



LEAD MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

DECISIONS to be made by the Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services,
Councillor Chris Dowling

TUESDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM

CC1, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

AGENDA

- 1 Decisions made by the Lead Cabinet Member on 23 July 2015 (*Pages 3 - 4*)
- 2 Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all Members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- 3 Urgent items
Notification of any items which the Lead Member considers urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda.
- 4 Changes to fees for the usage of Register Office ceremony rooms and other related charges (*Pages 5 - 14*)
Report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
- 5 Any urgent items previously notified under agenda item 3

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7 December 2015

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LEAD MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Community Services, Councillor Chris Dowling, on 23 July 2015 at County Hall, Lewes

Councillor Daniel spoke on item 4 (see minute 6)

4 MINUTES

4.1 Councillor Dowling approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2015.

5 REPORTS

5.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

6 HASTINGS LIBRARY AND REGISTER OFFICE

6.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

DECISIONS

6.2 RESOLVED to (1) agree to the revised proposals to move Hastings Register Office to Hastings Town Hall and to modernise the existing Hastings Library in its current location (the Brassey Building), incorporating the Children's Library; and

(2) delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to approve a detailed scheme of works for the proposals.

Reasons

6.3 The revised proposals meet all of the scheme objectives for an improved and enhanced Library and Register Office for Hastings at a considerably reduced cost, which would provide excellent value for money. The proposals for the Register Office make the best use of Hastings Town Hall, an architecturally and historically important building, providing a highly desirable venue for ceremonies. By working in partnership with Hastings Borough Council the proposal frees up estate for re-development as social housing, meeting the needs of the local community.

6.4 The revised proposals for Hastings Library provide an area of public library space which is 82m² more than is contained within the current Hastings Library and Children's Library. The building can be delivered to a high specification that meets the needs and expectations of its users.

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Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services

Date of meeting: 15 December 2015

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Changes to fees for the usage of Register Office ceremony rooms and other related charges.

Purpose: To enable the Registration Service to charge more appropriate fees for the use of the various Register Office ceremony rooms around the county, dependent upon their quality, size, decoration, situation and location.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the revised fees for marriage ceremonies taking place in Register Office ceremony rooms, as set out in Appendix 1, for the 2016/17 financial year;**
 - (2) Approve the fees charged for marriages taking place at the new Hastings Register Office in Hastings Town Hall, as set out in Appendix 1, to be effective from February 2016 and for the 2016/17 financial year; and**
 - (3) Approve the charges for related peripheral items, as set out in Appendix 1, for the 2016/17 financial year.**
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1. Background Information

1.1. For the purposes of this report, all references to ‘marriage’ should be interpreted as referring interchangeably to opposite sex marriages, same sex marriages and civil partnerships.

1.2. The Registration Service has experienced significantly increased surplus targets over the last few years as part of the council-wide Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings. Operating from the newly refurbished Southover Grange and Hastings Town Hall will bring with it increased staffing and revenue costs in the future. The service must therefore take every opportunity to maximise its income streams and the proposed fee changes detailed within this report are seen as instrumental in helping the service achieve its stretching 2016/17 surplus targets.

1.3. The Registration Service has a statutory obligation to provide couples, from in and out of county, with a statutory marriage room within one of the county’s Register Offices. This is provisioned in East Sussex in the Superintendent Registrars’ Office at the Town Hall in Eastbourne. It is a small, very basic working office, which couples can choose to marry in at a statutorily set fee of £46. This room accommodates just the couple plus two witnesses and two registrars. Current demand is met through this venue being available for use by customers twice a week on a Tuesday morning at 9.30am and 10am.

1.4. In East Sussex, in addition to the above statutory marriage room, couples wishing to have a secular/civil marriage ceremony have two other sets of options, namely they can choose to marry in one of the non-statutory Register Office ceremony rooms, or alternatively they can choose to marry at one of the approximately 100 Approved Marriage Premises (AMPs) situated right across the county.

