

## REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 AUGUST 2020

### ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Report from: Portfolio Holder for Business Management, Councillor  
Turpin

#### Summary

This report sets out progress made within the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management which fall within the remit of this Committee.

#### 1. Background

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee covered by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management are:

- Bereavement
- Community Wardens
- Emergency Planning
- Registration

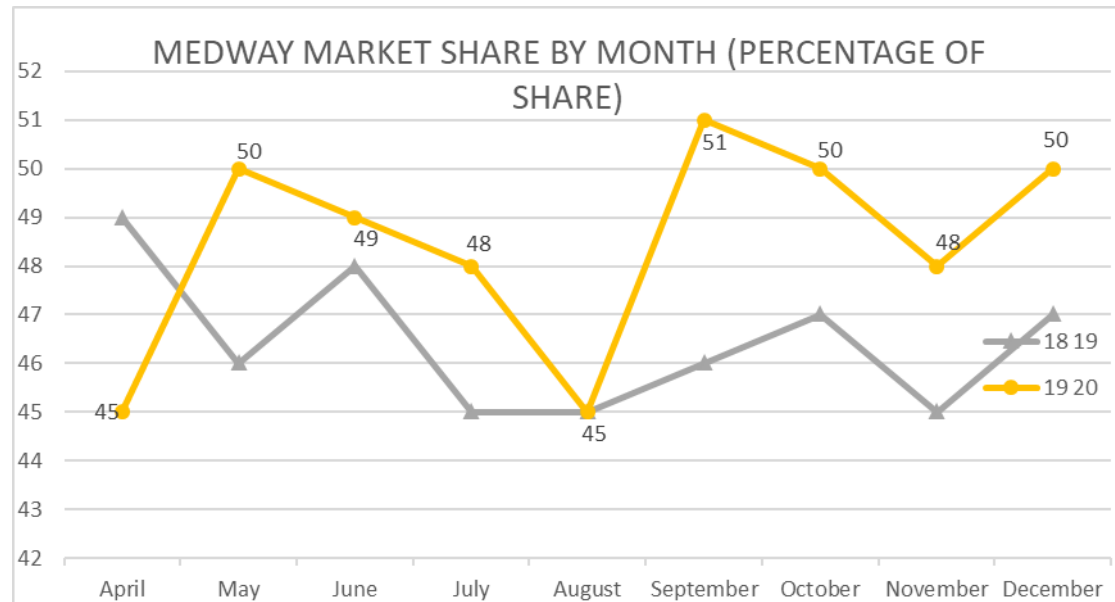
1.2 Achievements are detailed by services area below.

#### 2. Bereavement

2.1 Cremation and burial statistics for the last 4 years are as follows (adult numbers are given as these attract a fee):

Calendar Year	Total Cremations	Adult Cremations	Total Burials	Adult Burials
2019	1936	1845	322	299
2018	1995	1877	349	330
2017	2046	1925	343	321
2016	2696	2602	270	252

2.2 With the completion of the abatement project it is anticipated that numbers of cremations will rise. An increase in local competition means it is unlikely we will return entirely to the volumes of 2016, the chart below highlights that we will continue to recover and further increase our market share. Market share is measured as a percentage of all service users from Medway who chose Medway Crematorium over any other crematorium or cemetery.



Data Source – Medway Bereavement and Registration Services

Although the drop in services in July and August are in line with local activity (refer to the Registration Service death registration data), the September spike is likely to be attributed to the introduction of the new Obitus system installed to provide a digital screen in each chapel which allows visual tributes as well as the ability to stream funeral services via webcasting.

2.3 There were 13 referrals for funerals to be arranged under the Public Health (Control of Disease Act) 1984. Working with genealogy companies helped locate a number of relatives which resulted in 7 funded funerals being carried out.

2.4 On the first indications that the Covid 19 infection was reaching pandemic proportions Bereavement Services took action to achieve three main goals.

1. The swift management of the deceased
2. Maintaining the dignity of the deceased
3. Supporting the family of the deceased

The swift management of the deceased is crucial during a pandemic from a public health perspective, as hospital mortuaries have finite space and any delay in funeral arrangements could lead to unacceptable backlogs. Early in the outbreak the forecast mortality rate was high enough to warrant preparing to double the capacity of cremations to accommodate this potential increase in demand.

