

REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 NOVEMBER 2021

REVIEW OF NON-STATUTORY CEREMONY FEES

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 Business Services Committee is asked to approve proposed amendments to non-statutory fees relating to ceremonies provided by Aberdeenshire Council's registration service.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 **Note that a public consultation was carried out in relation to proposed changes to civil ceremony fees from 27 September 2021 until 24 October 2021;**
- 2.2 **Consider the summary of consultation responses set out in paragraph 4.5 below;**
- 2.3 **Agree to implement the proposed changes as set out in Appendix 1 with effect from 1 January 2022; and**
- 2.4 **Note that this review was delayed due to the Covid pandemic, and that in order to realign with the Corporate Charging Policy schedule, a further review of registration fees will be initiated in late 2022, with agreed recommendations introduced from 1 April 2023.**

3 Purpose and Decision Making Route

- 3.1 A review of non-statutory registration fees is being conducted in accordance with the Aberdeenshire Council's Corporate Charging Framework which states that a review of fees must be undertaken on a triennial basis, with annual inflationary increases applied as appropriate in interim years.
- 3.2 Business Services Committee approval is required where it is proposed that fees are increased beyond the rate of inflation.
- 3.3 Following a comprehensive benchmarking exercise it is proposed that some ceremony fees are increased beyond the rate of inflation in order to cover the cost of provision and better align with national local authority averages.
- 3.4 In the event that the Business Services Committee agrees to the proposals, revised registration ceremony fees will be introduced from 1 January 2022.

4 Background / Discussion

- 4.1 The Business Services Committee agreed at their meeting on 9th September 2021 to consult on proposed changes to civil ceremony fees.

4.2 A public consultation was conducted over the four week period between 27th September and 24th October 2021. This consultation could be accessed via the following means:

- Online - via the Engage Aberdeenshire website
- In-person - in Libraries and Services Points
- By telephone – by calling 01467 468 468

The consultation is shown in **Appendix 1**.

4.3 The public consultation was promoted via the following means:

- News release
 - issued on 27 September
 - subsequent articles in Grampian Online (27/9) and The Fraserburgh Herald (29/9)
- Aberdeenshire Council Twitter
 - 3,968 impressions
 - 45 engagements (*including 20 link clicks*)
- Aberdeenshire Council Facebook
 - 4,551 people reached
 - 67 engagements (*including 55 link clicks*)
- Aberdeenshire Registrars Facebook
 - 293 people reached
 - 14 engagements
- Posters in Libraries, Service Points and Registration offices
 - Attached as **Appendix 2**
- Via Aberdeenshire Council's Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Co-ordinator
 - Details of the public consultation on ceremony fees were communicated to marginalised groups and wider partners.

4.4 Overall, the online public consultation received the following engagement:

- 190 unique visitors
- ...of which 24 visitors reviewed multiple pages
- ...of which 16 visitors chose to submit a response

4.5 Summary of responses

In each question, the majority of respondents expressed support or no objection to the proposed increases to fees.

Q1. "Do you have any comments on proposed amendments to fees for Civil Marriage & Civil Partnership Ceremonies?"

- 16 responses: 81% Supportive & Unopposed / 6% Unclear / 13% Opposed

Q2. "Do you have any comments on proposed amendments to fees for Baby Naming & Renewal of Vows Ceremonies?"

- 16 responses: 69% Supportive & Unopposed / 31% Opposed

Q3. “Do you have any comments on the proposals for increases in fees for Citizenship Ceremonies?”

- 16 responses: 88% Supportive & Unopposed / 12% Opposed

Q4. “Do you have any other general questions, comments or suggestions for our registration service?”

- 3 responses: 100% Supportive & Unopposed

A breakdown of all responses including officer comments is attached at **Appendix 3**.

- 4.6 Having reviewed the consultation responses received, we remain confident that the proposed increases are reasonable and fair, that they remain well within the national average for delivery of this type of service, and that they remain more affordable than alternative non-religious marriage ceremony options. We therefore recommend that Business Services Committee grant approval to proceed in implementing these revised fees.
- 4.7 Due to the emergence of the Covid pandemic this review of fees was postponed by 18 months. In order to realign with the traditional corporate charging schedule, and to ensure that fees and charges remain fair and commercially competitive, it is proposed that an interim fees review is conducted in November 2022, with view to implementing amended charges in April 2023.

5. Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 5.1 This report helps deliver the principles which underpin the six Strategic Priorities of responsible financial planning and right people, right place, right time.
- 5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial	x		
Staffing	x		
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			x
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing			x
Climate Change and Sustainability			x
Health and Wellbeing			x
Town Centre First			x

Financial

The non-statutory fees under review generate vital revenue which offsets the Aberdeenshire Council registration service expenditure budget and contributes to a balanced budget of the Council.

It is estimated that the proposed fee increases will realise additional income of approximately **£22,000** per annum.

Staffing

A failure to maintain or increase current income generation through provision of ceremonies would result in net reduction to the registration service budget, which could impact on current staffing levels.

- 5.3 An integrated impact assessment has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals set out above. It is included as **Appendix 4**. The IIA identifies the risk that any increase to marriage or civil partnership ceremony fees could negatively impact low income and low wealth groups, and it explains that this risk is mitigated by i) ensuring no change to the affordability or accessibility of statutory ceremonies and ii) ensuring that these fees remain in line with national averages.
- 5.4 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- [ACORP001 Budget Pressures](#) – An increased focus on revenue generation is necessary to mitigate against anticipated future budgetary pressures. A review of fees is key in safeguarding future budget offset.
 - [ACORP006 Reputation Management](#) – Our registration team have earned an excellent reputation for quality and for client focus. Any review of fees must be transparent; a public consultation will offer an opportunity to set out proposed changes and offer clear context for proposed amendments to fees.

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- [BSSR001 Balancing The Books](#) – As noted above, a review of non-statutory registration fees is intended to ensure consistent revenue generation, helping safeguard against any future Council budget reductions.

6 Scheme of Governance

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on] this item in terms of Section C.1.1 of the [List of Committee Powers in Part 2A](#) of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Ritchie Johnston
Director of Business Services

Report prepared by David Nicholson, Team Leader (Registration)
Date 16/10/2021

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Consultation Document
- Appendix 2 - Promotional poster (Libraries and Service Points)
- Appendix 3 - Aberdeenshire Council's Registration Service – Fees Consultation
- Appendix 4 - Integrated Impact Assessment

APPENDIX 1- CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Aberdeenshire Council's Registration Service – Registration Fees Consultation

Aberdeenshire registrars' non-statutory registration fees were last reviewed in 2017, with a planned review in 2020 postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In line with Aberdeenshire Council's Charging Policy, our ceremony fees are subject to annual inflationary increases, with a full review required every three years.

This Policy is intended to ensure that the fees we charge for this valued service not only cover the cost of provision, but also remain fair and reasonable in a commercial context.



Services include civil marriage, civil partnership and the renewal of marriage vows, as well as baby naming and private citizenship ceremonies. Ceremonies can be held on any day and in any location within Aberdeenshire, tailoring events to the wishes of the couples and individuals concerned.

Statutory fees apply for the provision of small civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies held on a weekday in a council ceremony room with no more than eight people present. Councils have discretion to set fees for all other ceremonies that go beyond the statutory minimum.

The income generated offsets the cost of the registration of births, marriages and deaths, family history searches and ceremonial services.

The majority of Aberdeenshire's current ceremony fees cover the cost of service provision but are generally lower than the national average, and significantly lower than those charged by local providers of similar ceremonial services.

In setting our revised fees, we have conducted:

- i) A re-assessment of the cost of providing ceremonial services in 2021/22
- ii) Thorough national benchmarking
- iii) Local benchmarking against other providers of non-religious marriage ceremonies.

With the above in mind, we know that the proposed increases keep our fees in line with national averages, while remaining more affordable than other providers of non-religious ceremonies.

The results of the consultation will be brought before the council's Business Services Committee in November and, if approved, any changes to fees would take effect from 1st of January.

Aberdeenshire Council's Charging Policy makes clear that any proposal to increase fees must be subject to public consultation. We value your views and would appreciate it if you could take the time to provide answers to the questions below.

