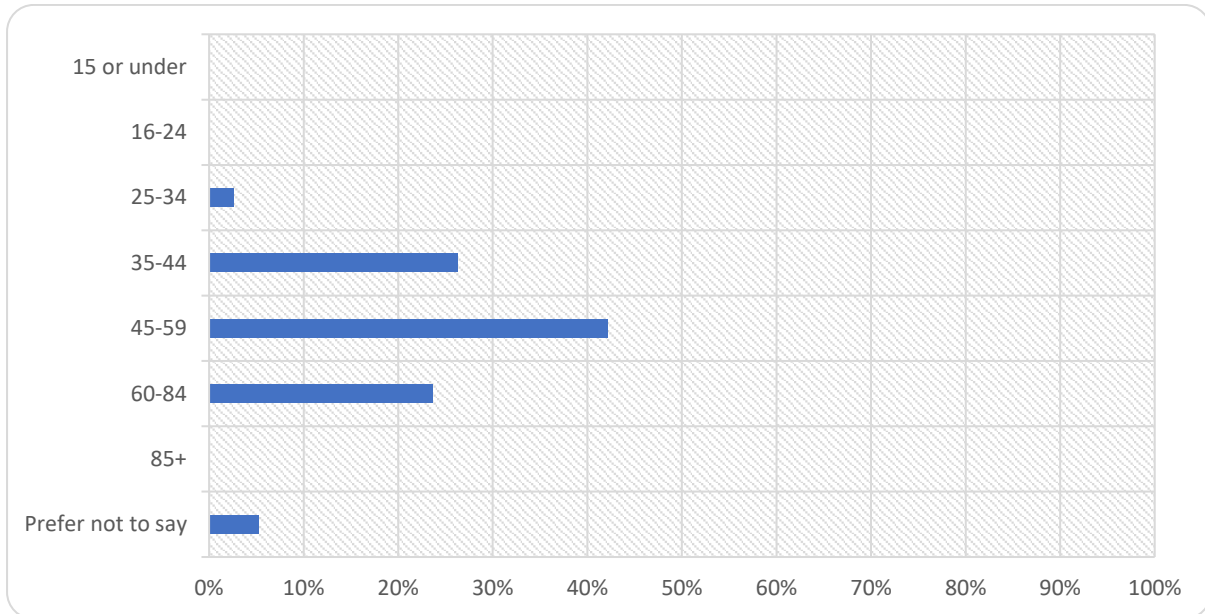


- 2.3 Of those who were Shropshire Council employees, nearly half (46% were registration officers.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Registration Officer	46.15%	12
Ceremonies Officer	15.38%	4
Certificate Production Staff	0%	0
Other staff member within Shropshire Registration Service	11.54%	3
Resources Directorate staff member – support services	0%	0
Senior Manager	15.38%	4
Other Shropshire Council employee	11.54%	3
Prefer not to say	0%	0
TOTAL		26

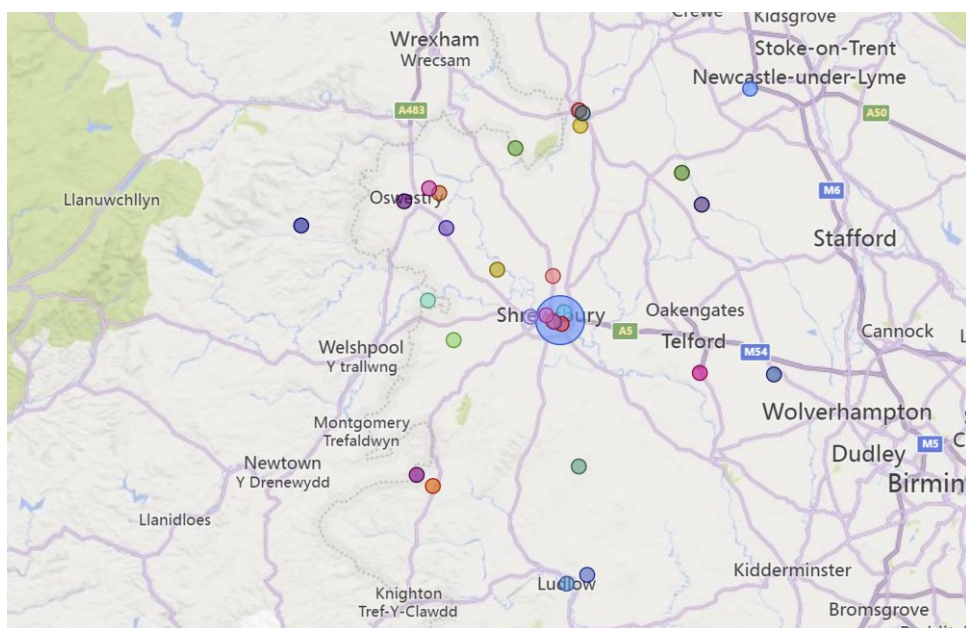
2.4 The vast majority of partner and stakeholder respondents were female (79%). Of the members of public who responded, only 2 people answered the question on gender, one male and one female.

