

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL
OFFICER DECISION NOTICE AND RECORD
(PUBLISHED)**

1. DECISION TAKEN			
2. To approve the proposed changes to Registration services fees as set out in Appendix 1 with effect from 1 April 2018. 3. To limit availability of Register Office ceremonies to 1 day per month 4. To introduce new charges for providing services at premium time and at weekends 5. To introduce a charge to offer a safer postal service for certificates as standard			
EXECUTIVE		NON-EXECUTIVE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Please tick either)
IS THIS A 'KEY DECISION' ? (see definition overleaf)			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
DOES THIS DECISION RELATE TO EXEMPT INFORMATION?			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
EXEMPT PARAGRAPH REFERENCE (NOT TO BE PUBLISHED)			

2. OFFICER DECISION TAKER	NAME HELEN MANDERSON POSITION/POST DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SIGNATURE <u>H. Mander</u> DATE <u>1-3-18</u>
3. REASONS FOR THE DECISION (Please ref to any report/minute/background documents attached)	Annual benchmarking exercise and fee review completed. Report attached.
4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED (BY DECISION TAKER(S))	To leave fees at current levels would impact on levels of service provided.

TO BE COMPLETED BELOW - ONLY WHEN A DELEGATED OFFICER DECISION REQUIRES PRIOR CONSULTATION WITH A MEMBER (LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CABINET MEMBER/CHAIRMAN OF A

COMMITTEE) IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE 'SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS TO OFFICERS' OR DECISION/MINUTE OF COUNCIL/COMMITTEE OR DECISION/MINUTE OF CABINET/CABINET MEMBER.

<p>5. DECISION REQUIRED TO BE TAKEN IN CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBER</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR</p> <p>POSITION</p> <p>SIGNATURE</p> <p>DATE</p>
<p>6. ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARED BY ANY EXECUTIVE (CABINET) MEMBER (S) CONSULTED, WHICH RELATES TO THE DECISION, OR (NON-EXECUTIVE) – ANY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE THAT DELEGATED THE DECISION TAKEN</p>	
<p>7. WITH REFERENCE TO 6. ABOVE - HAS ANY DISPENSATION BEEN GRANTED TO THE EXECUTIVE (CABINET) MEMBER? (ONLY APPLIES TO EXECUTIVE)</p>	

PLEASE REMEMBER TO ATTACH ANY ACCOMPANYING REPORT.

WHEN COMPLETE, PLEASE SEND TO HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, CIVIC CENTRE, SCUNTHORPE FOR PUBLISHING.

(The definitions of a key decision are when an executive decision is likely -

(i) to result in the Council incurring expenditure or the making of savings (including the receipt or loss of income) over £350,000 in any one financial year; or

(ii) to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the local authority).

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

Business Development and Economic Growth

REGISTRATION SERVICES – FEES & CHARGES

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To approve changes to fees for statutory ceremonies in approved premises and other non-statutory Registration services.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are:
- The Registration Service operates with a range of statutory and non-statutory services and fees
 - Most of the statutory fees that are set nationally have been in place since 2014
 - We have reviewed our discretionary fees for statutory ceremonies in approved premises and other non-statutory services
 - We have drawn up proposals for changes to these fees and charges
 - We are seeking to introduce the new fees with effect from 1 April 2018

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The council needs to periodically review the range and fees of the registration services we provide, particularly in response to the changing demands of our customers and the need to fully cover the costs of our services wherever possible.
- 2.2 We are statutorily required to provide some registration services but others are discretionary.
- 2.3 Statutory fees include statutory wedding and certificate fees. These fees are set nationally by a complex formula based on returns submitted by local authorities to the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 2.4 The last major increase in statutory fees was in 2014. The current statutory fees are not set at a level to recover the full cost of delivering the service.
- 2.5 The Immigration Act 2016 provided an opportunity for some new statutory fees to be introduced for a number of services that did not previously attract a charge. The new fees were introduced on 1 November 2017 and include: non-fault corrections, submissions of foreign divorce documents and forenames added within 12 months of a birth registration. The numbers of these events each year are small and the new fees are not expected to result in a large increase in income.

2.6 Each local council is responsible for setting discretionary fees for a range of services including statutory ceremonies (weddings and civil partnerships) in approved premises, and other non-statutory services. It is vital that we continually review these fees to ensure that we continue to deliver cost effective, customer focused and financially sustainable services.

2.7 Weddings

2.7.1 There are 4 options available for those couples wishing to marry at the Civic Centre in North Lincolnshire:

- a) The designated Register Office – a small office where a couple can marry in front of 2 witnesses (available Mon-Thurs 9am-11am). There is a statutory fee of £46 for this service.
- b) Ceremony Room 1 seating up to 20 guests (available Mon-Sat 10am-4pm).
- c) Ceremony Room 2 seating up to 60 guests (available Mon-Sat 10am-4pm).
- d) The Council Chamber seating up to 120 guests (only available on a Saturday 10am-4pm)

Rooms b, c and d are licensed by the authority for the solemnisation of marriages. The council is able to set discretionary fees for the Ceremony Rooms and the Council Chamber.