If you require more information on this consultation or require information in another format please contact registrars@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Civil Marriage & Civil Partnership ceremonies		Current Aberdeenshire fees	Average Scottish Registration fees	Average local non-religious ceremony fees	Proposed Aberdeenshire fees from 01/22
Ceremony Rooms	Weekday small (up to 8 in attendance)	£125.00	£125.00	£534.00	£125.00
	Weekday large	£177.00	£230.72	£534.00	£230.00
	Saturday small	£254.00	£361.04	£534.00	£300.00
	Saturday large	£305.00	£383.24	£534.00	£330.00
	Sunday/PH small	£305.00	£425.10	£534.00	£360.00
	Sunday/PH large	£357.00	£436.95	£534.00	£390.00
Council Chambers	Weekday	£244.00	£265.54	£534.00	£270.00
	Saturday	£321.00	£427.92	£534.00	£350.00
	Sunday	£372.00	£442.28	£534.00	£380.00
	Public holiday	£372.00	£460.84	£534.00	£380.00
External Venue	Weekday	£280.00	£341.02	£534.00	£340.00
	Saturday	£357.00	£419.78	£534.00	£410.00
	Sunday	£409.00	£464.66	£534.00	£450.00
	Public holiday	£409.00	£476.53	£534.00	£450.00

Context

The above fees incorporate a £70 fee statutory for submission marriage notices. To ensure accurate benchmarking, this has been incorporated in the average cost calculation of other non-religious ceremony providers.

In order to ensure that 'Ceremony Room' ceremonies remain as affordable and accessible, these remain under the national average, and we continue to make the £125 statutory minimum option available across all weekdays from all sites – despite the fact that this minimum fee does not cover the cost of provision of this service.

All other ceremony fees remain in line with, or slightly less than, national averages.

Any profits generated through the provision of larger ceremonies are used to mitigate the overall cost of providing Registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages, and provision of smaller statutory ceremonies.

QUESTION 1:

Do you have any comments on proposed amendments to fees for Civil Marriage & Civil Partnership Ceremonies?_

**Aberdeenshire Council's Registration Service
Engage Aberdeenshire**

Baby Naming & Renewal of Vows ceremonies		Current Aberdeenshire fees	Average Scottish Registration fees	Proposed Aberdeenshire fees from 01/22
Ceremony Rooms	Weekday small (up to 8 in attendance)	£62.00	£144.00	£110.00
	Weekday large	£139.00	£144.00	£145.00
	Saturday small	£139.00	£216.00	£150.00
	Saturday large	£155.00	£216.00	£185.00
	Sunday/PH small	£139.00	£216.00	£175.00
	Sunday/PH large	£155.00	£216.00	£200.00
Council Chambers	Weekday	£129.00	£144.00	£175.00
	Saturday	£206.00	£216.00	£200.00
	Sunday	£206.00	£216.00	£225.00
	Public holiday	£206.00	£216.00	£225.00
External Venue	Weekday	£165.00	£201.00	£200.00
	Saturday	£217.00	£244.00	£250.00
	Sunday	£217.00	£244.00	£275.00
	Public holiday	£217.00	£244.00	£275.00

Context

These are non-statutory ceremonies, and therefore not subject to additional statutory fees. All charges remain in line with, or under, national averages

QUESTION 2:

Do you have any comments on proposed amendments to fees for Baby Naming & Renewal of Vows Ceremonies?

Aberdeenshire Council's Registration Service
Engage Aberdeenshire

Private Citizenship ceremonies		Current Aberdeenshire fees	Average Scottish Registration fees	Proposed Aberdeenshire fees from 01/22
Ceremony Rooms	Weekday small (up to 6 in attendance)	£25.00	£91.94	£75.00

Context

Private Citizenship Ceremonies are optional, and available upon request. These are available in addition to group and 'virtual' citizenship ceremonies which are available at no cost to applicant.

QUESTION 3:

Do you have any comments on the proposals for increases in fees for Citizenship Ceremonies?

QUESTION 4:

Do you have any other general questions, comments or suggestions for our registration service?

ABOUT YOU:

This section of the questionnaire asks for information about you, to understand the profile of responses and identify whether responses vary by demographic.

These questions are no mandatory. They are completely confidential and used for analysis purposes only.