- 2.5 Three members of staff were identified in the redeployment pool for training as cremator operatives (the Mayors Drivers and a member of the Community Safety Team, to whom we are grateful). This gave the facility the ability to operate at the maximum capacity of the equipment if or when required.
- 2.6 To enable as many mourners as possible to witness the services in a safe way, all seating was removed from the chapels other than those at 2 meters apart. Live streaming of the services has also been offered free of charge (there is usually a modest fee). Medway Crematorium has also continued to enable the “witness charge” for faiths who find comfort, whilst maintaining social distancing.
- 2.7 In order to accommodate the increase in demand for services the hourly slots in the East Chapel were reduced to 30 minutes and the fee adjusted accordingly.

These actions have enabled Bereavement Services to continue offering not only excellent customer service, but resilience in these unprecedented times.

### **3. Community Wardens**

- 3.1 There are currently 14 PACTs running in Medway, compared to 12 in 2018; often PACTs disband once their specific concerns have been addressed. However, others have continued to remain active in their communities as residents’ groups.
- 3.2 Wardens attended 18 PACT meetings including New Road PACT, Brompton PACT, Allhallows PACT, Vineries and Surrounding Areas (VASA) PACT and Luton PACT. The Wardens also attended Police Liaison meetings, Town Centre forums, Community Engagement events, including healthy walks, student engagements, Parish councils, PCSO meetings, residents association meetings, neighbourhood panels, park friends’ groups and community fun days including the Focus On events and the Cherry Picnic held every year at the Vineries.
- 3.3 Wardens continue to engage with rough sleepers as necessary, signposting them to appropriate support agencies. They have also assisted with the Medway Winter Night Shelter programme. The Team Leader for the Community Wardens has also attended the last two rough sleeper counts, walking known areas for rough sleepers during the early hours of the morning to try and encourage these people to take advantage of the services offered by Medway Council. Anyone found has their details taken (should they be willing to engage) and given a cup of tea and some food.
- 3.4 The Community Wardens organised 35 community clean-ups and litter picks, encouraging the local community to take ownership of problems in their locality and do something positive about them.
- 3.5 24 of these clean-ups were carried out as part of the national Spring Clean campaign (a significant increase on 13 the previous year) and received positive reports in the local press. These are excellent community events and have an immediate and positive impact on the local amenity. Across the Spring Clean, 41 Councillors attended as

well as 309 members of the public. 769 bags of litter were collected along with some larger items. The total weight disposed of was just under 6.2 tonnes.

- 3.6 Other community clean ups of note have taken place at Jaynes Creek in Strood, where the team worked with the Guardians of the Deep and RSPB to clear shopping trolleys and other litter from the area of land / riverbed adjacent Morrisons in Strood. The team have also assisted Guardians of the Deep clearing the shoreline on the RSPB site at Cliffe. Officers have also helped clear the church garden at Allhallows after vegetation was cutback by the Probation service.
- 3.7 Wardens received 1365 reports of abandoned vehicles across Medway this year. Of these vehicles, 874 were deemed not to be abandoned (i.e. good condition, taxed, have a current MOT or have a local owner), 433 were referred to the DVLA for clamping and removal. 58 had removal notices served on them by the Community Wardens for removal by our contractor.
- 3.8 This year the programme of educational visits to schools, aimed at Year 6 pupils focusing on messages concerning personal safety, responsible dog ownership and littering have been taken on by the two new Engagement Officers who work alongside the Community Wardens. They have made an exceptional contribution to the service since joining the team. So far this year, they have spoken to and engaged with over 2,500 people ranging from school children to a local Women's Institute. They have made a huge impact on local communities and groups giving presentations on recycling and environmental hints and tips. They have also taken groups out to conduct litter picks as part of their interactive learning. Their interaction with the public also extends to social media with the team using twitter to push messages out further.
- 3.9 The Community Warden team have 6 dedicated areas and the stray dog Facebook pages. The areas covered are:
  - Rainham, Twydall and Parkwood: with 575 followers and 537 likes
  - Rochester and Horsted: with 102 followers, 59 likes and an average view of 26 per post
  - Gillingham: with 78 followers, 78 likes and an average of 22 views per post
  - Chatham and Luton: with 86 followers, 86 likes and an average of 18 views per post
  - Strood, Cuxton and Halling: with 622 followers, 600 likes and an average of 184 view per post
  - Lordswood, Walderslade and Princes Park: with 558 followers, 535 likes and an average of 331 views per post.