Fees are applied to these facilities to reflect the size and quality of the rooms and demand for particular days of the week. Two Registration staff must attend and officiate at all ceremonies held at the Civic Centre.

2.7.2 In addition couples may marry at other venues in North Lincolnshire which are licensed by the local authority known as an Approved Venue (available 365 days per year). The council is able to set discretionary fees for Registration staff to officiate at Approved Venues. Again the fees are set to recover costs and reflect demand for different days of the week.

2.7.3 Two Registration staff must attend and officiate at each Approved Venue ceremony. There are currently 19 Approved Venues in North Lincolnshire.

2.7.4 The service now has a team of 11 casual marriage Registrars who work as and when required, alongside experienced staff. This enables us to improve capacity to meet demand, particularly at the most popular times.

2.7.5 The legal part of every marriage ceremony must take place in a building or structure that is registered or approved for marriages. There are an increasing number of unregulated independent celebrants who provide non-legal ceremonies and offer these in private homes and outdoors. These are usually conducted after a legal marriage has taken place and guests often believe this is the actual “wedding”. This causes some concern as poor performance by independent celebrants could reflect badly on the local registration service if it is perceived to be registrars conducting these ceremonies. This also results in lost income.

2.7.6 There have recently been requests for the provision of outdoor ceremonies and in 2016 we introduced a service whereby we would offer to conduct the celebratory aspect of the ceremony outdoors before moving into the licensed venue for the legal part of the process. Alternative provision is made for any instances of bad weather. Registrars receive specialised training to deliver ceremonies in a professional manner and we believe we are better able to deliver the whole package, combining both the celebratory and legal elements of the marriage on the same day.

2.7.7 Outdoor ceremonies have increased in popularity; in 2016 the service was used 4 times. In 2017 it was used 14 times and there are currently provisionally bookings of 8 for 2018 onwards.

2.8 Non Statutory Ceremonies and Services

2.8.1 Non-statutory ceremonies include Naming's, Renewal of Vows, private Citizenship ceremonies and other services.

2.8.2 We conduct very few non statutory ceremonies. In 2016/17 there were 10 Naming ceremonies and 7 Renewal of Vows. There has been no demand ever for private citizenship ceremonies in Approved Venues. Most people booking a private citizenship ceremony do so because they wish to make a fast application for a British passport and do not wish to wait for the standard monthly ceremony. Non-statutory ceremonies take the same amount of time as a statutory ceremony. We therefore propose that fees for these ceremonies continue to be set at the same level as those for statutory ceremonies.

2.9 We have completed an extensive benchmarking exercise comparing our services and fees nationally and in particular against neighbouring councils. We have also considered fees for basic church weddings which can vary from £574 to £850.

3. OPTION FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 To approve the proposed changes to Registration services fees as set out in Appendix 1 with effect from 1 April 2018 and add further charges as follows:

3.2 To reduce availability of Register Office ceremonies to 1 day per month.

In 2016/17 there were 50 ceremonies in the Register Office. The ceremony cost and associated administrative work is undertaken at a loss to the service as it is a statutory set fee. Reducing the number of days offered would still allow for up to 72 ceremonies per year which is far above current uptake. Couple can still choose to use other rooms if they wish to marry on a day other than that offered.

3.3 To charge an additional fee for Notice of Marriage appointments on Saturdays

Notice of Marriage appointments are available Monday-Saturday. The most popular day for an appointment is Saturday however a number of customers with appointments on Saturdays fail to turn up. Staff are paid a weekend

enhancement so it is more expensive to deliver the service. In order to reduce lost staff time, it is proposed to pre-charge a non-refundable fee of £10 per person in addition to the statutory fee, so couples are less likely to not turn up for their appointments.

From April to December 2017, we had 151 Notice of Marriage appointments on Saturdays. Following the staffing review in August 2017, and the upskilling of staff, we now have the capacity to offer a higher number of Saturday appointments.

Additional charges are made by many offices nationally, although only a small number within our region; many offices regionally charge a 'deposit' which is then taken off the fee charged at the appointment. Although this would likely lessen customers not turning up, the administration costs of the fee would increase and there would be no savings made/income generated.

Customers can choose to make an appointment Monday-Friday if they wish to avoid this charge.

3.4 To use recorded delivery as the safe delivery option

Copy certificates are available to purchase for £10 per certificate for a standard five day return service. There is also an option to pay additional admin fees to get the certificates quicker, which are £5 extra for next day return or £25 for priority return (available same day – usually within 1 hour). Customers can choose to collect certificates from the Civic Centre or have the certificate posted. The postage fees are currently part of the cost. An increasing number of certificates are lost in the post and this is of concern.

