

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 10 November 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Proposed relocation of Hastings Register Office

Purpose: This report proposes the relocation of Hastings Register Office for births, deaths, and marriages to the Hastings library building. The move aims to enhance service delivery, optimise use of Council assets, and improve accessibility for residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the proposal to move Hastings Register Office (“the Service”) to Hastings Library, subject to planning permission, to facilitate service delivery improvements and deliver revenue savings of £100K. The savings that would be delivered through the relocation of the Service would contribute to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings in 2026/2027 and 2027/2028;**
 - (2) Note that the Service would refocus the current Council ceremony venues offer to meet customer demands and continue to provide a ceremony room at Hastings Library. In addition, the Register Office would continue to support the local economy through the licensing of approved marriage premises in Hastings; and**
 - (3) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to approve the detailed scheme of works for the proposal.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 The cessation of formal Adult Learning by the Library Service which was part of service changes that delivered savings of £192k during 2024/2025, has created an opportunity to relocate Registration Services to Hastings Library. Currently the Registration Service is located in the Town Hall, which is owned by Hastings Borough Council. The proposal is to move the Registration Service to the former learning space in the library. Relocation to this former learning space would ensure that public library space is not impacted.

1.2 While the current Register Office has served the community for a number of years, there are several challenges which include outdated facilities and accessibility.

2 Supporting Information

Legal requirements

2.1 The County Council provides registration services for births, deaths, and marriages, ensuring that these significant life events are accurately recorded and managed. This

responsibility is not only a statutory duty but also a vital service to the community, providing essential documentation that supports individuals throughout their lives. Currently the County Council provides registration services in Eastbourne, Hastings, Crowborough and Lewes.

2.2 There is no legal requirement for the exact number of registration offices a County Council must provide. However, the General Register Office (GRO) mandates that councils ensure their registration services are accessible and meet the needs of their communities. This typically means having enough offices to cover the geographical area effectively and to provide timely and convenient access for residents.

2.3 Councils are expected to assess local demand and ensure that their services are available within reasonable travel distances for all residents. The number of offices can vary based on the size and population of the county, as well as the specific needs of the community.

2.4 In addition, the County Council is required to provide at least one approved venue for civil ceremonies. Currently East Sussex County Council offers a wide range of ceremony venues to cater to a variety of preferences and needs.

Ceremonies

2.5 Responsibilities for ceremonies include:

- Conducting Marriage and Civil Partnership Ceremonies: Ensuring that all legal requirements are met and that ceremonies are conducted in accordance with the law
- Providing Non-Statutory Ceremonies: Offering services such as naming ceremonies and renewal of vows
- Managing Approved Venues: Overseeing the licensing and regulation of venues approved for civil ceremonies

2.6 Ceremonies are an important service offered by a Register Office. The proposed change would continue to offer customers a wide selection of venues across the county in which to hold a ceremony.

2.7 The current venue offers for ceremonies include:

- Register Offices: Located in Crowborough, Eastbourne, Hastings, and Lewes, these offices provide official settings for ceremonies
- Licensed Venues: Over 85 licensed venues are available across the county, including historic buildings, hotels, and unique locations

Hastings Town Hall ceremony usage

2.8 Currently the Register Office in Hastings Town Hall has 3 ceremony rooms and overall has the capacity to hold 15 ceremonies every day, if used to maximum capacity the service has space to hold up to 5,475 a year. This is based on each room holding 5 ceremonies per day, 365 days per year.

2.9 In the year 2022/2023 the Service conducted 273 ceremonies. In the year 2023/2024 216 ceremonies were conducted and in the following year (2024/2025) 219 ceremonies were held at Hastings Town Hall.

2.10 The usage figures demonstrate that the current provision of ceremony rooms at Hastings Town Hall are underutilised for ceremonies and identifies a potential opportunity to revise the

offer. The proposal moving forward, should the service relocate to Hastings Library, would be to have 1 ceremony room that can accommodate 10 people (10 to include 2 ceremony registrars) with a larger option on the ground floor that would be available when the library is closed.