These pages enable the Community Wardens to communicate effectively with community stakeholders, such as Ward Members, PACTs, Neighbourhood Watch and other community groups all at the same time. The ability to reach some of our customers in harder to reach communities means that we can effectively reduce potential social isolation.

- 3.10 Community Wardens received 309 reports of stray dogs in 2019 (which is down on the 391 reports the previous year).
- 3.11 Of 111 dogs taken to kennels, 66 were reunited with their owners, 17 were rehomed and 22 went to rescue centres. We still have 6 dogs in foster care or at the kennels.
- 3.12 26 of these dogs required veterinary treatments, some required more than one visit due to ongoing conditions which require care. We have a duty to provide vet care to all animals taken in by Medway Council under the Animal Welfare Act.
- 3.13 The terms of our dog kennelling contract enable the team to house dogs for longer than the statutory 7-day period when necessary meaning that they can be rehomed successfully
- 3.14 The team have microchipped 30 dogs this year, either at events or in their own homes free of charge. The number of dogs we chip has reduced over the years as the microchipping regulations have now been in place for a number of years.
- 3.15 All stray dogs are featured on our dedicated Facebook page. This page has 8,951 followers and in 2019 we reached over 628,000 people, with 193,558 engagements. Our best engagements generally come with reuniting or rehoming posts.
- 3.16 The Community Warden Team has been awarded the Gold Footprint Award by the RSPCA for the sixth consecutive year in recognition of their excellent stray dog policies and procedures. The team has also been nominated for a 'Pride in Medway award' for the second year running. This award is in recognition of the team's good care for animals.
- 3.17 Implications of the 2020 Front Line Services Structure review:  
As part of the Council's transformation programme, Frontline Services has been tasked with £406,000 savings to reflect business change. There will be no cut in front line service delivery, but the services will be delivered in a new way to reflect the changing needs of the local communities and modern local government agenda.
- 3.18 Community Wardens:  
In the new structure, the Community Warden Service (12 posts) will be split into specialist functions, taking the work they do with them to the relevant teams as detailed below. There is only a reduction of 1 FTE from the existing Community Warden Service and this post is a vacancy that has been empty for the last year due to the moratorium.  
By putting the officers into specialist teams/roles they will be given better career progression and allow us to be more efficient and streamlined with the front line services we offer. Additionally, not all officers are undertaking all parts of the existing Community Warden role, for valid personal reasons. This has led to pressure in some areas and parts of the work not receiving the dedicated attention it requires. The new service structure will give a much better, more efficient service to the public across Medway.

**2 x Waste Wardens and 1 additional Contracts Monitoring Officer**

- Condom and needle removal hotspots

- Street and litter inspections
- Monitoring repeat waste collections complaints
- Graffiti (indemnity forms)
- Assisted collection visits
- HWRC inspections
- Community Clean ups / litter picks

**3 x Engagement Wardens, to be managed by Environmental Engagement Manager**

- PACT and SACT meetings
- Community surgeries
- School and community talks
- Events - such as 'Focus On 'summer events
- Door Knocking campaigns
- Monitoring participation of recycling services
- Social media accounts – promoting the work of all the Environmental Services teams

**3 x additional Enforcement Wardens – merging with existing Street Scene Enforcement team creating a new team of 7.6 Enforcement Wardens**

- Refuse out early
- Abandoned Vehicles
- Footway/carrageway obstructions
- Flytipping removals and investigations
- Illegal skips
- Street trading
- Trade waste compliance

**3 x Animal Wardens working with the Noise and Animal Licensing team on all things animal related including:**

- Stray and dangerous dogs
- Dog chipping service
- Advice on dog and animal care
- Dog chipping
- Dog Code
- Dog friendly café's

3.19 During the COVID-19 pandemic the seven Community Wardens operated as close to normal as possible and were available to support the Emergency Planning response. Social distancing rules severely limited warden interaction with the public, prohibiting home visits for abandoned vehicles, fly tipping evidence collection and refuse out early door-to-door enquiries.