2.5 Partners and stakeholders were mainly in the 45–59 age bracket:



Again, for members of the public only 2 people answered the question concerning age group, both in the 45–59 age bracket.

2.6 Below are the locations of respondents who offered their postcode as part of the demographics section of the surveys. the map shows a good spread of responses across the county suggesting representation from people living across Shropshire. There were more responses from Shrewsbury (with a larger population) and fewer responses from the Southeast of the county.



Microsoft Bing map showing postcodes entered as part of the demographics section of the survey

2.7 Most partners/stakeholders reporting business or organisation size (34 respondents) stated that their business/organisation was large (250+ employees) but the total number of micro, small or medium businesses reported made up almost 56%.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Micro (1-9)	14.71%	5
Small (10-49)	23.53%	8
Medium (50-249)	17.65%	6
Large (250+)	44.12%	15
TOTAL		34

3 Staff Views

- 3.1 Q3 — Members of staff were asked to give their opinions on various statements. Overwhelmingly, members of staff as a whole responded positively, reporting that:
- The management team responded to the pandemic in a timely way (92%)
 - Staff communication was sufficient (70%)
 - Staff communication was not excessive (81%)
 - Removing the certificate priority service was the right decision (54% with 31% stating not applicable or didn't know)
 - Plans put in place for death registration were effective (76%)
 - Staff welfare was given enough attention by management (73%)
 - There was effective internal joint working within Shropshire Council (50% with 27% stating not applicable or didn't know)
- 3.2 Q4 — Members of staff were asked what didn't work well and should have been done differently. Only 14 people responded to this question. Positive themes that emerged were with regards to communication of various types, good preparation, and good use of limited resources. Negative themes that emerged included the national government's response, mental strain on registrars, more contact with staff from management, slow reactions of IT and lack of support from the wider council.

Communication was timely and comprehensive throughout.

Staff Communication from managers was not excessive. It hit the right medium.

A lot of the decisions made were out of the staff's hands - a lot of the guidelines from the gov were woolly and unhelpful and made the work we had to carry out incredibly difficult. I think that the best was made of a bad situation, and it was tough trying to look after staff keeping them safe and continuing with the roles that were required for the people of Shropshire. The telephone death registration was welcomed by staff and customers. I think we spread ourselves too thin trying to keep all our customers - venues, couples etc happy interpreting the guidelines.

Given the circumstances the council did a reasonable job during the Pandemic. It is easy to fault the decisions with the benefit of hindsight. The communication was neither too much nor too little.

I think that registrars had to register death after death at home with no real breaks, and it impacted their mental health, with no-one else around at home to talk to.

Registrar services ceased service within the building through March until mid-July 2020.

I think there should have been a little more contact to ensure how staff were coping. It affected everyone differently and sometimes was more difficult than others.

I felt that communication was good in response to the ever-changing Government guidelines.

Better joined up working with front facing and back-office teams especially IT as they were very slow to react. The withdrawal of customer services put additional pressures on other front facing services.

I do not feel that our service was supported by the wider council except for the CSC offering emergency staff.

I felt we had prepared well for this situation.

I believe that Karen Burton maintained the delivery of the knowledge that we needed in a very timely manner whilst being quite under-resourced from help outside of the registration service. In no circumstance did I believe that there was an excessive amount of communication.

You can never have too much information.

I don't agree that information from managers was insufficient, I think there were gaps, but these were when, in lockdown, there wasn't anything to communicate.

- 3.3 Q5 — Members of staff were asked to make comments about how the pandemic impacted their location of work or working from home. 17 people responded to this question but 2 of those only provided a one-word response indicating they, in fact, had no comment. Comments touch upon the pros and cons of working from home, IT frustrations, and no one-size-fits-all situation in terms of home setup for work.

I was pleased to be offered the option of working from home or the office. Office working was organised in a very covid secure way.

Working online has been an excellent means to maintain services. However, there are obvious limitations for those services which provide public facing services. Adaptation of services will have to continue, as regulations catch up with the changes to working culture.

Working from home was mostly effective especially for customers, in that sense it worked very well. Sometimes IT issues let us down both internal, home broadband and Office systems, i.e., RON. I needed to buy a different broadband package that worked more effectively to allow me to do my job. As the year progressed and working into 2021, I worked in one location at our central office registering deaths for approx. 5 months until we were able to work from our own individual offices within Libraries and F2F appointments.

Working from home was incredibly difficult - staff had all sorts of different home situations and one size did not fit all but the telephone registrations once logistics had been sorted fitted. Making the decision to reduce services worked. However, I felt supported at home but during the time that everyone was on lockdown at home but being isolated at home I felt that I wasn't contributing to the team.

I enjoyed working from home however I am fortunate to have a reasonably large home with a garden.

I had no problem working from home.

Nothing changed.

We had to work quickly, learn new skills adapt to different delivery methods and communicate this to communities.

Supported throughout pandemic.

I remained working at Shirehall along with the core team.

