

Report to: Lead Member for Communities & Safety

Date of meeting: 21 June 2018

By: Director of Communities, Economy & Transport

Title: Alterations to non-statutory ceremony packages at Lewes Register Office at Southover Grange

Purpose: To make changes to a number of the ceremony packages available at Lewes Register Office in order to make them more flexible for the customer.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended:

- (1) To approve the alterations to the existing packages available at Lewes Register Office for introduction from 1 August 2018;**
 - (2) To approve the introduction of additional package options, making the packages more flexible; and**
 - (3) To approve the changes in the prices charged for the ceremony package options at Lewes Register Office.**
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1. Background

1.1. The Registration Service re-opened Southover Grange in Lewes on 30th April 2017 following extensive renovations to the building. Southover Grange houses the Lewes Register Office and is used as a venue for ceremonies including weddings and non-statutory ceremonies, and more recently funerals.

1.2. As part of this re-opening, the Registration Service introduced non-statutory ceremony packages to complement the wedding and celebration ceremonies, making the best use of our resources.

1.3. In the financial year 2017-2018 we carried out 273 ceremonies in the Lewes Register Office, of which 20 (7.33%) opted to have an additional package. 14 of these were VIP packages (the cheapest option), 4 were Premium packages and 2 were Exclusive packages. The total gross amount raised from these additional packages in 17/18 was £14,340. The packages in their current form are outlined at Appendix A.

1.4. In the financial year 2018-2019 we have 277 ceremonies booked at Southover Grange. Of these 25 (9%) have opted to have a package in addition to their ceremony. 20 of these are VIP bookings, 4 are Premium bookings and 1 is an Exclusive booking.

1.5. It is clear that the packages as they currently stand are not performing to the level anticipated when they were introduced. Feedback from staff, through contact with the potential market, is that the packages themselves could be adjusted to meet people's needs more flexibly, and that viewing the venue plays an important part in selling the additional non-statutory offer to our customers.

1.6. As a result, we have recently recruited to the fixed term position of Events Co-ordinator at Southover Grange in order to improve the sales of these additional packages.

1.7. Further to feedback from the staff (as above), and from our customers (via a telephone survey carried out earlier this year), it is also apparent that the packages as they currently stand are too inflexible, and in some cases, too costly to be an attractive prospect for potential customers. The feedback we have received has included:

- The VIP package is by far the most popular, however some clients would like to have the option to have the Premium and Exclusive packages without the VIP due to the restrictions on children attending and/or not wanting to have refreshments both before and after their ceremony.
- The Premium package (which currently allows for two glasses of Prosecco per person) is often rushed and customers want to drink what they feel they have paid for, making it difficult to decant them from the building in time for the next celebration.
- The Exclusive package, which is designed to appeal to those who would like an intimate reception for close friends and family, is considered to be a little expensive for the market to which it should appeal.
- There is a gap in our services for a catering option suitable for parties of more than 30 people - those who would use the Ainsworth room (the larger ceremony room) for their celebration.
- Furthermore, members of staff have agreed that the format of the current Premium package could be changed to improve timing, reduce our costs, and reduce the price paid by the customer, without affecting the overall feel of the offer, all of which should contribute to increasing sales of this package.

2. Proposals

2.1. To slightly increase the cost of the Bronze package (previously called VIP) in line with the increased cost of providing the service (due to increases in the price of the refreshments supplied as part of the package, and of the staff to provide the service).

2.2. To introduce the additional options of having the Silver (previously called Premium), Gold (new) and Platinum (previously called Exclusive) packages without the Bronze package so that we can be more flexible to the needs of the customer, particularly in relation to children taking part.

2.3. To reduce the cost to the customer of the Silver package, increasing its appeal to potential customers, by way of reducing the offer from two glasses of Prosecco per head to one drink per person. This will also ensure that the package works better within the timeframe available, improving customer service, and reduce the number of staff required. Proposed prices have been calculated to ensure minimal impact on the surplus resulting from this service.

2.4. To introduce the Gold package – an extended drinks toast with canapés – to appeal to those who:

- Have opted for the informal village hall (or equivalent) option for an evening buffet and dancing but would like a formal drinks reception for their ceremony guests first *and/or*
- Would have considered the Platinum package but have more than 30 guests so the exclusive sit-down dinner is not an option due to the capacity of the Newton Room.

- 2.5. To reduce the cost of the Platinum package by reducing the margin achieved on room hire with the express aim of increasing the appeal of this option to the potential market by making it more affordable, thus increasing sales.
- 2.6. An overview of the proposed new packages is available at Appendix B.
- 2.7. A summary of the proposed pricing structure is available at Appendix C.
- 2.8. It is recommended that the new packages and pricing structure are introduced from 1st August 2018 because:
- It will give us time, following Lead Member approval, to replace existing promotional material and paperwork to reflect the changes before their introduction
 - Of the existing bookings for packages, the imminent bookings for Premium (Silver) packages and the one Exclusive (Platinum) booked will be completed by the end of July. The remaining packages are predominantly VIP (Bronze) (12 currently booked between 1st August 2018 and 23rd August 2019) with 2 Premiums (Silver), both booked in June 2019. The VIP (Bronze) customers have paid £11 less than the proposed new prices but we would waive the increase for these specific customers, and the 2 Premium (Silver) customers can be offered the choice to opt for the new format of the package (with one drink per person) and a small refund, or to keep the service as booked.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The alterations to the current non-statutory ceremony packages on offer at Southover Grange will enhance the service offering for customers by allowing them more flexibility in their choices, and improve the opportunity to upsell ceremony-only bookings to include an enhancement.

3.2 The adjustments to prices will improve the appeal of the other add-on packages by making them a more affordable option for the target market whilst maintaining our current returns.

3.3 The addition of more options to the range of packages available will further increase flexibility allowing our customers to personalise their celebrations and fill the gap in our services left by the limited capacity of the Newton Room for sit-down reception catering.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

None