The proposal is to charge all customers who choose to have their certificates posted a fee of £2 per posted certificate to cover the cost of recorded delivery (£1.62 for 1st class).

As part of the General Register Office's public protection and counter fraud initiative which is aiming to reduce the amount of data lost and help prevent fraudulent activity using these documents, local authorities have been encouraged to adopt more stringent policies to reduce lost data. Using recorded delivery would ensure documents are collected by the correct person and should reduce the number of certificates lost.

This charge would also help with cost recovery for staff time spent in the fraud checks done on all certificate applications; aid in the cost recovery of postage and potentially generate income. Customers can still choose to collect their certificates from the Civic Centre if they wish to avoid this charge.

3.4 To introduce a charge for premium wedding time slots

There is increasing demand from customers to have more time slots of 1pm available for ceremonies. We currently offer up to 4 slots at this time, due to the number of staff available. We have a team of casual staff who are able to conduct and register ceremonies however we are limited to what can be offered. Following feedback from our approved premise stakeholder meetings, and from customers, we recognise there is demand to increase the number of slots available at 'premium' times (1pm-3pm). In 2017, there were 172 weddings; 114 of these were 12pm-2pm timeslots. In order to do this, the proposal is to charge an additional £50 during the 'premium' times. This would allow us to recruit and train additional staff for ceremony delivery and registration, and to maintain the high standards the service currently offers, whilst meeting customer demand.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Implementing the revised fees and increases offers the best scope to continue to deliver a high quality and sustainable service. The proposals will:

- Offer choice for customers
- Allow the service to generate new business and cover costs while continuing to deliver high quality services to customers
- Provide a more realistic pricing structure that better reflects and promotes the quality of our facilities
- Still allow the service to offer competitive fees for weddings and ceremonies that compare well with neighbouring providers
- Contribute to meeting service budget savings targets and generating income

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 We have set the proposed fees to ensure we cover the cost of providing discretionary Registration services and avoid any subsidy for local taxpayers.

5.1.2 If the proposed fees are applied to activity levels for the last year, we estimate this will generate an additional £12,500 in service income per year.

5.2 Staffing, Property and IT

5.2.1 There is no other staffing, property or IT implications.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1 We do not believe that the proposed changes will impact negatively on customers.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED

7.1 No formal consultations required.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the proposed changes to Registration services and fees.

Date: 16 January 2018

Appendix 1

Proposed Fees from 1 April 2018

SERVICE	PROPOSED FEE	CURRENT FEE
WEDDINGS/CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS		
RO STATUTORY FEE –Cannot be changed. (SR's Office- Couple plus 2 witnesses) Currently available 9-11am Monday to Friday. Proposed to offer only on 1 st Wednesday of each month (9-11am)	£46	£46
CEREMONY ROOM 1 (SEATS 20)		
Mon-Thur	£110	£100
Fri	£130	£120
Sat	£150	£140
Sun	n/a	
CERENONY ROOM 2 Mon (SEATS 60)		
Mon-Thur	£230	£220
Fri	£270	£260
Sat	£305	£300
COUNCIL CHAMBER Sat only (SEATS 120)		
	£330	£320
APPROVED VENUE FEES		
Mon-Thur	£320	£310
Fri	£335	£325
Sat	£405	£395
Sun/Bank holidays	£460	£450
Premium time slot (1pm or 2.45pm slot) on top of fees	£50	n/a
Outside ceremony addition	£46	£46
NON-STATUTORY CEREMONIES NAMINGS/RENEWALS/PRIVATE CITIZENSHIP		
CEREMONY ROOM 1 (SEATS 20)		
Mon-Thur	£110	£100
Fri	£130	£120
Sat	£150	£140
CEREMONY ROOM 2 (SEATS 60)		
Mon-Thur	£230	£220
Fri	£270	£260
Sat	£305	£300
COUNCIL CHAMBER (SEATS 120)		
Sat only	£330	£320
APPROVED PREMISES		
Mon-Thur	£320	£310
Fri	£323	£325
Sat	£405	£395
Sun/Bank holidays	£460	£450
Premium time slot (1pm or 2.45pm slot) on top of fees	£50	n/a
OTHER SERVICES		
BOOKING FEE	£30	£30
REHEARSAL SERVICE	£25	£25
CEREMONY CHANGES ADMIN FEE	£30	£20
STANDARD CERTS-STATUTORY FEE	£10	£10
NEXT DAY CERTS (INCLUSIVE OF STATUTORY £10 FEE)	£15	£15
PRIORITY CERTS (INCLUSIVE OF STATUTORY £10 FEE)	£25	£25
NAME CHANGE SERVICE	£60	£60
EXTRA COPIES OF NAME CHANGE DEED	£30	£30