- 3.20 The service had two shielding officers who worked from home maintaining the stray dog service database, liaising with potential foster carers, vets and rescues as well as assisting colleagues with jobs for other services within Environmental Services. The five non-shielding Wardens continued to undertake proactive jobs and respond to service requests for stray dogs, abandoned vehicles, waste and litter issues while maintaining social distancing.
- 3.21 The March-April Great British Spring Clean community clear ups have been rescheduled in September with appropriate social distancing measures. Community engagement activities have been postponed until COVID-19 restrictions permit these to recommence.
- 3.22 During the height of the pandemic the Front Line Services restructure was finalised with the seven Community Wardens successfully applying for posts in the Animal (3), Engagement (2), and Waste (2) teams. Recruitment to the vacant Enforcement (4) and Engagement (1) warden vacancies will be completed in quarter two.

#### **4. Emergency Planning**

- 4.1 The Emergency Planning Team has recruited to the Senior Emergency Planning Officer Role.
- 4.2 A Heatwave and Emergency Plan was written to cover seasons from 1 June– 15 September 2019 and the team assisted the Consultant Public Health in developing the Cold Weather Plan for 1 November 2019 – 31 March 2020. These plans are refreshed each season to reflect the arrangements set out in NHS and Public Health England's National Emergency Plans.
- 4.3 The Emergency Planning team continues to monitor the Severe weather warnings and alert service, jointly run by the Meteorological Office and NHS, and advises Council services and voluntary organisations when trigger levels are met. To date response and action has been necessary on four occasions for heatwave (2 in June and in July and Aug 19) and so far three occasions for cold weather (Nov and Dec 19 and Jan 20) prior to the recent snow. There were eight named storms in 2019 and so far three in 2020 most notably was Storm Hannah in April 19 that caused widespread disruption in the UK.
- 4.4 A live test was conducted on the alerting systems that would be used in the event of an external emergency associated with an emergency at the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) site on the Isle of Grain. This test is carried out on an annual basis, last held on 27 June 2019.
- 4.5 Medway Council's duty to carry out a three yearly review, consultation, rewrite and development of the External Emergency Plans for Grain's Upper Tier Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites has been carried out. The Plans were tested during Exercise Combine 2019 in April 2019, a debrief took place in August 19 with a Plan rewrite still taking place.

- 4.6 The Emergency Planning Team has arranged for senior officers from across the Council to attend the following multi-agency events:
- Working in a Safety Advisory Group training – October 2019 (1 Officer)
  - KRF Winter Preparedness Workshop - November (4 Officers)
  - Oil Pollution Contingency/Officers training – March 2019 (5 Officers)
- 4.7 The Emergency Planning team has provided additional internal training and represented Medway Council at the following Exercises:
- MCG Control Centre – July 2018
  - Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) Seminar – November 2019
  - Incident Liaison Officer (Community Wardens, Duty Highway Engineers and Volunteers).
- 4.8 The Emergency Planning Team contributed to the planning and response for two multi-agency operations: Op Fennel road disruption in Kent (all 2019 and continuing through 2020) and Op Lairdship potential protests at an Energy producing site (July 2019).
- 4.9 The Emergency Planning Team were involved with the following Major Exercises during 19/20; Exercise for Faraday (EU Elections), Exercise Combine 2019 (Top Tier COMAH Site External Emergency Plans), Exercise United 2 (Mass Fatalities) and Exercise Lundy 2 (Traffic disruption due to EU Exit).
- 4.10 The Emergency Planning team has represented the Council on 16 separate standing KRF groups and task and finish groups, which are established as and when necessary, to undertake specific projects. These Groups are consolidated by means of a Kent Resilience Forum Delivery Groups Day which incorporates the three core function Groups, Plans and capabilities, Risk and Exercise & Training.
- 4.11 Throughout the year the Emergency Planning Team has responded to a number of flood alerts (potential Coastal flooding March, September, October, November 2019 and January 2020). There was also a response required for a major surface water flooding incident (July 2019). The team has also supported two incidents where residents experienced major water disruption (March and August 2019) and two Explosive Ordnance Disposal incidents (August 19 and January 20). The Team also responded to a Large House fire which contained 12 individual flats in Brompton and Human Disease contingency Planning (Corona Virus, Jan 2020).
- 4.12 The Team has been involved with Medway Council Resilience Partners in identifying any risk and threat associated with the move away from the European Union.
- 4.13 The Team has contributed to the following emergency plans/reports:
- Kent & Medway Severe Weather Framework