For health reasons I commenced WFH a week before the 'official' date. I had/have no issues with WFH.

Not relevant as working from home was not an option available to me.

I found it harder working from home, things like IT dropping out although support from ICT department was very good.

I do not feel the Shirehall building was fit for purpose due to ventilation issues. The nature of some jobs meant it was necessary to attend the office along with other staff members and to see the public in some circumstances. I do not feel that this risk factor was taken into account by the Council who have regularly stated their intention to remove us from the building. I do believe that our own management team did the best they could given the circumstances.

No, as a casual ceremonies officer there was no impact.

- 3.4 Q6 — Members of staff were asked for feedback about how staff members were cared for through the pandemic. 14 people answered this question with 1 indicating no comment. Comments were generally very positive with only a couple of concerns about poor ventilation and the same people being told to stand down first when demand was lower.

All good.

Social distancing, wearing face coverings and testing was paramount and everyone supported each other.

By the team it was clear that every effort was being put in place to care for the team. I never felt at risk or exposed or nervous. Council-wise not at all. Mentally as a team we did not get the support we desperately needed.

The support for staff was there when it was needed.

Social distancing was put in place effectively and quickly. It was difficult because at the beginning no one knew what we were dealing with.

Staff safety was the paramount concern reorganising work patterns and opening hours for staff who could work hybrid and those who could not taking into account the customers perspective.

I felt valued, supported, and respected throughout.

On a service level we did our best to look after each other and the core team became like a family group in terms of support. On a wider council level, I do not recall any support or concern for my welfare.

I felt very well supported.

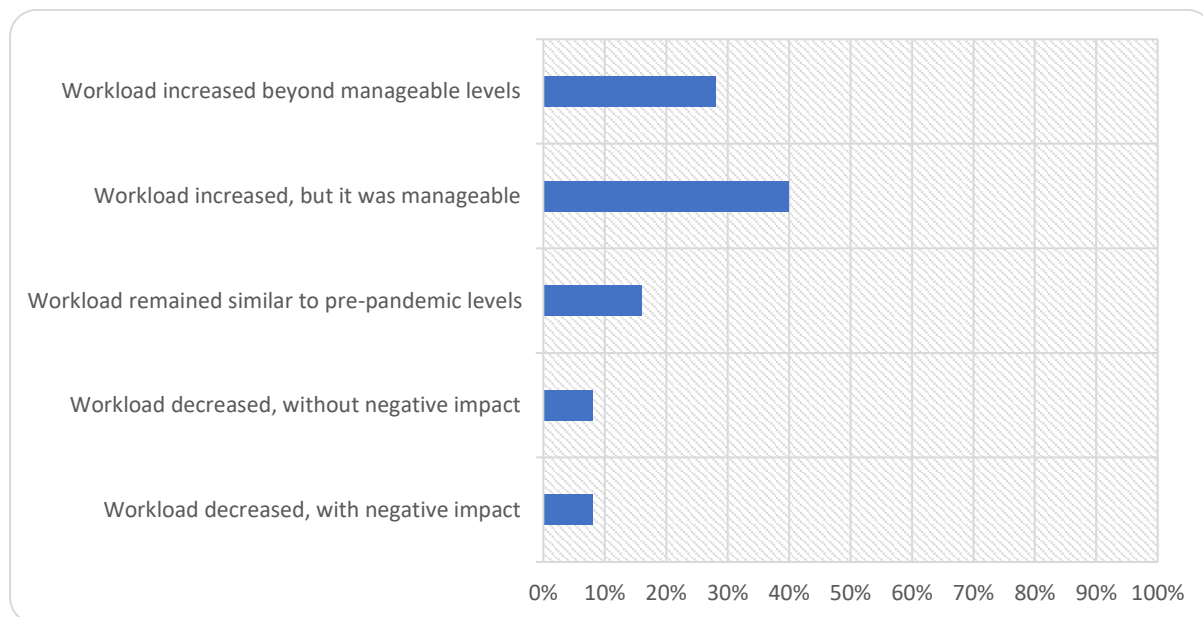
I believe that the decisions made by Karen always edged on the side of caution with staff safety as paramount which was very clear.

Overall, very good, but there were times when demand dropped off and it seems that the same people were told to stand down first.

Staff were cared for extremely well; offices were rearranged to allow for social distancing and communicating regarding reopening of offices was done in a timely manner.

Again, due to the sizes of our offices, it was difficult to socially distance (especially those of us sharing an office) and rendered pointless when the ventilation issues were brought to light. I appreciate that we were asked to take regular tests which were provided for us along with hand sanitiser. Those of us working in the offices were encouraged to work from home/take time off sick if we showed covid symptoms.

- 3.5 Q7 — Members of staff were asked how they felt the pandemic had impacted their workload. 25 people answered this question with 68% of respondents saying their workload increased, 16% stating their workload remained the same and a total of 16% saying their workload decreased.



