

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	Decision to introduce new, and increase existing Non-Statutory Registration Service fees and charges from 1 January 2024
Date of decision:	15 December 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 review of fees charged by neighbouring authorities to compare with Herefordshire fees. 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 January 2024 covering the period to end of 2026, 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 2023, covering the period up to the end of 2025.</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> <p><u>Licence fees</u> are paid by venues to be able to hold weddings and civil ceremonies in their buildings and grounds. These were increased in 2023 and will remain at the new rates in 2024.</p> <p>There are other discretionary fees we can charge to recover administrative time of the team and other costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin fee of £25 to make any changes to ceremony arrangements will be increased to £40. • Booking fee of £60 will be increased to £65 • Increasing costs for other administrative services eg to include

	<p>postage costs and completion of other forms eg passport will now be £12 and commemorative certificates of £12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private citizenship ceremonies of £175 will be increased to £185. <p>The new fees are attached in appendix 1.</p> <p>Additional sources of income are being explored including providing certificate boxes. Any new fees will at least cover the costs of providing any new service, and consider fees charged by other authorities.</p> <p>The service will also look to raise awareness and market existing services which are less used eg naming ceremonies. The potential to offer funeral ceremonies will also be explored.</p>
Equality Considerations	<p>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.</p>
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.</p> <p>From September 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 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 September 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>
Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	<p>Not to increase fees. Fees should reflect increasing staff and administrative costs.</p> <p>Ceremony fees for 2026 onwards need to be agreed and publicised to ensure couples know the full cost of their ceremony.</p>

**Details of any
declarations
of interest made:**

None.

Signed..... Date: 15.12.2023