2. Supporting Information

2.1. The Registration Service has historically charged a substantially lower fee for conducting and solemnising marriages in the Register Office ceremony rooms than for the registrar’s attendance at AMP marriages. In addition to the higher price paid for registrar’s attendance, the

AMPs themselves also generally charge the couples a fee for the room hire; the result being that a marriage at an AMP is usually a substantially more expensive endeavour than a marriage taking place in a Register Office ceremony room.

2.2. Over recent years, all fees charged by the Registration Service for marriages have been approved two years ahead, due to the tradition that most couples book their marriages well in advance, and thus desire price certainty at the time of their booking. The fees for the financial year 2016/17 were therefore set by Cabinet in February 2015.

2.3. The existing fees for 2016/17 were based upon the notional presumption that Hastings Register Office would continue to be located in its historical prefabricated office building, Summerfields, on the outskirts of the town. Likewise, in Lewes the existing fees for 2016/17 were set on the basis of ceremonies continuing to be provided temporarily at the less popular Lewes Town Hall, because the un-refurbished Southover Grange has been deemed unsuitable for ceremonies since 2013, due to severe inaccessibility issues.

2.4. Clearly, these two building projects have now progressed apace, and as such the marriage fees need to be reset for marriages in Southover Grange for some point in 2016/17 yet to be agreed upon, and in the case of Hastings Town Hall from February 2016 (which falls within the 2015/16 financial year).

2.5. Historically, the Registration Service has charged one single set of fees for marriages in the various Register Office ceremony rooms regardless of which building they were taking place in. The exception to this rule has been that an extra £80 surcharge has been added to the marriage fees for those ceremonies taking place specifically in the Council Chamber and the Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall.

2.6. Some other South East authorities' Registration Services long ago started charging wholly different rates for their different Register Office ceremony rooms, based on the quality of the offering in each individual room, including numerous aspects such as appearance, size, facilities, seating levels, location, accessibility and peripheral offerings. (Appendix 2 outlines these different rates for other authorities). Accordingly, establishing wholly different fees for different ceremony rooms would not be out of place in East Sussex compared to our neighbours.

2.7. Hastings Register Office, whilst located at Summerfields, has only ever had one marriage room, and despite the best efforts of the staff of the Registration Service, it is clearly very difficult to make a room in a temporary pre-fabricated building look very conducive to marriage ceremonies. As a result the demand levels at Hastings for Register Office ceremonies have always been artificially subdued. In the future, the expectation is that there will be an increased demand for ceremonies within the newly refurbished Hastings Town Hall, where the Hastings office will be able to offer customers a choice of two stunning ceremony rooms for the first time. It is worth noting that Hastings Register Office serves the entire Rother District as well as the towns of Hastings and St Leonards.

2.8. Due to the imminent delivery of the Hastings Town Hall scheme, and the desire already being experienced from couples to make bookings in February and March 2016, as well as into the 2016/17 financial year, it was thought pertinent for these fee changes to be determined and agreed now so that bookings can begin being taken. (The fee proposals for Hastings Town Hall can be found in Appendix 1).

2.9. Prior to 2013, when Southover Grange was last hosting ceremonies, it was by far the most popular Register Office ceremony room in the county, and this was despite the fact that the room was located on the first floor with a tortuous route up narrow steep stairs, no disabled access at all, a maximum number of 28 guests with no circulation or adequate waiting space for guests; such was the popularity of the building as a marriage venue there were 388 marriages conducted there during the 2012/13 financial year. Clearly the anticipation of the level of demand for Southover Grange once fully refurbished is that this will far surpass the demand levels seen pre-closure.

2.10. It is anticipated that the new Southover Grange will become one of the premier wedding venues in East Sussex. There will be a suite of grand rooms on the ground floor which include two very plush ceremony rooms. There will be a stunning entrance hall and state-of-the-art facilities.

2.11. Due to the delivery of Southover Grange at some point during the 2016/17 financial year there is already a demand being experienced from couples to make marriage bookings. It was felt sensible for the fees and charges there to be determined and agreed as early as possible to enable bookings to be made for the venue as soon as the delivery date can be confirmed for the building project.

