

1. Background

- 1.1. The Registration Service has recently renovated Southover Grange in Lewes as a ceremony venue including marriages and non-statutory ceremonies, such as naming ceremonies for children, renewal of vows ceremonies and non-statutory 'wedding celebrations' (where a legal marriage has, for example, already taken place abroad).
- 1.2. In the financial year 2015-2016 we carried out 2,470 ceremonies (excluding funerals) in East Sussex, of which 98% were statutory marriages.
- 1.3. In the financial year 2016-2017 we carried out 2,481 ceremonies (excluding funerals) in East Sussex, of which 95% were statutory marriages.
- 1.4. The minimum waiting time from giving statutory notice of marriage until the marriage authorities can be issued is currently 28 days. This means that any upcoming available dates cannot be filled with legal marriages if they are within the next 28 day period. The Registration Service will therefore never be in a position where a couple would like to book a wedding on a date already reserved for a funeral. The Service has also made the decision that no funerals will be booked on dates already reserved for weddings.
- 1.5. In the last year and a half, the Registration Service has been far more active in training staff in the delivery of, and promotion of, non-statutory ceremonies. These remain a small proportion of the number of ceremonies we carry out, but are increasing. The number of non-statutory ceremonies carried out in the 2015-2016 financial year was 57 (2% of the total), but this increased to 134 in the 2016-2017 financial year (5% of the total, and an increase in the number of non-statutory ceremonies of 135%).
- 1.6. We currently have 4 experienced funeral celebrants – two based in Eastbourne and two in Lewes. We have a Unique Selling Proposition of being a 'team' of funeral celebrants, with additional back-up from more senior ceremonies celebrants based at our offices, meaning no funeral will ever be missed through illness or absence.
- 1.7. In the 2015/2016 financial year we officiated at 149 funerals, of which 46% were carried out by the Lewes-based funeral celebrants.
- 1.8. In the 2016/2017 financial year we officiated at 101 funerals, of which 77% were carried out by the Lewes-based funeral celebrants. (The decrease in numbers in this financial year was due to some experienced funeral celebrants retiring from the service.)
- 1.9. This financial year to date (2017-2018) we have 87 funerals booked (up to and including 09/11/17), of which about 55% will be carried out by the Lewes-based funeral celebrants.
- 1.10. Deaths are required to be registered within 5 days of the event, unless they are referred to the Coroner. Most funerals take place within approximately one to three weeks of the death and are therefore booked at relatively short notice.
- 1.11. The nearest crematorium to Lewes is currently Woodvale in Brighton. This is just under 10 miles away (20 minutes by car). There is also a crematorium at Eastbourne (17 miles, or 30 minutes by car) and Tunbridge Wells (24 miles, or 42 minutes by car). There are plans to build a new crematorium in Horam which will be approximately 16 miles away (28 minutes by car).
- 1.12. Our funeral celebrants have reported that there is a growing trend for families to hold ceremonies outside of a crematorium setting and for the Funeral Directors to transport the body for burial or cremation following the ceremony. Some families accompany the body to the crematorium, but many do not.

1.13. Some Funeral Directors (for instance Payne & Sons in Eastbourne) have started offering these ceremonies on their own premises.

1.14. We have been asked by informants registering deaths at Southover Grange if it is possible to hold funerals/memorial ceremonies there.

2. Proposals

2.1. To introduce Civil Funerals and Wakes held at Southover Grange. These services will enable us to increase our non-statutory service offering across the County, and fill empty ceremony slots at Southover Grange, thus making best use of resources.

2.2. The proposed fee for a Civil Funeral only:

2.2.1. Civil Funeral at Southover Grange - £250.00 (No VAT)

(Customers will be provided with exclusive use of the ground floor of the building for 1 hour, including the arrival and departure of the Funeral Director, the deceased and the mourners. Price includes the funeral celebrant.)

2.3. The proposed fee for Civil Funeral followed by a Wake:

2.3.1. Civil Funeral & Wake at Southover Grange - £500.00 (Plus VAT) *(Customers will be provided use of the ground floor of the building for 3.5 hours in total for the ceremony and the wake – either starting at 10am or 2pm. Price includes funeral celebrant and hosts to serve drinks.)*

2.4. As a pilot, Gastro Catering Ltd, one of our pre-approved wedding reception caterers, has agreed to provide catering for wakes at Southover Grange. The proposal is that we will charge customers for their catering at the cost price we receive it from Gastro Catering, plus VAT. The prices quoted below are indicative of the level of pricing we have been quoted:

- **Afternoon tea - £11.50/head + VAT**
(Selection of sandwiches, scones with cream and jam, selection of pastries and mini cakes – minimum 20 people or a surcharge may apply)

or

- **Fork buffet - £15.50/head + VAT**
(Meat & fish selection – vegetarian option available, selection of homemade savouries, quiche, bread, vegetable crisps)

Optional

- **Buffet desserts - £3.95/head + VAT**
(Whole cakes sliced)
- **Drinks supplied at cost price + VAT**
(Supplied by Booker Wholesale under our current agreement)
 - **Wine**
 - **Soft drinks & Water**
 - **Tea/Coffee**
 - **Prosecco**

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The offer of funeral services at Southover Grange will enhance our Civil Funeral offering, as well as offering a local service to the Lewes community and surrounding area, which is not currently very well served by the regional crematoria. This will also respond to requests received by the service from some death registration informants.

- 3.2 The offer of these services will allow the Registration Service to expand our service offering, thereby increasing income generation opportunities by making best use of our resources. It will allow us to close the circle of services we offer throughout milestone events in the lives of our customers without compromising our statutory obligations, whilst increasing our partnership working with local private businesses and increasing community access to Southover Grange.
- 3.3 The Registration Service will be able to offer this service to fill any available ceremony slots not being used for other ceremonies, particularly during the winter months when marriages are off peak.

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