- 3.6 Q8 — Members of staff were invited to add any other comments about workload through the pandemic. 11 people responded to this question. Comments reference the increasing workload, adapting to the ever-changing pandemic needs, rising to the challenge and positive comments about the leadership of Karen Burton. There were frustrations about being told to stand down at the last minute.

The workload became excessive from time to time due to the unreliability of RON rather than from any internal management weakness.

Initially we mostly worked at home, with telephone death registrations. a skeleton staff remained at the central office for certificate production etc as well as responding to general telephone and email enquiries, liaising with hospitals, GPs, and Funeral Directors.

Birth registrations were put on hold as were wedding ceremonies. as the easements started to take place the wedding processes became a huge workload for the team that dealt with them from, disappointed customers, cancellations, postponements, and reshuffling dates etc. a flurry of people wanting to get married on top of that, saw a huge increase in the workload. as for death registrations, it sometimes took longer as people appeared more afraid, scared, so sorrowful of a loved one's death and so wanted to talk to someone- not easy to do all the legalities as well as being empathetic. all this over the phone with no body language to get a feel of the interview being over, just took a little longer I felt. However, looking back for our customers many of them were so please to register over the phone, no distance to travel and having the comfort of being at home or in a safe place. It worked really well and would be advantageous all around if the death telephone registration could be possible again.

The situation was unprecedented we had no idea what we were walking into- I think as a service we handled it the best we could. It would have been helpful to have more support from GRO or the Council themselves- we just to get left out and they couldn't relate to us at all. The workloads increased with work that some of us had not had to pick up before in such high volumes and had to drop our own 'day jobs'. I found it one of the most stressful times but not because of our service. I honestly believe we did what we could especially as we had no choice but to be reactive to situations imposed.

As the library was open to the public with minimal access, we did have to deal with enquiries for registrar services but were able to redirect customers to the call centre/registrar phone line.

The telephone death registration process, once embedded, was extremely efficient.

Overall workload was similar, but the nature of the job changed from being all round to just registering deaths for periods of time - which was the nature of the pandemic.

Pandemic allowed the development of digital services changing workloads to train staff in new skills but at an unprecedented pace. Staff also adapted to delivering services with internal and external partners. Speed of change was a mitigating factor as internal partners were slow to adapt to community demand putting pressures on front facing delivery.

The only thing we could do was react to the ever-changing picture. It was a matter of getting on with the job, which was to provide a critical service to the people of Shropshire. I am proud that I was able to rise to the challenge but also aware that nobody could.

Working in the registration of deaths department it needs no explanation to state that the workload increased exponentially, luckily, we have a very good team and a very thorough and supportive manager in Karen Burton.

At times there were more people available than would have normally been the case, so the workload actually decreased, this led to being told to stand down at short notice, this was quite frustrating.

The amount of cancelled and rearranged weddings/ enquiries regarding the new temporary laws, we were exceptionally busy and at times this was unmanageable. When the law changed to allow face to face appointments to resume, we were, again, exceptionally busy (although this was managed well by appointments only being made available on certain days of the week). As a small team this was a challenging time however I cannot make any suggestions as to how this could have been managed differently!

4 General Views from Partners & Stakeholders Part 1

- 4.1 Q9 — Respondents were asked if they felt that the registration service responded early enough to the threat of the pandemic. 40 people responded to this question. Overwhelmingly most partners and stakeholders (88%) thought that the registration service responded early enough to the threat of the pandemic.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, in full	87.50%	35
Yes and no (mixed view)	7.50%	3
No	2.50%	1
Don't know	2.50%	1
TOTAL		40

- 4.2 Q10 — Respondents were asked to rate the response to the pandemic in various areas of service. 39 people responded to this question. Overwhelmingly, almost all respondents thought that Shropshire Council's Registration Service was very effective or effective at:
- responsiveness to changing circumstances
 - adherence to national and Shropshire Council requirements
 - emergency service and planning
 - communications regarding changing regulations, requirements, and processes
 - communication with couples regarding ceremonies, certificates, and death registration
 - the telephone death service itself
 - communication with stakeholders and partners
 - implementation of social distancing measures
 - implementation of new processes
 - service relocation
 - Team working

- 4.3 Q11 — Respondents who selected "ineffective" or "very ineffective" in the previous question were asked to explain further. 6 people responded. The comments below express concerns about failure to enter signature details, length of time waiting for a certificate, lack of information about changes in delivery etc but some reflecting that these were extraordinary times.

In only one area was the implementation of new procedures ineffective. For a period, we failed to enter informant signature details by hand on entries.

Waited over 2 months for marriage certificate and was misled on several occasions as to the timescale. The local press became interested in my case but luckily for the Registrar I decided not to follow this path. Totally shocking service.

Not kept up to date with changes in delivery to ensure we reflected changes in opening hours. Unaware of how our opening times would impact on delivery to registration customers or how our legislation would affect services.

We did not have direct contact from the registration service when procedures changed. The information regards changes in procedures, we got came via third parties i.e., trade associations, government websites. Often the information of changes reached us post changes. While I appreciate things were happening quickly and decisions had to be taken very promptly. I believe letting us know of any changes in procedures would have helped us give accurate information to families and there for as whole made things more efficient.