2.12. Within Southover Grange there will also be a hireable VIP suite on the first floor, where brides and/or grooms will be able to relax prior to their ceremony and have photographs taken if they wish. This room, if hired by the couple, will also enable the compulsory pre-marriage interview to happen in a quality and relaxing environment. The hire of this suite will also encompass the opportunity for couples to have professional photographs taken as they descend the stunning listed staircase at the rear of the building overlooking the beautiful Gardens on their way to 'tie the knot'.

2.13. The ground floor will also house a community room which will be available for hire to the general public outside of core marriage times. The hire of this facility will require supervision from a caretaker/supervisor whose wages will need to be fully met from the cost of the hire so it is self-funding. There is also a kitchen which will be hired along with the room, but no 'cooking' will be allowed to take place, as the use of refreshments must remain 'incidental to the purpose of the hire' so as to avoid VAT complications.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1. The Lead Member is recommended to approve the marriage fee proposals as set out in Appendix 1. They will provide the Registration Service with a sensible and sustainable fee structure which will enable the service to immediately begin taking bookings for ceremonies at Hastings Town Hall, and in due course to begin taking bookings for Southover Grange once there is certainty of the delivery date of the refurbishment project.

3.2. The other peripheral fee proposals will enable to Registration Service to apply sensible and sustainable fees to these other related services and offerings. The Lead Member is therefore also recommended to approve the proposed fees as set out in Appendix 1 for these peripheral items.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

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COUNCILLORS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Appendix 1 – Registration Office Fee Proposals for 2016/17

- 1.1. All the following fee proposals relate to ceremonies taking place after 1 April 2016. The sole exception to that is for ceremonies at Hastings Town Hall where these fee proposals relate to ceremonies taking place from 1 February 2016 onwards. It was felt pertinent to implement the 2016/17 fees as soon as the new Hastings building opens for ceremonies in February 2016 so as to avoid the need of having one set of fees in operation for just two months.
- 1.2. All customers who have already booked their marriages, fully or provisionally, based on the previously agreed fees will have that former fee honoured; the new proposed fees are for new marriage bookings only. This clearly does not relate to Hastings Town Hall or Southover Grange as those buildings have not had any bookings taken yet. There are approximately 20 couples who had provisionally booked Summerfields for 2016/17 and it is proposed that their marriage bookings be transferred, with their agreement, to Hastings Town Hall with the same fee structure as was previously agreed for Summerfields on the condition they refrain from increasing the amount of guests they have invited. If they wish to increase the number of guests which will fit in Hastings Town Hall, above the limit they would have been subject to at Summerfields, then the proposal is that they will be charged the new Hastings Town Hall fees detailed herein.
- 1.3. **Hookstead ceremony room in Crowborough** – This will become the most basic Register Office ceremony room offering in the county. The proposal is to retain the same level of fees for 2016/17 as was agreed by Cabinet in February 2015. The ceremony room at Hookstead could reasonably be described as ‘utilitarian’ and could not readily be described as ‘highly aspirational’. Due to planning regulations the ceremony room may not be used at all on Sundays or public holidays and cannot be used outside the hours of 10am-6pm Monday-Saturday. As a result this ceremony room is somewhat limited in its use, it is also limited to a relatively low number of guests due to fire regulations and as such the proposal is that the fee for this ceremony room is set at the lowest tier of fees in the new pricing structure – essentially the same prices as those currently agreed by Cabinet for 2016/17:

Proposal for 2016/17	Hookstead Ceremony Room, Crowborough
Monday - Thursday	£125
Friday	£150
Saturday	£250
Sunday	<i>Not permitted by Planning Regulations</i>
Public Holiday	<i>Not permitted by Planning Regulations</i>

