



Author/Lead Officer of Report: (Mark Holmes
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Report of: Eugene Walker, Executive Director Resources

Report to: Councillor Terry Fox, Cabinet Member for
Finance, Resources and Governance

Date of Decision: 6th September 2019

Subject: Registration Services' Increase in Discretionary
Fees for Ceremonies

Is this a Key Decision? If Yes, reason Key Decision:-	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
- Expenditure and/or savings over £500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	
- Affects 2 or more Wards	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Which Cabinet Member Portfolio does this relate to? Finance Resources and Governance		
Which Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee does this relate to? <i>Economic and Environmental Wellbeing</i>		
Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? <i>(Insert reference number)</i>		
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-		
<i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i>		

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for proposals to:

- increase discretionary Register Office fees to cover operating costs and improve the service offer and to
- increase discretionary ceremony fees annually to cover inflationary costs.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that discretionary registration fees are increased as described in the table at paragraph 1.2 of this report with effect from 1st September 2019.

After consultation with Financial Services, on an annual basis, the service increases discretionary costs in line with inflationary pressures.

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 shows benchmarking information with local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region.

Lead Officer to complete:-

1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: Paul Schofield
		Legal: Andrea Simpson
		Equalities: Michelle Hawley
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	EMT member who approved submission:	Eugene Walker
3	Cabinet Member consulted:	Olivia Blake
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: Mark Holmes	Job Title: Service Delivery Manager, Customer Services
	Date: 18 June 2019	

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Register Office budget is a fully-traded account; income is derived from a range of statutory and discretionary fees. The local authority cannot change statutory fees for registration services relating to births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, which are set by the Secretary of State but it can review discretionary fees which currently provide approximately 42% of Register Office income.
- 1.1.2 Discretionary fees have not increased since 2013, consequently, as costs have increased income does not cover operating costs. The service achieves its income target of £935,000, but has operating costs of £1,029,195. This creates a pressure of £94,195.
- 1.1.3 The impact of the deficit is two-fold. Firstly, it contributes to budget pressures within Customer Services and ultimately the Council. Secondly, it limits the service's ability to invest in improving the ceremony 'offer' to customers such as improved IT and a refresh on the décor of the ceremony rooms.
- 1.1.4 The statutory fees for birth, death and marriage certificates have increased from £4 to £11. This should increase revenue for the Register Office but the increase is insufficient to bridge the budget deficit. The Register Office currently issues around 12,000 certificates per year but it is possible that the increased charges may result in people choosing to purchase fewer copies than they would otherwise have done.

1.2 Proposed fee increase

The service proposes to increase discretionary fees as described in the table below. These fees are for registrar attendance at marriages or civil partnerships at approved premises, including the Council's own Ceremony Rooms in the Town Hall where the fee also includes the use of the room itself, and for discretionary ceremonies such as renewal of vows and naming ceremonies. The average discretionary fee will increase by 18% from £216 to £255. The increase will enable the service to cover its delivery costs, including operational costs and the costs involved in improving the service offer to customers as described above at paragraph 1.1.3..

Discretionary Fee Type	Yearly Volumes	Existing charge	New charge	Estimated increase
Ceremony room: Loxley	335	£107	£150	£14,405.00
Ceremony rooms: Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam,	493	£187	£230	£21,199
Approved premise Sat-Sun	767	£337	£400	£48,321
Approved premise BH		£437	£500	
Approved premise Mon - Fri		£307	£350	
Renewal of vows - Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, Sat	9	£180	£200	£180
Renewal of vows - Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, BH		£180	£200	
Renewal of vows - Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, Mon- Fri		£180	£200	
Renewal of vows - @ Home address or other venue, Mon-Fri		£204	£250	
Renewal of vows - @ Home address or other venue, Sat & Sun		£204	£250	
Renewal of vows - @ Home address or other venue, BH		£204	£250	

naming ceremonies - Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, Sat		£180	£200	
naming ceremonies Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, BH		£180	£200	
naming ceremonies Arundel, Norfolk, Hallam, Mon- Fri		£180	£200	
naming ceremonies - @ Home address or other venue, Mon-Fri		£204	£250	
naming ceremonies @ Home address or other venue, Sat & Sun		£204	£250	
naming ceremonies @ Home address or other venue, BH	12	£204	£250	
			Total	£84,345

