

Cheshire East Registration Service Proposal to introduce Celebrant Service

Background

Since the start of Cheshire East Council in 2009, the Registration Service has been very successful in increasing the number of civil marriages in approved venues. This has been achieved by a commitment on the part of the Council to invest in the service and staff resources, as well as increased efforts on the part of the Registration Service to actively promote its marriage programme and the relationship with approved venues.

The success of this programme can only be maintained and improved upon by continuing to explore new markets and to ensure that the Registration Service continues to offer the best possible service to its customers, potential customers and stakeholders.

Current and future issues

Celebrants

Over recent years there have been a number of challenges to current marriage legislation, particularly by non belief groups such as Humanists who wish to be able to perform legal marriage ceremonies. There is also currently a Law Commission group looking at the future of the legal basis of marriage in England and Wales. Its scope includes changing the authority for legal marriage to be solemnized from the building to the person and introducing a schedule system to replace marriage registers.

In addition, there are a growing number of independent celebrants offering their services to couples. Whilst these individuals are not currently able to offer a legal ceremony, they do offer the possibility to have a ceremony in locations not approved for marriage and to include ceremony content not permitted to registration staff, such as hand fasting, religious texts and other ceremonial rituals.

The independent nature of these celebrants means that they are able to offer couples a more flexible approach to ceremony times, locations and ceremony content.

To maintain and increase the number of ceremonies, and to meet the aspirations of its customers, the Registration Service needs to adopt a more flexible approach to ceremony provision, whilst still operating within the legislative framework.

Employment status of registration staff

Since 2007 all registration staff have been employed as local authority employees. As part of their role, they perform statutory duties on behalf of the Registrar General, including the conducting and registering of civil marriage ceremonies. It is a requirement of the Registrar General that only local authority employees can perform these duties. The Registrar General has taken the view that non statutory ceremonies are a matter for local authorities and not for the Registrar General.

A specific power to charge was introduced by section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003, which gave relevant authorities the power to charge for discretionary services. Cheshire County Council (which had jurisdiction of the Registration Service until 2009) used this legislation to enable the Service to offer non statutory services, such as renewal of vows, naming ceremonies and also civil funerals.

Proposal Celebrant Service

It is proposed that the Registration Service introduces a Celebrant Service. This would enable registration officers acting solely as local authority employees to offer non statutory ceremonies at approved venues or other locations. These ceremonies would be entirely separate and distinct from any legal marriage ceremony, as required by marriage legislation. This would provide flexibility for the Registration Service to be able to offer couples more choice about the ceremony location and service content.

It is proposed that this service be marketed in the 2017 Your Ceremony brochure and the September 2017 wedding fairs attended by Registration Service staff.

Proposed Fees for the Celebrant Service

It is proposed that the fees for the Celebrant Service be set at the same level as those agreed for Ceremony Fees as follows for 2017/18 and 2018/19:

Agreed fees for	<u>Recommended Fees</u>	
	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>2018/19</u>
Weekday	£485	£500
Sat & Sun	£590	£605
Bank Holiday	£695	£715
Christmas Day and Boxing Day	£835	£850