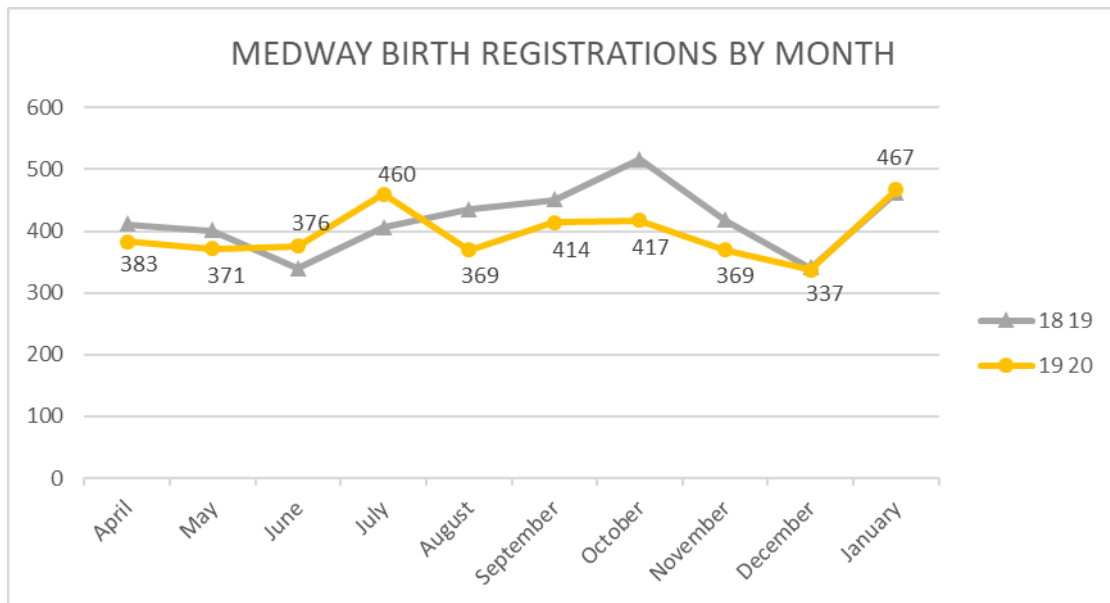
- Pan Kent Strategic Emergency Response Plan
- Kent Resilience Forum Resilience Direct Protocol

4.14 Emergency Planning were involved with the initial planning with Public Health colleagues for the threat of a global pandemic COVID-19. Although this materialised as a public health emergency, the Emergency Planning led on the establishing the strategic and tactical response for the Council, putting in place a command and control structure from late March 2020.

The Assistant Director for Emergency Planning took the role of Tactical Commander working with the Local Resilience Forum and was aided by the Emergency Planning Team who formed a Tactical Advisory Group. They established emergency structures across the Council and with partners to respond and to ensure that critical services continued and resources were targeted to helping vulnerable adults and children.