Postcode:

Age:

APPENDIX 2 - Promotional poster (Libraries and Service Points)



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

Public Consultation: Ceremony Fees

The Registration Service seeks your view on proposed amendments on fees for provision of civil ceremonies

Feedback can be submitted before Oct 24th via the following means:

- **Smartphone:** Scan the **QR** code below
- **Online:** Via the **Engage Aberdeenshire** website
- **In person:** Request paper forms at **service points** and **libraries**
- **Phone:** If unable to participate online or in person feedback may be submitted by calling **01467 468 468**



A photograph showing a close-up of wedding rings and a large, light-colored rose. The rings are silver with diamonds, and the rose is a soft pinkish-white color. The background is a white, textured fabric.

APPENDIX 3 –

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL’S REGISTRATION SERVICE – FEES CONSULTATION

Information:

Consultation Period	04/02/21 to 24/10/21
Total visitors to online consultation	190
Total visitors who reviewed multiple pages ¹	24
Total visitors who chose to submit a response	16

Responses Received:

Q1	Do you have any comments on the proposals for increases in fees for Marriage & Civil Partnership Ceremonies?
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#	Response	Interpretation / Officer Comments
1	Why not add 20% to your prices for those quoted which seem to be quite still low from the national average - e.g. Saturday small to be £305 not £300 - the suggested prices seem low compared with the average - and how was the baseline of local derived - £534 seems awfully low? what was used as the baseline?	<i>(Unopposed to proposed increases). The proposed increases will bring Aberdeenshire more in line with national averages while also ensuring that smaller ceremonies held council accommodation remain affordable. Local averages calculated as the mean of fees advertised in Aug 2021 by five leading alternative providers of non-religious marriage/CP ceremonies. A further review of fees is proposed to take place in 2023.</i>
2	Seem very reasonable by comparison.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
3	I'm all for cost recovery, but making a profit to offset other things like family history research and ceremonial services.	<i>The consultation response is unclear, However, any revenue generated in excess of cost-of-provision is used to fund provision of all registration services, including statutory ceremonies. This reduces pressure on council revenue budget through provision of quality services at competitive rates.</i>
4		
5	Can them. Nobody has any money to buy essentials. Freeze them for 5 years until covid is over. Then increase by 5% only.	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases) No change proposed to minimum fees for small ceremonies, and fees for ceremonies in council venues remain below national average.</i>
6	Seems very cheap in most cases.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
7	Seems reasonable given the national average.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
8		
9	I think those are very reasonable and in keeping with other places.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
10	I think the proposed new fees are extremely reasonable, excellent value for money and offer the service at a fair cost.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
11	Seems good value.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
12	Based on the national registration averages I feel the council has made acceptable proposals for 2022.	<i>Supportive of proposed increases.</i>
13	The external fees have gone up quite a bit. I know fuel and wages have increased but not by this % surely.	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases) External fees are designed to cover cost of provision and generate additional revenue to offsetting cost of service provision. Due to the emergence of the Covid pandemic, this review of fees was postponed by 18 months. Therefore, a 4 ½ year period has passed since the previous evaluation of costs and national & local benchmarking.</i>
14		
15	No.	<i>Officers have taken this to mean that the respondent has no comments to make and is therefore supportive of the proposed increase.</i>
16		

Q1 - 16 responses: 81% Supportive & Unopposed / 6% Unclear / 13% Opposed

Q2 Do you have any comments on the proposals for increases in fees for Baby Naming & Renewal of Vows Ceremonies?

