

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	6 October 2022
Report Title:	Registration Service – Ceremony Fees
Report of:	Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance
Report Reference No:	CP/51/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To review the fees that the Registration Service charges for ceremonies and related services.
- 1.2. This report contributes to the Council's objective of being an open and enabling organisation and the objective of having thriving urban and rural economies.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Registration Service reviews its ceremony fees on a regular basis to ensure that the full cost of the work undertaken is recovered. Bookings for ceremonies in Approved Premises are often made up to three years in advance, as couples appreciate certainty in respect of the fee that they will pay.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the fees set out in the Appendix to the report are agreed.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. Some fees charged by the Registration Service, such as those for copy certificates and marriage notices are set nationally by the Registrar General with Parliamentary approval. Others are set locally to reflect the detail of services provided to the public and the costs of delivering them. Locally set fees are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they reflect the full cost to the Council of delivering the service.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. Increasing fees is optional, and the Council could decide not to do so. However, if it did this it would be delivering services at a loss. The proposed fee increases are proportionate and will enable the Council to ensure that its costs are covered.

6. Background

- 6.1 Registration Service fees were last reviewed in 2021 under the Council's former governance arrangements.
- 6.2 Many couples make their decisions over the type and location of ceremonies a number of years in advance of their ceremony., Couples often remind the Registration Service of their need to budget for their ceremony and as such are very anxious to know the level of fee they will be charged. Such requests are often made well in advance of a formal booking being made for a ceremony. In addition, publishing fees for future years helps the Registration Service to predict income levels more accurately. Bookings for ceremonies in Approved Premises (such as hotels, restaurants, and stately homes) can be made up to three years in advance.
- 6.2 During 2022/23 the Registration Service will conduct over 2,000 ceremonies in Approved Premises, projections (backed up by firm bookings) for future years are equally buoyant. Ceremonies in Approved Premises make a significant contribution to the Cheshire East economy. Over half of the ceremonies conducted are for couples who do not live in the Borough, but who choose to come to Cheshire East because of family connections, the enviable choice of venues, and the level of service delivered.
- 6.3 In addition to ceremonies in Approved Premises, a considerable number of ceremonies are conducted in the Mayor's Reception Room and Mayor's Parlour in Crewe, and in rooms at Macclesfield Town Hall. Bookings for these rooms can only be made twelve months in advance. Unlike the majority of Approved Premises these rooms do not offer catering or facilities for a reception, which in the case of some venues can get booked some years in advance. Once booked the venue has no, or only very limited further availability that day, unlike the rooms in the Municipal Buildings and

Macclesfield Town Hall. A Statutory Ceremony Room is provided at the Register Office where a nationally set fee (currently £57) is charged for a ceremony.

- 6.4 The current legislation requires two staff to attend marriage and civil partnership ceremonies. The cost of this is reflected in both the current and proposed fees.
- 6.5 The fees charged to couples reflect not just the cost of delivering a service on the day of the ceremony, but the support and guidance provided to couples from their first contact with the Service, to the day they receive their marriage certificate (since the national introduction of marriage schedules, this is no longer given to couples on the day of their ceremony).
- 6.6 The Service also offers Celebration of Life Ceremonies (similar to a civil funeral but conducted for the family and friends of the deceased at a later date) and Civil Naming Ceremonies. Whilst take - up is low and the Service's primary focus is on marriages and civil partnerships, it is suggested that these services continue to be offered as they do not detrimentally impact the delivery of statutory services. Updated fees for these services are included in the Appendix.
- 6.7 During the Pandemic a great many couples were forced to postpone ceremonies, some as many of four times. In response to requests from a number of the Borough's Approved premises, the Service started to offer a facility where couples had the option of a very small-scale statutory marriage / civil partnership ceremony at an Approved Premise (meaning the couple were legally married or in a civil partnership), followed at a later date, by a much larger scale celebration (non - statutory) ceremony; these were branded "Together Ceremonies". Whilst take up was low and very much related to the pandemic, it is recommended that such services continue to be offered, proposed revised fees are included in the Appendix.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.2.1 The specific power to levy fees for Approved Premises is set out in the Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 2011. These state that local authorities may charge an amount determined by the authority as reasonably representing all the costs incurred by it of providing a registrar and superintendent registrar to attend at a solemnization ceremony. It is therefore incumbent on the Council to ensure that an assessment of all the costs incurred are made and that the charges levied do not exceed this amount in order to comply with the Regulations.
- 7.2.2 There is a specific power to charge under Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003, which gives relevant authorities the power to charge for discretionary services. Further the general power of competence

contained in the Localism Act 2011 now sits alongside a local authority's power to trade and charge. In common with the LGA 2003 powers, charging for things done in the exercise of the general power of competence is not a power to make a profit from those activities (unless the local authority specifically sets up a company to trade).

7.2. Finance

7.2.1. Finance colleagues have been consulted over the fee levels recommended in this report and they are satisfied that the proposed fees are likely to recover the full cost of the relevant activity. However, the current high rate of inflation does make it problematic to calculate future costs. The recommended increases (most for 2025/26) are approximately 5 percent (rounded up or down to the nearest £5 where necessary). These increases are seen as proportionate and whilst lower than current inflation rates should ensure that the full costs of delivering services are recovered. If there were to be any significant changes to the assumptions, a further review would be undertaken.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 There are no legal implications.

7.3. Policy

7.2.1 Other than the recommended changes to the Council's fee charging policy, there are no direct policy implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7.4. Equality

7.4.1. There are no equality implications related to any of the recommendations. All services outlined in this report are open to all, unless debarred by age or other legal restriction.

7.5. Human Resources

7.5.1. There are no human resource implications which directly arise from the recommendations of this report.

7.6. Risk Management

7.6.1. If fees were not increased the Council would not be recovering the full cost of delivering services, there would be a risk of compromising the delivery of other statutory services, such as the registration of births and deaths.

7.7. Rural Communities

7.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities which arise from the recommendations of this report. Approved premises exist all over Cheshire East, many in rural locations, and can make a significant contribution to the local economy.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1. There are no implications for young people / cared for children

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. There are no public health implications.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. There are no climate change implications.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	There is one appendix to this report
Background Papers:	There are no background papers