Overall, everything came together, in relation to funerals and the bereaved, quite quickly. There were areas within the early days that could have been addressed more effectively but overall, and in extraordinary times, it was fine.

Communication relating to changing regulations, requirements, and processes. Not informed of the change in process with posting MCCD certificates.

- 4.4 Q12 — Respondents were asked for any comments and feedback relating to either their own experiences or those of members of the public. They were also asked how the services could have been improved. 22 people responded to this question with 2 people referring to their answer to the previous question. This was by far the most popular open question to answer. Positive comments included compliments about communication including the telephone death registration system (and the potential for continued use beyond the pandemic), care and compassion shown by staff, excellent leadership, and a feeling that partners were listened to. Negative comments included issues of remote document creation and verification, the mental strain felt by registration officers, mixed messaging, and a question as to why this feedback wasn't sought out regularly during the pandemic itself.

It was difficult to impose financial penalties on bereaved families for errors on documents they had never seen. I believe GRO should have waived correction fees on telephone registrations.

Excellent communication, with full detail on what was required, and clarity as to why things were changing over the course of the pandemic.

The over-the-telephone death registrations was so well received for so many reasons - I think the families and staff did not want to lose that option. Not only did it keep staff and customers safe it enabled us to be more flexible and it was less restrictive.

My father died during the pandemic and not only were the team professional and helpful they also, via phone, were caring and compassionate. Amazing team of people!

Regularly received positive feedback from informants registering deaths via telephone. Those informants that had previously registered a death from a register office found the telephone registration service far less stressful and easier as it allowed them to undertake

this legal requirement safely from their home, wherever that might be, without having to collect the MCCD, attend the register office or deliver the Form 9 afterwards to the funeral director.

It was mentally challenging registering a death over the phone with a bereaved family member and knowing that they often had no one with them to support them. It was the nature of the pandemic but was sometimes hard as a registration officer.

The general feedback from bereaved families using Shropshire Registration Service throughout the pandemic was very good.

With the ever-changing Government guidelines as we were coming out of the pandemic in the latter half of 2021 and first quarter of 2022, it was challenging to get the public to adhere to the guidelines. This was a particular problem in venues with venue staff either not knowing or being reluctant to insist on mask wearing during the ceremony, despite us making this request, as at this stage mask wearing had almost become personal choice. I know a ceremony customer was very confused as to what the rules were and hadn't received any updates on the rules from the Registration Office ahead of their wedding in Dec 2021. There was also confusion about the rules for weddings held outdoors in relation to their licenses.

Mixed messages and over complicated regulations coming from Gov made communicating very difficult, particularly when ceremonies began to be allowed again. Time and time again we had to explain 'regulation or guidance' to each other, our venues, customers...the lag between an announcement and the regs coming out was particularly difficult as well as seemingly arbitrary cut off dates. We could perhaps have had a standardised approach to comms, but we weren't working within a framework where the comms from above were coming in a standardised or logical way.

The coroner's service was able to continue with inquests remotely to save families having to wait for a death certificate. If though circumstances meant the inquest had to be adjourned it was, I feel there was nothing more the service could have done.

A very small number of wedding customers advised us that they struggled to get hold of the registration service at times, however we were understanding of the possible reasons for this.

In my experience all customers of the registration service registering deaths much preferred to register over the telephone perhaps this could be an option available to them in the future.

Overall, I personally thought that the leadership shown by the SR was very effective and dynamic to an everchanging situation which was new to all of us, we seemed to be leading the West Midland Area in changing ways of working, installing screens, testing staff, performing limited size ceremonies, registering births. As a service I think that the team pulled together amazingly and showed good spirit and a willingness to adapt to changing situations and continue to provide an excellent service to our customers.

It is fair to say that when we told bereaved relatives that they would be able to register their relative's death over the phone, and they could stay safe at home, they were more than relieved. They thought it would all come to a halt given the difficult situation faced by all public services, and so despite having to accept the new rules for funeral services, relatives were relieved that they could proceed with a death registration and that this new way of working supported their circumstances. After they had spoken to us, we assured them that their next call would come from the Registrar, and so it did. They sat back and waited for calls, as it should be, instead of them having to chase departments and hang on

the phone in the queue for an appointment. The immediate aftermath of a death for some relatives can be overwhelming and so anything we can do to ease this feeling and support them, should be looked at. Being able to register a death over the phone changed so much, for the better. Some people could not leave their homes due to isolating or shielding or didn't live locally and so travel was not an option. This new way of working eased all those worries. We could still support relatives over the phone, and the registrars picked up where we left. It was a worthwhile change, and one which is missed very much as an option to those registering now.

We at David Davies & Sons believe that the changes put in place during the Pandemic were effective, efficient, and creative. We feel that our customers were well served.

I felt very confident in the responses to my questions. I used your team as the definitive answer for queries especially when couples didn't like the restrictions.

Obviously, some couples were disappointed when there was a change in restrictions just days before their wedding, but they understood the reason why.

