

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Karen Warrington, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Customer Services	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 12 th January 2019 (for single Member decision)	
		E 3109
TITLE:	A reduction in ceremony fees in the Russell Room in the Guildhall, an introduction of a new dual ceremony, and an increase to Approved Premises ceremony fees.	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
None		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 The statutory ceremony held in a working office is for the couple and two guests and is available on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. By providing an alternative simple ceremony in the Russell Room on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings couples could include a few more guests, so creating a better experience for the couple. Having a simple Russell Room ceremony for 30 minutes at a reduced Russell Room fee would not impede on the ceremonies up to an hour booked in the Guildhall rooms throughout the rest of the week. The current fee for Russell Room ceremonies is £200 Monday to Thursday and £350 Friday and Saturday.

1.2 Couples are looking for alternative options for their ceremonies. They sometimes prefer to be married or form their civil partnership outside which is not permitted in law. They sometimes ask to include some traditions such as hand fasting and vows that are not permitted in the legal ceremony. Some registration districts already provide these combined or dual ceremonies where the couple can have a simple legal ceremony followed by a further ceremony in a place of their choosing. These ceremonies can include alternative traditions and vows and can take place outside. The fees for these ceremonies would be the fee for the simple legal ceremony, plus the fee for an approved premises ceremony. A further fee of £50 would be payable if the ceremony venue would need to be visited prior to the ceremony for health and safety reasons.

- 1.3 There has been no increase in Approved Premises fees since 2015 in Bath and North East Somerset, however associated costs increase each year.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is asked to;

1:

To introduce a new ceremony for the Russell Room.

To provide a smaller ceremony with no enhancements in the Russell Room Tuesday and Wednesday mornings for up to 6 guests only, at a fee of £130.

2:

To introduce a Dual Ceremony option for marriages and civil partnerships.

To provide a Dual Ceremony at the cost of a legal ceremony plus the Approved Premises fee. A further £50 location visit fee may be required for health and safety reasons.

3:

To increase Ceremony fees for Approved Premises and Reservation fee for all Ceremonies for 2019-2020 and to increase all ceremony fees year on year in line with market forces from 2020-2021.

4:

To re-instate a ceremony fee for ceremonies before 9:00am and after 5:00pm.

An extra fee to be introduced plus the Approved Premises fee for ceremonies before 8:30 and after 5:00pm.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 Costs of setting up of new ceremony scripts and options and relevant training of registrars in the provision and delivery of new ceremonies. Costs of website and diary updates. Cost of visiting alternative premises or open spaces for dual ceremonies.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The introduction of new ceremony options increase equalities and accessibility of having more choice and venues to choose from thus adding to councils offer, and is within and complimentary to the requirements in statute and requirements for customer engagement by the General Register Office.

5 THE REPORT

Bath and North East Somerset Registration Service 2019-2020

Introduction of a new ceremony for the Russell Room.

Proposal to provide a smaller ceremony with no enhancements in the Russell Room Tuesday and Wednesday mornings for up to 6 guests only, at a fee of £130

The statutory ceremony fee is £46. We cannot change this fee as it is statutory. This is for a ceremony with the couple and 2 witnesses only in one of our statutory ceremony rooms. The statutory ceremony rooms are the four working offices on the ground floor of the GH. These ceremonies have no enhancements and take approximately 25 minutes. We have these ceremonies on a Tuesday and Wednesday morning only.

The Russell Room is a designed ceremony room for up to 12 guests and the last key decision increased the fee in the Russell Room to £200 Monday - Thursday and £350 Friday-Saturday. This ceremony has enhancements and takes up to an hour.

The proposal to provide a simple ceremony with no enhancements in the Russell Room Tuesday and Wednesday mornings for up to 6 guests only that will be 30 minutes, at a fee of £130. This would provide for both sets of parents or wider family/friends (up to 6 guests) to attend a simple ceremony in a designed ceremony room. Couples may choose this type of ceremony as oppose to the statutory ceremony in an office to include a few more guests, so creating a better experience for the couple. Having a smaller Russell Room ceremony at this fee would not impede on the ceremonies up to an hour booked in the Guildhall rooms throughout the rest of the week.

Providing a Dual Ceremony.

Proposal to provide a Dual Ceremony option for marriages and civil partnerships.

Couples are looking for alternative options for their ceremonies. Couples sometimes request to be married or form their civil partnership outside which is not permitted in law. They sometimes ask to include some traditions such as hand fasting and vows that are not permitted in the legal ceremony.

Many registration districts already provide these combined or dual ceremonies where the couple can have a simple legal ceremony followed by a further ceremony in a place of their choosing. These ceremonies can include alternative traditions and vows and can take place outside.

The fees for these ceremonies would be the fee for the simple legal ceremony, plus the fee for an approved premises ceremony. A further fee of £50 would be payable if the ceremony venue or outside space would need to be visited prior to the ceremony for health and safety reasons.

Ceremony fees for Approved Premises and Reservation fee for all Ceremonies.

The fees for Approved Premises have not increased since 2015.

Proposed increase Approved Premises ceremony fees.

AP Fees B&NES 8:30-17:00	2018-2019	2019-2020
Mon- Thurs	410	430
Fri	440	460
Sat	440	460
Sun	460	490
Bank Hol	460	490
After 17:00	410,440,460	490
Non-refundable reservation fee	40	45

The current ceremony fees for the ceremonies in Alkmaar, Russell and Abbey View rooms in the Guildhall will not be increased for 2019-2020.

Approved Premises Ceremony fees comparison table with neighbouring districts 2018-2019.

AP Fees	B&NES	Wiltshire	Somerset	Bristol	Glous	Oxford
Mon-Thurs	410	430	420	385	420	495
Fri	440	450	450	385	470	545
Sat	440	450	450	400	490	545
Sun	460	480	500	480	545	610
Bank Hol	460	500	600	480	545	610
Late and early ceremonies						
Mon-Thurs	410	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	700
Sat	440	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	700
Sun+Bk Hol	460	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	720
Reservation fee – non-refundable (extra to ceremony fee)	40	50	None	35	45	50

Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Bristol have confirmed they have requested a 5% increase in current fees for 2019-2020. The other districts do not know yet.

Increase all ceremony fees year on year in line with market forces from 2020-2021.

Extra ceremony fee for ceremonies after 5:00pm.

Proposal for the Approved Premises fee for ceremonies after 5:00pm to be the same as the Sunday and Bank Holiday fee.

Prior to the key decision Oct 2016, for ceremonies outside the working day or 9:00am-5pm the fee was £620 Monday to Saturday and £720 Sunday and Bank Holidays. This was decreased to £410 Monday to Thursday and £450 Friday and Saturday and £460 Sunday and Bank Holidays in October 2016.

We have had approximately 20 ceremonies per year at 7:30 pm and also have had one at 11:00pm this year. To help recover costs and increase income we propose an extra the fee of £60 to the stated Approved Premises fee for ceremonies before 9:00am and after 5:00pm. Not all registration services offer ceremonies before 9:00 or after 5:00pm – Oxford fees for such ceremonies 2018-2019 are Monday – Sunday £700 and Bank Holidays £720.

5 RATIONALE

5.1 As in the report

6 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Divisional Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer), Finance Officer and Cabinet Member for Transformation and Customer Services.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	Jacqueline Bennett
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	