2.11 With the proposed offer in Hastings library of one main ceremony room the service has the potential of holding up to 5 ceremonies per day in this room and has the maximum capacity to offer up to 1460 slots per year.

2.12 In addition, the library closes on a Wednesday from 1pm for the afternoon and does not open on a Sunday. The Registration Service could use the space at the front of the library on the ground floor during this time, offering a large attractive space to customers within the town. This space could accommodate up to 60 people and the service has the potential to offer 416 additional slots during these times.

Approved Marriage Premises

2.13 Currently within Hastings Borough there are 34 approved marriage premises, and these offer a wide range of venues, at a variety of price points. Should the service relocate to the library building, there would remain in Hastings a wide range of alternative options for customers to consider as venues for their ceremonies. The licensing of Approved Marriage Premises by the Registration Service is an important part of supporting the local economy.

Service integration

2.14 The integration of the Registration Office into the library space offers wide-ranging advantages across all age groups. For young families and new parents, the convenience of registering births in a familiar, community-focused setting reduces stress and supports engagement.

2.15 Older adults would benefit from the welcoming environment of the library, which offers seating, assistance, and accessible facilities. Libraries also play a vital role in supporting older and socially isolated residents through difficult times, for example bereavement. Feedback from other County Councils where Registration and the Library Service are collocated has been that older residents have found it a comforting and supportive environment.

2.16 Integrating registration offices within libraries offers several benefits, enhancing both the accessibility and efficiency of public services. Some additional advantages include:

- Co-location: Libraries serve as community information centres where people gather for various activities. Having registration services in the same location could increase community engagement and awareness of available services
- Cost Efficiency: Sharing facilities and resources between libraries and registration services would reduce operational costs for the council, making better use of public funds
- Enhanced Service Delivery: Libraries are equipped with trained staff who can assist with a variety of inquiries, providing a seamless and supportive environment for individuals accessing registration services
- Promotion of other services: Visitors to the library for registration purposes may become aware of and utilise other library services, digital literacy training, and cultural events

2.17 Integrating the Registration Service and Hastings Library within the current library building would deliver revenue savings of £100K. The savings that would be delivered through the relocation of the Service would contribute to the MTFP savings in 2026/2027 and 2027/2028.

2.18 A draft programme has been developed and costed and the estimated costs associated with the relocation of the Hastings Register Office, based on pre-tender estimates, are £125K. Should the Lead Member endorse the recommendations in this report, the Registration Service would be operational from Hastings Library in September 2026. This programme would ensure service continuity and a smooth coordinated relocation with minimal disruption to users.

2.19 Overall, the integration of registration offices within libraries fosters a more connected and resourceful community, enhancing the delivery of essential public services. It is proposed that, should the relocation be approved, the library building is renamed to incorporate the dual use.

Lease arrangements

2.20 Currently the lease for Hastings Town Hall will expire in January 2026 and if the Lead Member endorses the recommendations of this report, a new flexible lease will be put in place, subject to Hastings Borough Council's agreement.

2.21 It is proposed that East Sussex County Council liaise with Hastings Borough Council to minimise the financial impact on them by exploring opportunities for Hastings Borough Council to continue to use the existing town hall venues as Approved Marriage Premises as a potential income generator for the Borough Council.

Planning applications

2.22 Following consideration, and subject to agreement of the proposal, a planning application would need to be submitted for change of use of the library space in Hastings to facilitate the relocation. In addition, an application for listed building consent may also be submitted, if required.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 This proposal offers value for money and would deliver an improved and enhanced library and Registration Office. The proposal can be delivered within the existing budget, due to forecast additional ceremony and citizenship income for this financial year and will achieve on-going revenue saving. The proposals will make the best use of library buildings.

3.2. The proposal allows the Service to refocus the current Council ceremony venues offer to meet customer demands and establish a ceremony room at Hastings Library. In addition, the Service would continue to support the local economy through the current 34 approved marriage premises in Hastings.

3.3 It is, therefore, recommended that the Lead Member for Transport and Environment approve the proposal for the Register Office to relocate to Hastings Library. It is further recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to approve the detailed scheme of works for the proposals.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None