- 1.4. **The Mayor’s Parlours in Eastbourne & Hastings Town Halls** – These are the two smaller rooms in these two locations and both will have unlimited Registration Service access seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The Eastbourne Mayor’s Parlour is currently the single most popular Register Office ceremony room in East Sussex with 294 marriages taking place there in 2014/15, since Southover Grange has been

unavailable. Both rooms are on a par with each other decoratively, and so are seen as comparable for pricing. Both of these rooms represent a more attractive and aspirational ceremony room than can be offered in Hookstead, although they are both somewhat limited in the numbers of guests that can attend (comfortably no more than about 20 people in each room, mostly standing) and hence the proposal is that these two rooms should be priced one step above the prices for Hookstead, thus in the second tier of fees in the new pricing structure:

Proposal for 2016/17 <i>(from 1 February 2016 at Hastings only)</i>	Mayor's Parlours at Eastbourne & Hastings Town Halls	<i>Previously agreed prices (Eastbourne only)</i>
Monday - Thursday	£150	£125
Friday	£175	£150
Saturday & Sunday	£275	£250
Public Holiday	£400	£375

- 1.5. **The Court Room and Council Chamber at Eastbourne Town Hall and the Council Chamber at Hastings Town Hall.** These three rooms will come to represent the main sizeable and aspirational marriage rooms in the offering at Eastbourne and Hastings Town Halls, all of which can comfortably accommodate 60 seated guests (the Eastbourne Court Room can accommodate up to 100 in total). The proposal is for these three rooms to be priced one step above the prices for the Mayor's Parlours, thus in the third tier of fees in the new pricing structure:

Proposal for 2016/17 <i>(from 1 February 2016 at Hastings only)</i>	Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall or Council Chambers at Eastbourne and Hastings Town Halls	<i>Previously agreed prices (Eastbourne only)</i>
Monday - Thursday	£225	£205
Friday	£250	£230
Saturday & Sunday	£350	£330
Public Holiday	£475	£455

- 1.6. **The Evelyn Room at Southover Grange.** This will be the smaller of the two rooms situated within the new ceremony suite at Southover Grange. Decorated to a very high standard set in the beautiful 16th Century Grade II* listed building, with views directly overlooking the stunning Southover Grange Gardens for that picture perfect backdrop. Seating for up to 30 guests. This room is newly available in 2016 so there are no previously agreed prices. The proposal is for this room to be priced at the fourth tier of the new pricing structure:

Proposal for 2016/17	Evelyn Room at Southover Grange
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Monday -Thursday	£250
Friday	£275
Saturday & Sunday	£375
Public Holiday	£500

- 1.7. **The Ainsworth Room at Southover Grange** - this will be the larger of the two rooms within the new ceremony suite at Southover Grange. Decorated to a very high standard set in the beautiful 15th Century Grade II* listed building, with views directly overlooking the stunning Southover Grange Gardens for that picture perfect backdrop. Seating for up to 60 guests. As this room is newly available in 2016 there are no previously agreed prices. This room is anticipated to become the single most used marriage room within the county, once the newly refurbished building is publicised. The proposal is for this room to be priced at the fifth and final tier of the new pricing structure:

Proposal for 2016/17	Ainsworth Room at Southover Grange
Monday -Thursday	£300
Friday	£325
Saturday & Sunday	£425
Public Holiday	£550

- 1.8. All of the above fee proposals will operate in conjunction with, and on top of, the previously-approved surcharge fee arrangements, namely that a surcharge of between £100 – £250 is levied for ceremonies taking place in the evenings and at night time, and that a separate surcharge of £50 is levied for ceremonies taking place on 'Peak Demand' days.
- 1.9. **Community Use Room for Hire.** Charges for the hire of this room are proposed to be set at £50 for the initial hire, including the first hour, and thereafter £15 per hour. It is envisaged that the room will be hired to local groups for meetings/training and the like – this was agreed as a condition of the building swap with Lewes District Council. It may be that low-key drinks receptions after marriages could use this facility by hiring the room, but it would need to be the last ceremony of the day to ensure that it did not interfere with the smooth running of other ceremonies. This room would not be available for hire when there are ceremonies already booked, and in any event will not be available for hire after 10pm so as to avoid potential disputes with neighbouring residential properties.
- 1.10. **VIP Suite and Photographic Staircase at Southover Grange.** This provision will be accessible to adults only because of the health and safety liabilities surrounding the staircase. Charged at £50 for 30 minutes, includes the mandatory pre-marriage

