



## Report to Leader (Regulatory Services portfolio)

<b>Date:</b>	12 March 2021
<b>Reference number:</b>	RS01.21
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Registration Service fees 2023/24</b>
<b>Relevant councillor(s):</b>	Councillor Fred Wilson
<b>Author and/or contact officer:</b>	Wendy Morgan-Brown
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>To approve the proposed fees</b>
<b>Reason for decision:</b>	To maintain a 3-year fees schedule for customers

### 1. Executive summary

To review and approve the non-statutory fees chargeable for 2023/24 for the Registration Service.

### 2. Content of report

- 2.1 The Registration Service is funded through statutory and non-statutory fee income. The non-statutory fees are set locally by the Council and increased in line with inflation.
- 2.2 The service delivery is predominately statutory, birth and death registrations are a statutory requirement and are free to those using these services with a charge for any certificates required by the customer. There is a statutory ceremony fee of £46 for a wedding and a civil partnership formation which is greatly below cost recovery. Certificate fees were increased in 2018, but the other statutory fees have not increased for the last over six years.

- 2.3 The Service is reliant on a steady number of activities each year which generates a level of income to cover costs. A reduction in activities affects the Service's ability to cover its costs and deliver the budget.
- 2.4 The Service receives no budget from the Council and the budget starts with a deficit of -£135k. The Service therefore is required to cover all operating costs of £1.353m. Income is usually in the region of £1.488m per annum.
- 2.5 The main income for the Service is from weddings and civil partnership ceremonies with around 1800 ceremonies undertaken each year. Bookings are made up to three years in advance and couples pay the full amount for their ceremony at point of booking.
- 2.6 The three year fee structure was brought in to allow customers to pay at point of booking and provide for improved efficiency both for the Service and couples by reducing the number of contacts and created a clearer pricing structure.
- 2.7 The fees for 2021/22 are within the current MTFP process budget approval process and fees for 2022/23 have already been approved via the Member decision process last Spring.
- 2.8 To maintain the 3-year fee plan fees for 2023/24 now need to be agreed. It is particularly important as the Service is seeing increased levels of bookings for 2023 onwards following the covid restrictions and impact on the wedding market generally. Couples are now arranging ceremonies well into the future to avoid any restrictions which may be in place over the next year or so.
- 2.9 Attached at Annex 1 are the fees for 2021/22, 2022/23 and proposed fees for 2023/24. Inflation has been applied at 2.9%. Where there is no proposed increase it is felt the market could not take an increase.
- 2.10 Few authorities have sent their fees for 2023/24 so there is little to compare against. However, the fees already agreed sit in the upper quartile of the fees benchmarked across the South East authorities and are comparable with shire authorities who tend to have a high number of wedding venues. Customers are inclined to book a

wedding venue on the venue itself, rather than the price charged by the Registration Service.

### **3. Other options considered**

- 3.1 Consideration was given to not increasing fees but the Service would not then meet anticipated MTFP requirements.

Consideration was also given to increasing fees above inflation, but this would be outside the Council's guidance and possibly create a surplus.

### **4. Legal and financial implications**

- 4.1 There are no legal implications.
- 4.2 In terms of financial implications, customers have a wide range of venues and prices should they choose to marry or form a civil partnership.
- 4.3 Approval of the proposed fees is required to meet the existing income budget, no impact is anticipated on the overall budget position.

### **5. Corporate implications**

- 5.1 Around 1800 civil weddings and other ceremonies take place in Buckinghamshire each year. This business is worth around £24m to the local economy and across the wedding businesses with the national average cost of a wedding at £15,000.
- 5.2 Weddings and other ceremonies bring people into the County which further supports the culture and leisure spend too.
- 5.3 Buckinghamshire offers a wide variety of wedding venues providing couples with choice to suit their budget.
- 5.4 The fees have been benchmarked alongside the other South East authorities (where they have fees available for comparable years).
- 5.5 By setting fees three years ahead it benefits the venues in being able to secure bookings into the future, as well as providing couples with a fixed price which is not subject to any further increase (unless they change their request to a higher priced offer).
- 5.6 As the fees do not affect specific groups no EIA is required. There is no personal data involved with the proposal so a DPA is not required either.

## **6. Consultation with local councillors & community boards**

6.1 The proposal covers all Members and Community Boards.

## **7. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

7.1 Once agreed the relevant websites will be updated to show the new fees. The fees will increase from 1 April 2021.

## **8. Next steps and review**

8.1 The new fees will be introduced on 1 April 2021 and charged to customers booking ceremonies between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

## **9. Background papers**

9.1 Please see below.

## **10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)**

10.1 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 012960383521 or email [wendy.morgan-brown@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.morgan-brown@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

*Annex 1 – Proposed Registration Service fees for 2023/24*