- 1.3 Going forward, the service proposes to increase discretionary fees in line with inflationary pressures on an annual basis. Any decisions about inflationary increases will be taken following consultation with Financial Services to determine the appropriate rate of increase.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 Providing registration services that ensure citizens have choice, timely appointments and the highest standard of service during important stages in their lives contributes to the Corporate plan priority of the Council being an In-touch Organisation.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 The Council is not required to consult on fees for discretionary services and consultation with citizens has not been undertaken. However, the service has benchmarked its discretionary fees with other Council's in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Sheffield residents have to give their notice to marry in Sheffield, but are free to choose where they hold their ceremony. Sheffield's Town Hall is considered to be a prestigious venue and is priced very competitively in comparison to Yorkshire and Humber Local Authorities. (See appx 1)

3.2 Before the proposed increases

- Ceremonies in 'Approved Premises' equate to 27% of income. Sheffield's average fee at £360 for registrar attendance is the 2nd cheapest in the region. Rotherham is the cheapest at £340 and York the highest at £575
- Ceremonies in our rooms at the Town Hall (Loxley, Arundel, Norfolk and Hallam) equate to 14% of RO income and range from £107 to £187, including registrar services, depending on the day (weekday, weekend, Bank holiday). Only Bradford (£80 to £170) offers a cheaper alternative.

3.3 After the proposed increases

- Ceremonies in Approved Premises will average £417 – putting Sheffield in the middle of the price range.

Ceremonies in our rooms at the Town Hall (Loxley, Arundel, Norfolk and Hallam) will range between £150 and £230. This still prices Sheffield extremely competitively in the region. Each Authority has varying fees depending on the room and the day of the week. Bradford, North Yorkshire, Doncaster and Barnsley will offer cheaper alternatives than Sheffield for some rooms and days.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

- 4.1.1 As a Public Authority, the Council have legal requirements under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. These are often collectively referred to as the 'general duties to promote equality' with particular regard to persons sharing the relevant protected characteristics - age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It is considered that the proposals comply with this duty as overall there are no significant differential equality impacts, positive or negative, from their implementation.
- 4.1.2 Customers have choice about which ceremony offer they choose depending on their budget – this includes using the statutory register office room for a statutory fee of £50. The Register Office will also publicise its fee structure on the Council's website to ensure that customers are aware of the choices they have and exactly what they are being charged.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 The increase in fees will be realised gradually, as many future ceremonies are already booked/paid-for at the current fees. Those charges will be honoured and only new bookings from the implementation date (1 September 2019) will be charged at the increased rate.
- 4.2.2 Based on 2018-9 demand for services, the estimated full-year effect of the increases will be £84,000. This will bridge the financial deficit for the service's budget and provide the financial capacity to invest in service delivery.
- 4.2.3 It is anticipated that the fee increase proposed in this report will mean that in future annual budget setting fees will be increased in line with inflation.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 Statutory registration fees are prescribed by Secretary of State in the Registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Fees) Regulations 2016 (as amended). The Council cannot change these fees and this report does not seek to do so.
- 4.3.2 The local authority must provide registrars for the solemnization of a marriage or formation of a civil partnership at approved premises. Under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2016 it has the power to set a fee of an amount determined by the authority as reasonably representing all the costs to it of providing registrar attendance. The fee levels proposed in this report do not exceed such reasonable costs.
- 4.3.3 Provision of naming or vow renewal ceremonies, and use of the Ceremony Rooms as approved premises, are discretionary services offered by the Council. Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 empowers the Council to charge for discretionary services, subject to a duty to ensure that the income from charges for the service do not exceed the costs of provision. The fees for the discretionary services described in this report have not been increased since 2013 and so current levels do not cover the costs of delivery. The proposed increases will ensure that costs may be recovered but that income from the fees will not exceed the costs of provision.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The Council could maintain its current discretionary fees. This option would not generate the additional income required to respond to the budget challenge of income currently being exceeded by operating costs or to improve the ceremony offer to citizens.
- 5.2 The service could cut costs such as salary costs rather than increase fees. This would result in a reduction in the quality of the service provided and significantly undermine the service's capacity to perform both its statutory and discretionary functions.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Income from fees is used to maintain financial and operational capacity in registering births, deaths and marriages, ensuring customers continue to receive the highest standard of service during their significant life events and also to ensure that facilities continue to be maintained to a high standard in future.
- 6.2 Increasing income is preferable to reducing costs which would result in a reduction in quality of the service provided.