

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 07 June 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Registration Services - Bespoke Ceremonies
Purpose of Report:	To propose introducing bespoke ceremonies, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packaging statutory with non-statutory ceremonies • Including additional elements to the ceremony • Enabling non-statutory ceremonies to take place outdoors
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services
Responsible Officer:	Jeff Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services Managing Director Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report seeks Cabinet approval to introduce additional services and associated fees and charges within the Council's Registration Services department for 2021/22. • The proposed fees reflect the additional staff time and expertise necessary to design and deliver a bespoke ceremony over and above the standard ceremonies currently offered. • Social distancing and legal changes due to Covid-19 have curtailed many plans, particularly in relation to wedding and civil partnership ceremonies. This additional service could offer couples the opportunity to celebrate safely and in line with government guidance.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the contents of this report
2. That Cabinet approves the introduction of additional fees for the Registration Service to commence on the date that Cabinet's resolution takes effect.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To make Cabinet aware of the current situation regarding ceremonies within the Vale of Glamorgan.
2. To improve the options available to both Vale of Glamorgan residents and non-residents in choosing the Vale of Glamorgan for their ceremony and to obtain Cabinet's approval to introduce associated fees and charges.

1. Background

- 1.1 Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies must take place in venues approved for such purpose. Licencing legislation restricts the nature of these venues to 'permanent structures' and as such, outdoor ceremonies are effectively prohibited.
- 1.2 Where a couple decide that they would prefer an outdoor celebration, they will usually marry in their local Register Office for the statutory fee and then use a private celebrant to perform an outdoor ceremony in their chosen location at a later date.
- 1.3 Many approved premises have outdoor space and allow it to be used in this way. Should a couple from outside of the area marry in their local Register Office and then hold a non-statutory ceremony outdoors at an approved premise, the Vale of Glamorgan Council receives no revenue.
- 1.4 Most couples would prefer that the statutory and non-statutory ceremonies take place on one day and at the same location. Many other local authorities are already successfully providing this service.
- 1.5 The existing Registration Team in the Vale of Glamorgan has the skill and capacity to offer bespoke ceremony packages at licenced venues.
- 1.6 Non-statutory ceremonies are sometimes chosen to celebrate life events. During the past year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions many couples have been unable to celebrate significant anniversaries and offering bespoke ceremonies within the Vale of Glamorgan could provide a means to do so.
- 1.7 This report sets out proposals to introduce both Bespoke Ceremonies and Non Statutory Ceremonies within the Council's Registration Service and makes recommendations for associated fees and charges.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Bespoke Ceremonies

- 2.1 It is proposed the Registration Service offer bespoke ceremonies to include a one-hour planning meeting and two Registrars for 3.5 hours to conduct a statutory ceremony followed by a non-statutory ceremony.
- 2.2 This ceremony package will consist of two parts, which will be tailored to the couple and designed by them under guidance from a Registrar. The legal part of the ceremony, which must take place inside a licenced structure, may be short with only the couple, the Registrars, and witnesses in attendance, as per legislation. This would facilitate a sense of intimacy for the formal part of the process
- 2.3 A celebratory ceremony with larger attendance would follow elsewhere on the property. As this is the non-statutory element, the ceremony could take place in a temporary structure such as a pagoda or tipi or outside on a lawn or in a wooded area.
- 2.4 The non-statutory ceremony could include less conventional elements such as [sand-pouring](#), [handfasting](#), bespoke vows, live or recorded music with religious content or connotations that would not be permitted at a statutory civil ceremony and readings with religious content that could not be used as part of a statutory civil ceremony.
- 2.5 It is envisaged this additional service offering would offer many benefits including an improved customer service allowing couples to personalise and tailor their ceremony. Continuity of care would be ensured with the same Registrars planning the event and conducting both ceremonies.
- 2.6 Offering this service could be seen as an opportunity for couples who may have had to cancel, postpone or compromise their wedding plans in the last year to finally celebrate and would provide an opportunity for a safe, socially-distanced celebration.
- 2.7 The service would also see increased revenue for the Vale of Glamorgan Council. Many couples choose a statutory ceremony with their local Registration Service followed by a celebratory ceremony with a private celebrant. In this case, the Council receives £46 from couples who live within the Vale of Glamorgan and nothing from those who live elsewhere and choose an outdoor ceremony in one of the Approved Premises in the Vale of Glamorgan. By offering this package and providing both elements, the Council would be the sole provider.
- 2.8 Ceremony enhancements of this type are offered on an ad-hoc basis or by request within other Local Authorities, but this would be a new approach. As such, it isn't possible to undertake a fee comparison of this service with other Local Authorities.

2.9 Offering bespoke ceremonies would not impact on services currently offered by the Council's Registration Service but supplement them in order to provide more choice.

2.10 The charge for a Register Office statutory ceremony at the Civic Offices (set by the General Register Office at an England & Wales level) is £46.

2.11 The Vale of Glamorgan Council's charges for a statutory ceremony at a licenced venue for the 2021/22 financial year which were approved by Cabinet in February 2021 are as follows:

Mon-Thurs	Friday	Saturday	Sunday & Bank Holiday
£423.90	£450.60	£455.80	£496.70

2.12 The following table outlines the proposed fees for a bespoke ceremony at a licenced venue within the Vale of Glamorgan:

Mon-Thurs	Friday	Saturday	Sunday & Bank Holiday
£950.00	£1000.00	£1050.00	£1150.00

2.13 The above fees include provision for a planning meeting, in addition to two members of staff to conduct the service for half a day. It should be seen as a combination of a statutory ceremony at a licenced venue combined with a non-statutory ceremony.

Non-Statutory Ceremonies (to include Reaffirmation of Vows)

2.14 It is also proposed that non-statutory ceremonies are introduced. Many people have been unable to celebrate significant milestones in the last year. A non-statutory ceremony which could take place safely, outdoors could be offered to mark landmark anniversaries that could not be celebrated with parties and first anniversary celebrations for couples who married during lockdown. Without the legal restrictions of licences or statutory wording, these ceremonies could be conducted by one or two members of staff on site for one hour. The proposed fees and charges are as follows:

Mon-Thurs	Friday	Saturday	Sunday & Bank Holiday
£375	£400	£450	£500

2.15 Other Welsh authorities currently offer non-statutory ceremonies and a comparison of these costs is outlined in the following table:

	Mon-Thurs	Friday	Saturday	Sunday/Bank Holiday
Cardiff	£375	£375	£475	£495
RCT	£380	£380	£380	£445
Swansea	£420	£420	£500	£575

Pembrokeshire	£400	£450	£450	£650
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- 2.16** Existing structures within the Vale of Glamorgan could be used to accommodate these celebrations, particularly those with an outdoor facility.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** It is necessary to review fees on an annual basis to ensure the continuation of services in light of increasing costs. It is particularly important this year, with the Council and communities feeling the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is undertaken in the context of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which requires the Council to consider five ways of working when making decisions.
- 3.2** Thinking to the longer-term is a key consideration when setting fees and charges, to minimise the impact on the Council’s ability to provide services in the future that the current budgetary pressures present. The proposals also seek to further the Council’s Well-being Outcomes contained within the Corporate Plan. Fees and charges have been proposed to further these objectives, within the context of the financial cost of doing so.
- 3.3** There are no specific climate change implications arising from the fee increases proposed.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The fee increases outlined in this report assist in reducing to the budgetary pressures within the Directorate.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment implications arising from the proposals in this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** Under relevant legislation the Council is permitted to charge for certain services it provides. Full details of the relevant legislation on fees and charges is contained in the Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Strategy.

5. Background Papers

None.