

## APPENDIX 3 – PROPOSAL FOR DISCOUNTS ON NON-STATUTORY CEREMONIES

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### 1. Background

- 1.1. The Registration Service currently offers a wide range of non-statutory ceremonies, all currently charged at £250 including VAT, in order to remain commercially competitive. The most commonly requested versions of these are:
  - 1.1.1. Renewal of Vows,
  - 1.1.2. Baby Naming,
  - 1.1.3. Conversion of Civil Partnership into Marriage,
  - 1.1.4. Celebration Ceremonies - *to celebrate a marriage that has recently occurred, perhaps abroad or where family were unable to attend,*
  - 1.1.5. Commitment Ceremonies - *where the couple cannot legally marry, perhaps due to not being divorced, but wish to publicly declare their partnership in front of family and friends.*
- 1.2. The service, however, is quite happy to provide any kind of bespoke non-statutory ceremony that the customer requests. Some more unusual requests include:
  - 1.2.1. Engagement ceremonies,
  - 1.2.2. Adoption ceremonies,
  - 1.2.3. Divorce ceremonies,
  - 1.2.4. Anniversary ceremonies.
- 1.3. Occasionally customers will purchase a Baby Naming Ceremony for their child, or a Renewal of Vows Ceremony for their parents, to take place immediately after their statutory marriage ceremony. The combinations are clearly endless.
- 1.4. None of these non-statutory ceremonies hold any legal weight and are all totally unregulated. The Registration Service offers these ceremonies to complement its all-round professional offering, to provide customer choice, and for the purposes of income generation.
- 1.5. There are various independent celebrants around the county who also offer these non-statutory ceremonies but, with many of these being sole traders, they often cannot provide the customer with an alternative celebrant in the event of sickness or unavailability.
- 1.6. Despite there being pockets of the County well served by independent celebrants, there are other areas of the County where there are no independent celebrants operating.
- 1.7. There are misconceptions amongst the public which are regularly encountered:
  - 1.7.1. That an independent celebrant's ceremony is legally binding
  - 1.7.2. That the Registration Service will only provide a one-size-fits-all ceremony
  - 1.7.3. That the Registration Service can only provide legal weddings
- 1.8. The Registration Service is aware there is a general unawareness amongst the population at large that non-statutory ceremonies are available from the Registration Service, leaving many customers feeling they have no option but to use an independent celebrant through a perceived lack of choice.

## **2. Proposals**

- 2.1. There are many instances where customers could be offered a non-statutory ceremony which links to their initial reason for contacting the Register Office. Some examples of this are:
  - 2.1.1. A baby naming ceremony, whilst they are registering the birth of a child
  - 2.1.2. A baby naming ceremony, whilst they are arranging a marriage, where they already have a child together whose surname may be changed via the marriage
  - 2.1.3. A celebration ceremony, (for couples who are planning to marry abroad), for when they return to the UK, who need to obtain a 'Certificate of No Impediment' from the Registration Service in order to marry abroad.
- 2.2. The proposal is for the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to be authorised to give standing permission to the Proper Officer for Registration to discount fees by up to 25% for non-statutory ceremonies on the condition that the customer purchases these ceremonies whilst they are in contact with the Registration Service for another matter.
- 2.3. It is believed that this approach will enable regular conversations to take place with customers about these additional ceremonies, which will increase awareness, and it will enable the Registration Service to secure many more of these ceremonies than it currently achieves.
- 2.4. There is no cost of sales to this proposal as the customer will already be in conversation with the Registration Service about another matter, and hence the discount can be justified on the basis that no marketing or promotion activity has been expended to attract that potential new business in the first place.

## **3. Other considerations**

- 3.1. Whilst the Registration Service intends to retain the price of non-statutory ceremonies at the current level of £250 including VAT for commercial competitiveness, it is perfectly possible that this price may be subject to upward pressure in due course. Accordingly, the request here is for a percentage discount to be approved rather than a set amount.
- 3.2. The Registration Service is alive to the potential danger of this becoming a 'hard-sell' type conversation, and so accordingly will establish strict protocols to ensure this conversation is merely one where the registrar is advising the customer of their options and the customer will never have to say 'no' to the registrar offering them the additional ceremony. To ensure compliance around this, all registrars are already routinely competency evaluated and any instance of 'hard sell' observed during these evaluations will result in the registrar being swiftly retrained.

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