I appreciate the hard work of Mrs Burton and her team who delivered a fantastic service in very difficult circumstances.

I, as a funeral director, was reassured knowing our part within the pandemic and emergency planning was taken seriously and we were included within discussions, thank you. We as a firm are saddened that telephone registration of deaths came to an end. This was a service that assisted, greatly, a number of bereaved families and this would have been a service worthy of keeping.

This survey comes a long time after the event and would be far more beneficial to have done this type of survey every quarter during the pandemic and make any appropriate adjustments while they could be done to have an effect on improving services. All in all, the registration process was simplified so much for the bereaved during the pandemic, other than getting through on the phone everything was very well conducted and in a good timely fashion which helped families, and all concerned when making funeral arrangements.

- 4.5 Q13 — Respondents were asked to comment on issues of diversity, equality, and health with regards Shropshire Council's Equalities, Social and Health Impact Assessments (ESHIA). 2 people answered this question. The lack of response suggests that there weren't any significant concerns but the comments about the telephone service's benefits for inclusion are important to reflect upon.

The telephone death registration impacted positively regarding disability and religious characteristic groups. It removed the need for those who found it difficult to get to an office due to a disability. Also, certain religions required urgent death registration to allow for the body to be released within a given time, often within 24 hours. Although this is something the service will always try to accommodate - the process Shropshire put in place really helped us to achieve such outcomes more easily/swiftly.

We had a positive impact in many ways for our elderly customers who were able to register from their own homes rather than having to travel.

5 General Views from Partners & Stakeholders Part 2

- 5.1 Q14 — Respondents were asked for comments about partnership working by the registration service during the pandemic and how they could have worked with partners more effectively. 6 people answered this question. Comments included frustrations being able to make contact, compliments about how people responded despite working long hours and recognizing the unforeseen challenges.

Shropshire Coroner's Office have an excellent working relationship with Shropshire Registration Service.

The registration service could have been an integral member of the joint community response.

It would have been helpful to receive the latest restrictions and guidance on wedding venues and ceremonies quicker after any new directive from the Government. As mentioned above, easier access to someone in the weddings team would have been beneficial, it was sometimes difficult to get hold of someone.

Nope, they were working very long hours and responded with good grace, I surely asked some ridiculous questions.

I don't think you could have been more effective. It was a case of the blind leading the blind some of the time but none of us knew what we were dealing with, especially in the first year.

Overall, the registration service provided a fantastic service throughout the pandemic and probably didn't get the recognition that they deserved.

- 5.2 Q15 — Respondents were asked to think about their connection with Shropshire Council's Registration Service and comment on what worked best during the pandemic. 22 people answered this question. Positive comments included those about teamwork, flexibility, great communication, the telephone registration system, positive reflections on working from home, and good teamwork.

The teamwork, particularly the commitment from those in the reception/admin office who were the first point of contact with customers.

Flexibility of the service, ability to change approach to adapt to short notice regulation changes, great communication throughout, with full explanations of changes and why required.

Definitely telephone death Registrations, efficient and timely mostly, but as mentioned before sometimes, in the early days of the pandemic, it could be slower,

Being able to work from home because I needed to and being in touch with the office. Meetings keeping staff up to date made you feel less isolated. Being made to feel safe when returning to work - testing and sneeze screens. The team being brought closer

together because of what we had been through. The service wide acknowledgement that it was pressured and stressful.

I have to say that the Registrar Service was extremely helpful especially considering the chaotic background. The highlight was their ability to arrange Registrars to attend here at short notice on 30th December 2020. Thank you very much.

Communication via email. Staff working from home were pleasant and helpful, considering the strange circumstances.

In the run up to reopening, the registration service kept in contact, and we worked together to ensure a safe open space to waiting customers and access to a registrar.

The process was swiftly designed and implemented to meet the legislation change for death registrations from 'face to face' to telephone registration.

Still being able to complete my job.

Continuing with weddings throughout the pandemic, as the guidelines were interpreted so that the law was not being broken. This was not the case in other Registration Districts.

Registration officers liaising with staff delivering services in the community sites.

Worked together as a team.

In some ways, the sense of abandonment by the wider council was positive because we did our best with little interference. We came together as a team, we had great comms with each other every day using teams and people started to get to know each other better. There was a sense we were separated physically and joined together in other ways. We shared more and looked after each other.

Communication via email.

Telephone registrations worked well.

Willingness to change and adapt.

Finding out new ways of working with the Teams system and mail merging etc.

Good communication.

Being able to scan MCCDs over to the registrar. Over the phone registration provided huge benefits for bereaved relatives. Also helpful to those who act in an Occupier role, when having to register in the absence of next of kin. This meant public service staff could remain in their departments and not have to attend the Register Office. More efficient working.

Electronic submission of paperwork and forms was excellent. Long may it continue.

Just having someone to speak to.

Communication.

