



Report to Leader (Regulatory Services portfolio)

Decision Date: 28 July 2020

Reference number: RS02.20

Title: Approved Venue Licence Extensions (Weddings & Civil Partnerships)

Relevant councillor(s): Councillor Fred Wilson

Author and/or contact officer: Wendy Morgan-Brown, Head of Registration, Coroners & Trading Standards

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations: To extend all existing Approved Venue Licences by four months at point of renewal.

Reason for decision: To provide support to the local wedding businesses affected during the Covid pandemic lockdown restrictions which have been in place between 23 March and 4 July.

Executive summary

- 1.1 There are 81 venues licenced for civil weddings and civil partnerships in Buckinghamshire. Each holds a licence for a three year period from date of issue. Due to the covid pandemic and the Government placed restrictions from 23 March – 4 July on any weddings or gatherings being held, during this time these venues were closed and many furloughed staff, so were unable to deliver weddings or other ceremonies. They were therefore, unable to use their existing licences for this period of time.
- 1.2 To assist these businesses, it recommended to provide for a four month extension to all existing licences at point of renewal, in acknowledgement of approved venues being unable to use their licence between 23 March and 4 July.

Content of report

- 1.3 At the outset of lockdown the Government instructed there were to be no weddings and gatherings. An announcement on 23 June confirmed weddings may recommence on 4 July. Government and General Register Office guidance is to be issued on recommencement of both religious and civil ceremonies and their operations.
- 1.4 The Service had ceased taking any new bookings with the priority focussed on rearranged ceremonies for those who were either affected by the restrictions, or who wish to move or cancel a booking they already had for 2020. Around 900 ceremonies have been moved, with around 100 cancelled in both the Registration Service ceremony rooms and in Approved Venues, as couples wish to maintain their plans for gathering and celebrating with family and friends.
- 1.5 There are currently 81 venues licenced by Buckinghamshire Council who were also affected by the situation, with many venues closed and staff furloughed. Each venue paid for a three-year licence from the Council, at a cost of £2,100 for the three years, and they have been unable to use that licence due to the restrictions.
- 1.6 Whilst the Registration Service works to regulations around the licensing process, the Council has discretion over the fee charged and the length of the licence. As stated above licences in Buckinghamshire are for three years.
- 1.7 Extensions to licences across South East authorities vary from an initial three months up to twelve month extensions.
- 1.8 The Registration Service has benchmarked with the other Thames Valley authorities and this is the situation:
- Wokingham & Oxon – received approval for a 12 month extension across all licences
 - Reading & Milton Keynes – have not offered an extension at present
 - Windsor & Maidenhead & Bracknell Forest – extending for length of shutdown
- 1.9 The Service has received several queries about whether Buckinghamshire will be offering an extension the existing licences.
- 1.10 Licences can only be extended when they are renewed, legally it is not possible to extend an existing licence. There is a financial impact of extending the licences by four months and the impact will cross several financial years due licences being valid for three years from date of renewal. The number of renewals varies each year due to the initial date the licence was issued. The number of licences which would require extending each year and the cost is below:

2020/22 – 18 licences to be extended – loss of income £4,356

2021/23 – 33 licences to be extended – loss of income £7,986

2022/24 – 24 licences to be extended – loss of income £5,808

- 1.10 This loss of income would be recorded alongside other covid losses for the Service and it would be anticipated this would be covered by the Council's covid grant funding.

Other options considered

- 2.1 To do nothing and retain existing licence expiry dates. There would be no loss of income to the Registration Service.

- 2.2 To extend by six months, the cost of this period of extension is:

2021/22 – 18 licences to be extended – loss of income £6,498

2022/23 – 33 licences to be extended – loss of income £11,913

2023/24 – 24 licences to be extended – loss of income £8,664

- 2.3 To extend by twelve months. The cost of this period of extension is:

2020/22 – 18 licences to be extended – loss of income £12,996

2021/23 – 33 licences to be extended – loss of income £23,826

2022/24 – 24 licences to be extended – loss of income £17,328

This period of extension at this point in time is not proposed due to the cost, and the pandemic closure period was for four months.

Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 The financial implications are detailed above. The impact in relation to 2020/21 has been included in Covid 19 Financial Implications forecasting on loss of income for Registration Services overall. The future years' impacts will be picked up as part of the 2021/22 MTFP.

- 3.2 There are no legal implications.

Corporate implications

- 4.1 None other than the financial impact outlined. There are no equality or data protection impact assessments required.

Consultation and communication

- 5.1 There is no consultation required. Communication on any extension will be sent directly to the approved venues by the Registration Service.

Next steps and review

All venues will be informed of any agreed extension immediately by the Registration Service. New licences will then be issued showing the new expiry date of the licence.

Background papers

None

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

