

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	Decision to increase Non-Statutory Registration Service fees and charges from 1 July 2023 to December 2025
Date of decision:	15 May 2023
Decision maker:	Director of Governance and Law
Authority for delegated decision:	Under the bespoke delegation set out in the Cabinet decision on 16 April 2012 SUBSIDIES, FEES AND CHARGES UPDATE Microsoft Word - \$5mbjgrn.doc (herefordshire.gov.uk) which allows for the implementation of any changes to fees and charges covered by the principles and policy direction, including those outlined in the report, be carried out under the overall scheme of delegation.
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	A benchmarking exercise was undertaken comparing neighbouring authorities fees with Herefordshire. This was to ensure Herefordshire remains competitive and affordable for couples and venues whilst covering increasing service costs.
Decision made:	To increase non-statutory Registration Services with effect from 1 July 2023 covering the period to end of 2025, with charges to be reviewed annually.
Reasons for decision:	<p>The Registration Service is a statutory service with responsibility for registering births, deaths and marriages within the county.</p> <p>Non-statutory fees apply to the conducting of a marriage or civil ceremony at either a Register Office or approved venue, and the licensing of approved venues. These increases do not include the statutory register office ceremonies which the General Register Office set at £46.</p> <p>Fees for the conducting of a ceremony were last reviewed and increased in 2021, covering the period up to the end of 2023. Licence fees for approved venues have not been increased for a number of years. The proposals for new fees are attached at Appendix 1. A benchmarking exercise was undertaken comparing neighbouring authorities costs with Herefordshire's costs (see Appendix 2).</p> <p><u>The fees for conducting a ceremony</u> are proposed to be increased by 5% year on year, keeping them affordable for couples and in-line with neighbouring authorities. Herefordshire has a large number of impressive wedding venues and attracts couples from across the country. It is important the service supports these local venues to remain competitive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with venues and some other Local Authorities, the proposed changes include ceremonies on a Friday being charged at the same cost as a Saturday ceremony as these are popular days with couples. • Ceremony fees have been increased further by £22 to include the cost of 2 certificates (£11 certificate fee is set by the General Register Office). Certificates are currently ordered separately.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional options are being costed to provide further ceremony packages with a range of fees that couples can opt for. This is to prepare for the possible legislation changes to ceremony venues (see legal section below). One option will include a bespoke package to include the legal ceremony taking place in the register office, and then a ceremony at a venue of a choice of the couple. This is currently costed at a £1000 and will be reviewed in 3-6 months' time to ascertain demand and costs. <p><u>Licence fees</u> are paid by venues to be able to hold weddings and civil ceremonies in their buildings and grounds. It is proposed to increase these by 13% recognizing they have not increased for a number of years. This is in line with neighbouring authorities. The proposal is also to introduce a range of licences covering different time periods – 3,5,7 and 10 years with discounted rates for taking a longer licence. This is considered good practice by the General Register Office (GRO) to reduce the administrative burden on venues. Similarly, this will also reduce administrative time for the service. Currently the service only offers 3 year licences.</p> <p>There are other discretionary fees we can charge to recover administrative time of the team and other costs. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing an admin fee of £25 to make any changes to ceremony arrangements; this will encourage couples to confirm dates/times once. It is currently easy for them to amend these but causes significant administrative time and effort to change on systems. Booking fee of £60, which will be non-refundable and not deductible from costs of the ceremonies Increasing costs for other administrative services eg to include postage costs and completion of other forms eg passport Private citizenship ceremonies which were charged at £50 which does not cover the admin time, use of a room and registrars time to perform. This has now been increased to £175. <p>Appendix 1 Proposed Fees Appendix 2 Benchmarking</p>
Equality Considerations	Any increase on fees can impact those in society that are less well-off. The authority is required to offer a basic ceremony for bride, groom and 2 witnesses at a fee of £46.00. This is unaffected by the proposals in this report.
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	<p>The council has the power to set fees for the registration or renewal of an approved wedding premises under Regulation 12 of The Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005. There is also a power under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 for the council to make a charge for discretionary services.</p> <p>These non-statutory fees will as a minimum cover the costs of providing the service, whilst remaining competitive against other authority fees and helping local businesses. Finance have considered the proposals, indicating they are acceptable.</p> <p>From April 2024 the use of the Oak Room in the Town Hall as a decommissioned room of the Registration Service will cease as part of the move of council services out of the building. An alternative decommissioned room is proposed in No. 8. However this is on the first</p>

	<p>floor which will pose access restrictions; as this is a listed building and is a short term arrangement it is not considered a reasonable adjustment to install a lift. The statutory register office however is on the ground floor. It is expected therefore that the service will see a decrease in income from the use of the decommissioned room from April 2024 until an alternative can be found.</p> <p>The General Register Office is currently considering a recent Law Commission Report reviewing the arrangements of weddings and civil ceremonies in England and Wales. This could remove the need for approved venues (allowing ceremonies to take place anywhere as is the case in Scotland) and for independent persons to become officiators at ceremonies. If this becomes law, this will have a significant negative impact on the income the Council can generate. Therefore the service is looking at introducing other ceremony packages with the aim that the council registration team is seen as offering high-quality, flexible, bespoke ceremonies and become the first point of call for couples considering their options.</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<p>Not to increase fees. Fees have not been reviewed since 2021 and should be increased to recognise increasing staff and administrative costs. Ceremony fees for 2024 onwards need to be agreed and publicised to ensure couples know the full cost of their ceremony.</p>
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>None.</p>

Signed..... Date:

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