interview of the couple, either separately or together as they wish. The staircase will only be used for photographs when the VIP suite is hired. No actual bridal preparation (hairdresser, make-up artist, etc) will be allowed to take place within the VIP Suite due to health and safety requirements relating to personal electrical equipment, cleaning liabilities and the issues around the responsibility of personal belongings being left in there. This room will be available to be hired on a first come first served basis. There will be a 15 minute gap between uses and this will be used to tidy the room to make good for next couple who wish to use it. This service would require an usher to be on-site, which is already being planned for.

- 1.11. **Exclusive use of the entire ceremony suite of Southover Grange.** This would include the ceremony room, grand hall, community room, kitchen, and the VIP suite. No children permitted past the bottom of the staircase owing to health and safety reasons. No 'cooking' would be allowed, but 'champagne and canapes' type catering would be allowed, along with low level background music. This would initially be available only between Sundays and Thursdays and on Public Holidays only for a maximum of 4 hours at a time, including the ceremony. The proposal is for this offer to be priced at £995, plus the normal fee for the marriage ceremony. The hirers would enter into a contract regarding damage to furniture/fittings and a sizeable security deposit would be taken.
- 1.12. **TV Filming at Register Offices** – the proposal is that any type of filming taking place in or around the Register Office, including the interviewing of registrars in their professional capacity, will be charged at a rate of £500 per calendar day, or part thereof. Soft market testing has shown that TV production companies expect to pay locations for filming and that the market can sustain this fee level. Some other local authorities' Registration Services similarly already charge for filming within their Register Offices, so again this is not something which would be unique to East Sussex.

Appendix 2 – Other South-East Authority Ceremony Fees

Kent Register Offices Ceremony Fees

For ceremonies taking place 01/04/15 to 31/03/18.

Ashford (Austin Room)
Bexley (Emerald Room, Sapphire Room & Jade Suite)
Ramsgate (Pugin Room)
Sittingbourne (Milton Room)
Tunbridge Wells (Wells Room)

Monday to Friday £215

Weekend (Saturday/Sunday/Bank Holidays) £327

Special Days (Xmas Day/Boxing Day/New Years Day) £440

Ashford (Lambert Room)
Bexley (Diamond Suite)
Canterbury (The Drawing Room)
Dartford (Anne of Cleves)
Dover (The Theatre)
Maidstone (The Undercroft & Warham Room)
Ramsgate (Gazebo & The Augustine Suite)

Monday to Friday £327

Weekend (Saturday/Sunday/Bank Holidays) £440

Special Days (Xmas Day/Boxing Day/New Years Day) £553

Dartford (Lord Irving Suite)
Maidstone (Solar Room)
Tunbridge Wells (Regency Suite)

Monday to Friday £553

Weekend (Saturday/Sunday/Bank Holidays) £667

Special Days (Xmas Day/Boxing Day/New Years Day) £779

Maidstone (The Great Hall)

Monday to Friday £801

Weekend (Saturday/Sunday/Bank Holidays) £1071

Special Days (Xmas Day/Boxing Day/New Years Day) £1240

*** Please note, the fees above include your ceremony and room hire**

West Sussex Register Offices Ceremony Fees

Fees are valid from 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016.

The Balcony Room - Crawley

Monday to Thursday £183

Friday £234

Saturday/Sunday £260

Bank Holiday £336

Chichester Ceremony Room

Friday £234

Saturday £260

Worthing Ceremony Room

Friday £234

Saturday £260

The Henshall - Crawley

Monday to Thursday £234

Friday £285

Saturday/Sunday £336

Bank Holiday £439

The Parlour - Horsham

Monday to Thursday £234

Friday £285

Saturday/Sunday £336

Bank Holiday £439

The Drawing Room - Horsham

Monday to Thursday £407

Friday £450

Saturday/Sunday £552

Bank Holiday £608