

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 2 MARCH 2017

### REVIEW OF REGISTRATION CIVIL CEREMONY FEES

#### 1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Note that a planned review of registration civil ceremony fees should be brought forward
- 1.2 Note that initial benchmarking indicates that fees currently charged for Aberdeenshire's registration civil ceremonies are less than those applied by other Local Authorities and other non-religious groups;
- 1.3 Note that fees applied are discretionary and will be subject to the triennial review schedule stipulated in the Council's Charging Policy following this review;
- 1.4 Agree to a formal consultation on proposed increases to registration civil ceremony fees;
- 1.5 Agree that the results of the consultation exercise be reported back to the Committee with a view to introducing any changes to the fees from May 2017.

#### 2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The Marriage (Scotland) 1977 Act established a statutory obligation for Local Authority registration services to provide a civil marriage service from within dedicated registration offices and marriage rooms.
- 2.2 The Marriage (Scotland) 2002 Act enabled the registration service to broaden this service, allowing civil marriages to be conducted in venues outwith Council properties.
- 2.3 Local Authorities are required to apply a statutory minimum fee of £125 for provision of a basic civil marriage ceremony in a dedicated Council marriage room with no more than 5 individuals present (the couple to be married, two witnesses and the officiant).
- 2.4 Additional fees may be applied for the provision of civil marriages ceremonies in circumstances beyond those set out in 2.3. These fees are set at the discretion of each Local Authority. Aberdeenshire Council registration service set discretionary fees in 2003 for the delivery of the civil marriage services, and these fees have not to date been reviewed.
- 2.5 Aberdeenshire Council's registration staff have established a reputation for providing a high quality, customer focused service that is geared to meeting

the particular needs of clients throughout the preparation and the delivery of their civil marriage service.

- 2.6 Benchmarking is recognised to be a helpful tool in reviewing charges and its use is supported by the Council's Corporate Charging Framework. A study of national civil ceremony charges was carried out in November 2015. Aberdeenshire's present charges for civil ceremonies are amongst the lowest in Scotland, and are significantly lower than those advertised by other non-religious celebrant groups.
- 2.7 The existing fees and proposed fees are also outlined in Appendix 1. Proposed fees will remain less than most other Local Authorities and also less than all other non-religious celebrants.
- 2.8 If Committee is minded to approve a consultation, the service intends to produce a "survey monkey" questionnaire to allow online engagement with the public. The Council's Communications team would support the consultation and could promote the survey through the website and via social media.
- 2.9 Going forward, it is the intention of the service to ensure all registration fees will be subject to appropriate annual inflation increases if necessary, and full review every third year in accordance with the Council's Corporate Charging Framework.
- 2.10 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C.1.1.j in the List of Committee Powers at Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to a resource matter in respect of a delegated function.

### **4 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications**

- 4.1 An Equalities Impact assessment is not required as authority is being sought to request permission to carry out a consultation. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out following any consultation if any changes to service provision are recommended.

**Ritchie Johnston**  
**Director of Business Services**

**APPENDIX 1:**

**Table showing current fees, proposed fees and national averages\***

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>National average</b> (collected Nov 2015)
Registration Office	Weekdays <5 indiv	125.00	125.00	125.00
	Weekdays >5 indiv	160.00	180.00	213.00
	Saturdays	£200.00 / £235.00	£250.00 / £285.00	£295.00 / £321.00
Committee Rooms/ Council Chambers/ Marriage Suites	Weekdays	190.00	210.00	273.00
	Saturdays	265.00	315.00	356.00
	Sundays	265.00	315.00	377.00
	Public holidays	265.00	315.00	386.00
External Venue	Weekdays	225.00	275.00	287.00
	Saturdays	275.00	350.00	332.00
	Sundays	325.00	400.00	384.00
	Public holidays	325.00	400.00	394.00

\*National averages calculated from information collected from 24 local Authorities in November 2015.