- 5.3 Q16 — Respondents were asked to comment on the worst thing that happened through the pandemic in connection with Shropshire Council's Registration Service. 6 people responded to this question. Comments included the negative impacts of working from home, frustrations regarding

venues and guest limits, unclear national guidance about testing and government advice about new directives, and the complaints and unrealistic expectations of couples with regard cancellation of ceremonies.

Working from home - the added stress of home life it wasn't a stress-free place to try and work- dealing with large numbers of complaints.

It was a shame that when we had our ceremony, even though the PM had lifted guest limit to 30, the ceremony room wasn't big enough to do this safely. There are much bigger rooms in Shirehall that could've been used to accommodate 30 guests safely.

As we were coming out of the pandemic - April 2022 the guidance relating to LFTs stopped suddenly so was unclear whether regular testing should continue in relation to our job

Being really worried about going out to do ceremonies whilst looking to reassure staff it was ok. The fear that something would happen to one of the staff because of something that had happened at work.

Waiting for advice to come through regarding the implications of any new directives from the Government which had a big impact on couples deciding whether to continue with their planned wedding date or postpone.

Couples' complaints regarding cancellation of ceremonies and their unrealistic expectations.

- 5.4 Q17 — Respondents were asked what they would change or do differently if they experienced another emergency in the future. 8 people responded to this question. Comments include difficulties of remote online notarization, simplifying approaches, better welfare support, improved communication, and positively that nothing needed to be changed.

The unreliability of RON remains an issue.

I would weigh up whether taking a simpler approach to continuing with ceremonies would benefit and be less stressful for staff and all customers rather than reacting to all the changes - I completely understand why we did what we did especially not knowing how long it would last for.

Coordinate service delivery within the context of advance ceremonies and facility opening hours.

Ask for regular welfare support from the Council for staff even if they say they don't want or need it.

I think I would attempt to seek clarification from Shropshire Council's registration service more promptly to endeavour to improve the communication to my wedding couples to assist them in their decision-making and plans.

Remain open to change.

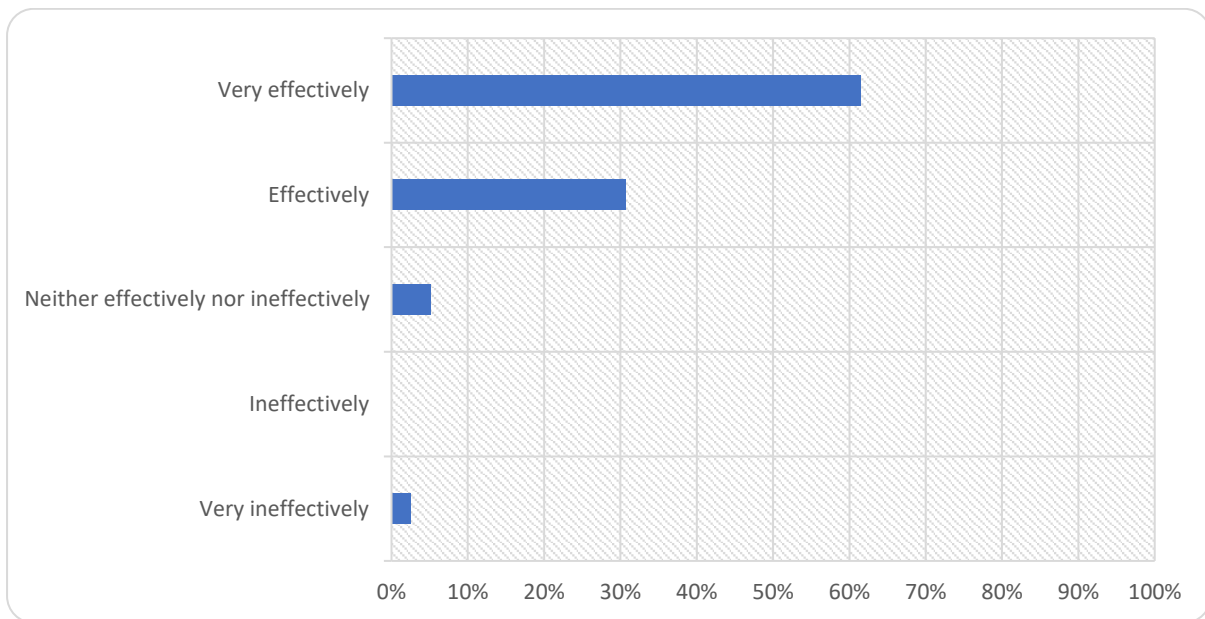
Nothing. We now have a rigorous system which we could revert to should another pandemic happen.

I can't think of anything.

Improved communication with all working parties.

More communication in regard to new processes.

5.5 Q18 — Respondents were asked for their overall views on how the registration service coped with the impact of the pandemic. 39 people responded to this question. Over 92% felt that Shropshire Council's Registration Service coped very effectively or effectively with the impact of the pandemic. Only one person felt it the service coped ineffectively.



5.6 Q19 — Respondents were asked to provide any further comments. 5 people used this opportunity to make other comments. All positive mentioning great service and leadership despite the challenges.

