

Comment on Registrar Office Consultation

Andy Boddington, Councillor Ludlow North

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I comment via email as the online form does not allow me to express my opinions fully. In summary: I do not see the case for a change in hours for the Ludlow office and believe the office should remain as open as at present.

The three options given are to: 1) Continue as we are; 2) Reduce the hours of the Ludlow office; 3) Close Ludlow completely.

Faced with these three alternatives, only Option 1 is acceptable. But with a change to Option 2 to keep Ludlow's hours as at present, this might be acceptable.

Nothing can be more exciting than recording a birth, though finding time to do it can be hard. Nothing can be more painful than registering a death, which needs to be done with dignity and without fuss. Residents of Ludlow and its hinterland should not have to go to Shrewsbury to register a birth, and certainly not to register a death. To force people to take a sixty mile round trip to register the death of a loved one is cruel.

It costs Shropshire Council almost the same to register a death, birth or marriage in Ludlow as Shrewsbury.¹ There is the same level of usage of the service.² The options are cut back the hours at the Registrars Office in Ludlow or even close it. But the Shrewsbury Registrars Office will not be cut back under any scenario.

We are a town with a significant elderly population. A quarter of our residents are aged 65 or over, higher than in Shrewsbury or across Shropshire as a whole.³ A quarter of households in Ludlow have no car or van; considerably greater than the Shropshire average.⁴ If our Registrars Office closes will people have to go on the bus? We are talking about a journey three hours each way from Clee Hill to Shrewsbury.

In Ludlow, 49% of potential appointments were filled in 2013/14. Under Option 2, it will get a cut in hours. Up in Oswestry, just 39% of appointment slots were filled. Under Option 2, it gets an increase in hours.

The nature of the Registrar business means that not all appointment slots can be filled. In Ludlow, the Registrars Office is open for 1.5 hours for every visit by a member of the public. In Oswestry, it is open for 1.8 hours. Under Option 2, Ludlow will be reduced to 0.9 hours per visit and Oswestry increased to 2.1 hours.

It already costs more for a 30 minute appointment in Oswestry: £88 compared to Ludlow's £67. This disparity can only increase under the current Option 2.

I cannot see any demographic or operational reason for this difference in treatment. It is blatantly favouring Oswestry at the expense of services in the south of the county.

Given these statistics, I do not see the case for a change in hours for the Ludlow office and believe the office should remain open with the same hours as at present.

The inadequate EINA

The Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA) for this consultation is inadequate. I can't see it meets legislative requirements. For example, for Ludlow the EINA says for disability: "Minimal impact as there are no sweeping changes proposed." That's not the case. Option 3 for this consultation is to close Ludlow Registrars Office altogether, a sweeping change in any book. The EINA for Bishops Castle, again on disability, says: "As the utilisation rate of the office is so low [disabled] people are obviously able to get to other offices to complete their business." There are no numbers on how many people with disabilities or have mobility problems use the service at Bishop's Castle. There are no numbers on people, with mobility issues or not, who are "obviously able to get to other offices". We can't meet the needs of people who are vulnerable or have mobility problems using guesswork.

I do not believe that any changes should be made without a more robust EINA.

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1. It costs Shropshire Council £70 to register a birth, marriage or death in Shrewsbury, and £67 in Ludlow.
 2. 49% of appointment slots in Shrewsbury are taken up, the same as in Ludlow.
 3. Proportion of population 65 years or older: Ludlow: Shrewsbury: 18%; Shropshire: 21%
 4. Proportion of households without a car: Ludlow: 25%; Shrewsbury: 22%; Shropshire: 16%.