

Meeting date: 30th January 2019

Report to: Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships

Subject/report title: Registration Service Ceremony Proposals

Report from: Emma Mayhew, Head of Customer Services

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Operational Manager Registration Service



Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph:

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval from Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships to implement changes to our marriage and civil partnership registration services which include the introduction of a third room for marriages/civil partnership, new fees and bespoke ceremony planning service which will provide more choice for customers.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 Cabinet Member is requested to approve the following proposals:
- 2.1.1 Introduction of a third ceremony room to offer the basic statutory register office marriage / civil partnership service at the cost of £46.00.
- 2.1.2 Change of use of the current statutory register office (operating out of the small ceremony room) to be a non-statutory ceremony room called 'the Jubilee Room' at a new fee rate of £95
- 2.1.3 The introduction of a range of new chargeable services, including ceremony planning, at £45 and personalised stationary.
- 2.1.4 A small increase in the annual charges noted in the table at 6.4.1.

3. What is the issue?

- 3.1 Currently our statutory ceremony is held in our smaller ceremony room known as 'The Register Office' at the statutory fee set by the General Register Office (GRO) of £46.00 and in line with The Registration Services Act 1953.
- 3.2 At the moment included with the £46 fee we offer extras such as music, a reading and personalised vows to these ceremonies which can take up to an hour. The length of these ceremonies means that the £46 fee does not cover the costs of staff time.
- 3.3 We are only required by law to cover the minimum legal requirements to offer a short statutory service which only needs to accommodate those entering into a civil marriage or partnership, the two Registrars and two witnesses. People may choose this basic service because of cost, religion or because they want a different non-legal service elsewhere.
- 3.4 We are proposing that from the 1 August 2019 to offer the basic legal service only from a new room which will be known as 'The Register Office' which can accommodate just 6 people and will not include bespoke extras.
- 3.5 To support the options available we also propose that from 1 August we use the small ceremony room (to be known as 'The Jubilee Room') for smaller ceremonies of up to 10 people with bespoke extras such as choice of music, a reading and personal vows. The proposed fee of £95 covers the cost of the longer more bespoke ceremony.
- 3.6 The Ceremony Suite which can accommodate 60 people will continue to be offered as a non-statutory ceremony room at a slightly higher rate of £235-£390 from 1 August 2019.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 The Council's Health and Safety Advisor has been consulted and it has been agreed that the new register office room is suitable to accommodate a maximum occupancy of 6 persons (including a wheelchair and / or a pushchair if required).
- 4.2 In order to change the use of these rooms in line with the proposals above it is proposed that we change the status of the current small ceremony room subject to agreement of the General Register Office to a non-statutory room from 1 August 2019 which will allow for the current bookings.
- 4.3 Providing an alternative smaller venue for the statutory ceremonies will not disadvantage local users and will allow the room to be used to its maximum effect whilst reflecting the costs of service. It also enables customers to have a choice of formal ceremony rooms.
- 4.4 To enhance the service provided to customers of the Registration Service it is proposed to introduce an optional pre-ceremony planning meeting. Sometimes couples know exactly what they want from their ceremony but often they appreciate some advice and suggestions. The proposed pre-ceremony planning meeting will be an opportunity for the couple to discuss and personalise the ceremony with one of the service's Event Co-ordinators for a fee of £45.

- 4.5 The service also proposes offering customers the opportunity to purchase personalised stationary such as save the date cards, order of service etc.
- 4.6 An Enhanced Ceremony in the Ceremony Suite within the Register Office (Capacity 60) and at our approved venues (capacity 100 – 500) would cost between £235 and £620 depending on room and day of the week. These ceremonies offer the full range of ceremony choices for couples, including and personalised ceremony script, own choice of readings/music, interviewed separately.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 This proposal to decommission and licence the small ceremony room aligns us with facilities at other West Midlands Registration Services and maximises the potential of our ceremony rooms whilst still meeting our statutory duty.
- 5.2 The proposal to introduce new ceremony packages ensures that we are providing improved choice to customers in response to demand.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 Delivery of the Council's priorities:

How will the options/proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Council Priorities:

- Improve Health and Wellbeing -
- Managed Growth -
- Build Stronger Communities -
- Deliver Value -

6.2 Implications for children and young people, vulnerable groups and particular communities:

6.2.1 The new proposal offers a range of ceremonies at various costs.

6.3 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.3.1 We have benchmarked against other register offices to ensure we are a value for money service.

6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 To cover the costs of the registration service we need to adapt our current offer. The table below shows the current costs and the new proposed offer and charges.

Offer	Now	Proposed	Current fee	Proposed fee	Implemented from
Statutory Legal Ceremony only	Small Ceremony room	New Register Office (accommodates 6 people)	£46	£46	1 August 2019
Simple Ceremony	Small Ceremony Room	Small Ceremony Room to be known as The Jubilee Room (accommodates 14 people)	n/a	£95	1 August 2019
Personalised Ceremony	Ceremony Suite	Unchanged – Ceremony Suit (accommodates 60 people)	£225 - £375	£235 - £390	No change
Personalised Ceremony	External venue	Unchanged - External venue (accommodate up to 200 people)	Up to £595	Up to £620	No change
Service Planning	n/a	New one hour appointment to plan a bespoke service	n/a	£45	1 August 2019
Personalised Stationary	n/a	Personalised save the date cards, invitations etc.	n/a	To be confirmed	1 April 2020

6.5 Legal implications:

6.5.1 We are required by the GRO to decommission the current small ceremony room as the statutory Register Office. This is a routine process in conjunction with the General Register Office.

6.6 Risk implications:

6.6.1 Currently some couples like to invite a small number of guests to their basic statutory service. This currently costs £46 this and will increase to £100 as this will need to be held in the small ceremony room. This could reduce the demand and therefore impact on the number of staff required to deliver ceremonies. We have mitigated this risk by freezing recruitment to vacant posts until any impact has been assessed.

6.7 Statutory Equality Duty:

6.7.1 The proposal provides a service that is inclusive for all.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 N/A

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 N/A

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 N/A