Although it may seem that I am being very negative, I think Shropshire Registration Service did the absolute best they could in the situation we had been put in. We had no choice at some points to be purely reactive not knowing which way to go. The team did incredibly in what was a very scary stressful time, having minimal support from some of our partnerships and for that I am so very proud of us all and to be part of the team.

Our service manager was key to the way everything worked. We didn't sleepwalk into March 2020 like many services, and this is down to our service manager.

I think in the enormously difficult circumstances of the pandemic, Shropshire Council's registration service still managed to maintain a great service and helpful advice.

Super team, efficient and kind. Top dollar.

As a ceremonies officer there was little impact on myself, I was very grateful for the furlough payments made during the lockdown period.

6 Views of the Public

- 6.1 Q1 — With only 14 members of the public responding to the public survey as a whole, 11 (79%) did *not* use Shropshire Council’s Registration Service between 24 March 2020 and 31 March 2022.
- 6.2 Q2 — The two services that were required were Death and “Other”. One of the respondents who answered affirmatively in the previous question declined to answer this one.
- 6.3 Q3 — For the 11 people who did *not* use the registration service in that period, 9 responded as follows:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I didn't require the service	77.78%	7
I experienced barriers to using the service	0%	0
I recently moved to Shropshire	11.11%	1
Other (please specify below)	11.11%	1
TOTAL		9

- 6.4 Q4 — Nobody chose to explain in more detail why they experienced barriers to using the service.
- 6.5 Q5 — 4 people responded that they didn’t know whether the registration service responded early enough to the threat of the pandemic (This suggests those respondents didn’t have enough information versus expressing any doubt).
- 6.6 Q6 — Members of the public were asked to give their views on various statements. While the 4 people who responded generally stated “Don’t know / not applicable”, 1 person felt the registration service did not respond in a timely way and another said that they were very happy with the plans put in place for death registration during the pandemic.
- 6.7 Q7 — Members of the public were asked to comment further if they disagreed or strongly disagreed with any statements in the previous question. 2 people responded to this question. The first comment mentions difficulties in registering a death. The second comment below has been included for the sake of completion, but it is important to note that it does not even mention any aspect of Shropshire Council’s Registration Service by name.

Had several friends struggle to register their loved one's deaths. It was distressing for them.

1) There was no pandemic 2) The illegal measures put in place in March 2020 were clearly an attack on the British people by its own government. 3) The people of this country will neither forget nor forgive the deliberate and malevolent destruction of their society, economy and their children's education wrought by the government and its poodles such as Shropshire council. 4) Nor will we ever forget the evil psychological and behavioural tactics used by government and its goons the media, plus use of the police to physically enforce compliance. 5) As a result of the above, public trust in the institutions of government, both national and local, and its lackeys the justice system, the entire infrastructure of parliament, including the Lords, the police, the health service, the education system, and of course all mainstream media, has dissolved.

6.8 Q8 — Members of the public were asked to rate the response to the pandemic in relation to various areas of service. 3 people responded to this question. Mostly the responses to the various statements were “don’t know / not applicable” or neutral with 3 communication statements labelled “ineffective” relating to changing regulations, couples relating to ceremonies, and death registration.

6.9 Q9 — Members of the public were invited to comment further if they considered any of the above areas of service to be ineffective or very ineffective. One person opted to give further information about why they labelled an area of service to be very ineffective.

The “scamdemic” was an outrageous act of violence by the government on its own people from which this country may never recover. Shropshire Council must take its share of blame for its complicity in this.

6.10 Q10 — Members of the public were invited to give any further comments of feedback relating to their experiences. One person opted to give a general comment.

Please remember, not everyone has access to a computer!

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The research produced important feedback from a range of people including staff, partners, and members of the public. Numbers of responses were on the low side but those who took the time to respond commonly added comments to explain their answers and the combined information has produced some clear and valuable findings.
- 7.2 While the partners' and stakeholders' responses were more numerous, open-ended questions were not responded to in any great number. The comments offered as part of the analysis are therefore often the entirety of the response set.
- 7.2 The responses were overwhelmingly positive about Shropshire Council's Registration Service and its operations during the pandemic period. Areas to be proud of include:
- quality and appropriate level of communications
 - the management leadership
 - teamwork
 - safety measures and working conditions
 - rising to the unknown challenges of the pandemic.
- 7.3 Areas that might offer a chance to reflect on how things could be further improved (whilst acknowledging that these were mentioned in the minority of responses) include:
- better support for the mental health of members of staff
 - ensuring IT support is more efficient
 - working with the wider council to ensure better support in times of crisis
 - ensuring that online services can deliver the same or surpass that of in-person (e.g., remote online notarization)
 - ensuring that when workloads drop, it is not the same people who are asked to stand down at the last minute.
- 7.4 The analysis above indicates that Shropshire Council Registration Service performed extremely well during the pandemic. The registration service now plans to take some time to understand the feedback and, where possible, act on the suggestions and comments made in order to plan should Shropshire and the UK experience something of the pandemic's magnitude and severity again.

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