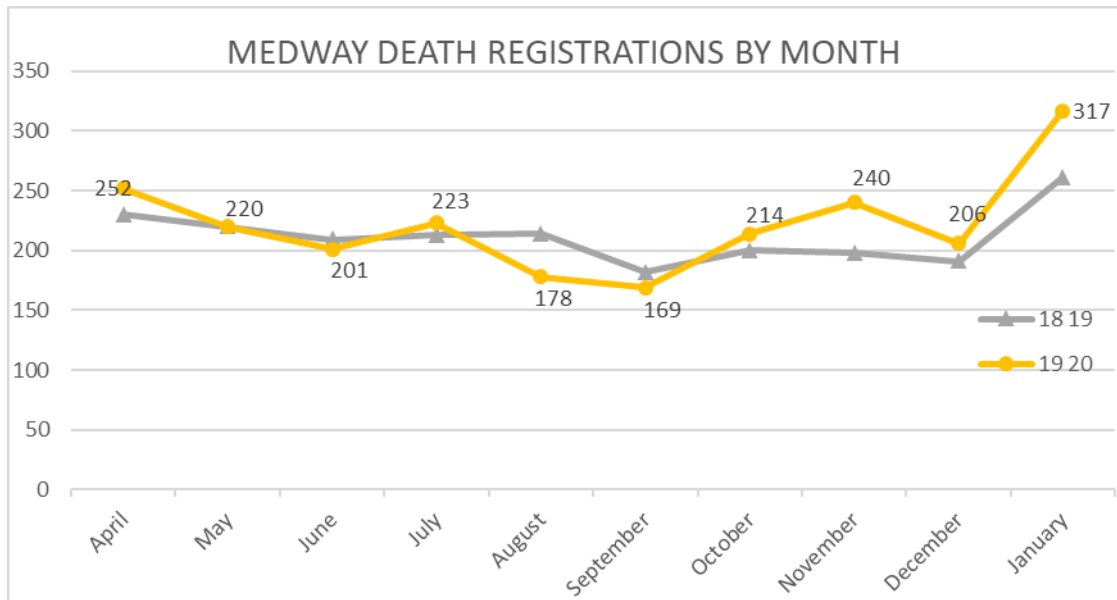
## 5. Registration

5.1 There were 4954 birth registrations in 2018/2019 with 97% being registered within the target 42 days of birth. There has been a small drop in births mid-year with 3963 registrations against 4177 at the same time last year. This is highlighted in the illustration below.



Data source - The General Register Office

5.2 2584 deaths were registered with 99.5% of informants being offered an appointment within the target 2 working days of notification; 394 deaths involving post mortems were registered. It's anticipated that levels may slightly increase by the end of 2019/2020 but within normal parameters.



Data source - The General Register Office

- 5.3 752 marriages were registered in the 2019 calendar year against 817 registered in 2018. This decline appears to follow a national trend which is supported by the decreases in Notices of Marriage (the civil form of Banns) in 2018.
- 5.4 2153 Notices of Marriage were taken in 2018/2019 this is a 6% decrease overall against 2017/2018. However Notices for Medway's Statutory venue increased by 18.5%, indicating financial drivers.
- 5.5 Medway Register Office hosted 12 well-attended group Citizenship Ceremonies across 2018/2019.
- 5.6 In 2019 Medway adopted the "Tell Us Once" service delivered by Registrars. "Tell Us Once" is a service offered by local authorities on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. The service allows you to inform central and local government services of the death at one time rather than having to write, telephone or even attend each service individually.
- 5.7 On 31 December 2019 legislation was introduced that allowed heterosexual couples to enter into a Civil Partnership giving an equal alternative to marriage. This legislation was adopted seamlessly in Medway and to date nearly a dozen couples have taken up this option.
- 5.8 On commencement of lock down instruction was received from the Registrar General that all registrations should cease other than the registration of deaths. The reasons were two-fold.
1. All other registrations were not regarded as "essential travel" and would therefore breach the guidance at the time.
  2. To prioritise the registration of deaths, the data from which has proved crucial in tracking the infection and providing live statistical data with which to inform policy.

- 5.9 To facilitate the registration of deaths during lockdown the Covid 19 Bill allowed for the registration to be made over the phone by the informant, and the electronic transmission of the required documents from the certifying Doctor to the Registrar. This required a complete re-design of the service within a couple of days and was achieved with excellent results. Perhaps surprisingly, the general public have been very positive to the change of arrangements and it is generally hoped they continue once the Bill expires in two years.
- 5.10 Once it became clear that the changes in primary legislation required to allow the registration of births over the phone would not be possible, the decision was proactively made locally to prepare for registrations to take place face to face within the current social distancing guidelines. With excellent collaborative work from Medway Councils I.T department, Medway Norse, Medway Councils Property Services, Corporate Health and Safety and the Audit team, the main ceremony room at the Register Office was converted into a certified safe space for families to come to register, and for staff to discharge their statutory duties without fear of infection. This was achieved in time for the government relaxation on essential travel and the Registrar Generals instruction to re-commence the registration of births on the 1 June 2020.
- 5.11 On average 100 new babies are born in Medway each week. The last registration took place on the 27 March 2020, therefore by the time of recommencement on the 1<sup>st</sup> there were over 1200 unregistered babies to back capture, each requiring (by law) a face to face interview which takes on average 30 minutes and has a statutory deadline of 6 weeks. In order to get through the backlog as quickly as possible 4 additional staff were re-deployed to be trained and register under supervision. At current capacity the backlog will be cleared by early November.
- 5.12 Once the public became aware that registration could commence it was anticipated that demand would be incredibly high for appointments which the existing telephone booking method would struggle to accommodate. To mitigate any problems Medway Council's I.T department developed an on-line booking system which was live in time for the public communication of re-commencement of registrations.
- 5.13 The Register Office remained open throughout lock down and continued to provide an emergency duplicate certificate service.

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**Appendices**

None

**Background documents**

None