#	Response	Officer Comments
1	Weekday small (up to 6 in attendance) - that is too much an increase percentage wise - its more than 70% increase. Do the Saturday and Sunday prices really cover all increased costs of being open on a non-week day?	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases)</i> <i>Previous fees did not cover the cost of provision. These are non-statutory, optional services and therefore fees must cover cost of provision. A range of factors are taken into account when setting fees, which are required to recover costs relating to preparation and provision of ceremony. This includes ceremony creation, venue risk assessments, travel time and weekend staffing allowances.</i>
2	Again see reasoning comparison.	<i>Officers have taken this to mean that the respondent feels that the proposed increase is reasonable and is therefore supportive of the proposed increase.</i>
3	Should these really be provided by the council?	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases)</i> <i>Our range of non-statutory ceremonies options is consistent with those offered by all Scottish registration services. These ceremonies are optional and available upon request. Any revenue generated beyond cost of provision is used to offset registration staffing budget, therefore making council budget available for other vital services.</i>
4		
5	Can them. Nobody has any money to buy essentials. Freeze them for 5 years until covid is over. Then increase by 5% only.	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases)</i> <i>Proposed increases are designed to provide full cost recovery. Increases are consistent with national averages.</i>
6	Why are Ceremony Rooms and Council Chambers so cheap compared to external venues?	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases)</i> <i>A range of cost factors are considered. Fees are required to recover costs relating to preparation and provision of ceremony, including venue risk assessments, travel time and external venue staffing allowances, and they must reflect the quality of the service provided in a commercial context. Proposals are benchmarked against national averages. Revenue generated in excess of cost of provision will offset registration staffing budget.</i>
7	On the whole, I'd say I'm ok with them.	<i>Supportive of proposed increased.</i>
8		
9	I think it is fair that prices are brought largely in line.	<i>Supportive of proposed increased.</i>
10		
11	Reasonable proposal.	<i>Supportive of proposed increased.</i>
12		
13	External venue fees seem very high.	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases)</i> <i>Proposed fees for these optional ceremonies are designed to cover cost of provision and are in line with national averages. Any revenue generated beyond cost of provision is used to offset service staffing budget</i>
14		
15	No.	<i>Officers have taken this to mean that the respondent has no comments to make and is therefore supportive of the proposed increase.</i>
16		

Q2 - 16 responses: 69% Supportive & Unopposed / 31% Opposed

Q3 Do you have any comments on the proposals for increases in fees for Citizenship Ceremonies?

#	Response	Officer Comments
1		
2	Again very reasonable.	<i>Supportive of proposed increase.</i>
3		
4		
5	These should be FREE. Scotland needs fresh blood & this should be our gift to those individuals have spent thousands to get here, and collectively contribute millions to our economy!	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases). These ceremonies are available as an optional alternative to the free group and online ceremonies already provided.</i>
6	Never seen anything about these ceremonies being advertised.	<i>(Unopposed to proposed increases) The range of ceremony options is communicated to applicants as they proceed through the citizenship application process.</i>
7	Fair price.	<i>Supportive of proposed increase.</i>
8		
9	No.	
10		
11	An optional ceremony requires full cost recovery.	<i>(Unopposed to proposed increases) The proposed fee will recover the cost of provision.</i>
12	This is a considerable increase from current fee of £25. However in comparison with national averages it is still below that.	<i>Supportive of proposed increase.</i>
13		
14		
15	No.	<i>Officers have taken this to mean that the respondent has no comments to make and is therefore supportive of the proposed increase.</i>
16	It's a huge increase Is that really necessary	<i>(Opposed to proposed increases) Previous fee did not fully recover the cost of provision. The amended fee does recover cost of provision. Note that this ceremony option is additional to statutory options which are available free of charge.</i>

Q3 - 16 responses: 88% Supportive & Unopposed / 12% Opposed

Q4 Do you have any other general questions, comments or suggestions for our Registration Service?

#	Response	Officer Comments
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10	More promotion of your service are required. People often ask for an Independent Celebrant to lead their ceremony because they are unaware that the Registration Service is more than just completing the legal documentation	<i>Noted - promotion the range and quality of ceremonies provided by Aberdeenshire Registrars is a key priority for the service in order to ensure that couples wishing non-religious ceremonies appreciate the range of options available to them.</i>
11		
12		
13		
14	The proposed changes appear reasonable and in line with costs across the country. I have no objections.	<i>Supportive of proposed increased.</i>
15	No.	<i>Officers have taken this to mean that the respondent has no comments / suggestions or recommendations to make.</i>
16		

Q 4 - 3 responses: 100% Supportive & Unopposed

Aberdeenshire Council

Integrated Impact Assessment

Amendments to registration fees

Assessment ID	IIA-000207
Lead Author	David Nicholson
Additional Authors	Lynne Driver
Service Reviewers	Alistair Stobie
Subject Matter Experts	Lynne Gravener
Approved By	Elaine Stirton
Approved On	Tuesday October 26, 2021
Publication Date	Tuesday October 26, 2021

1. Overview

This document has been generated from information entered into the Integrated Impact Assessment system.

Assessing impact of increases to non-statutory fees for provision of civil & citizenship ceremonies

During screening 1 of 10 questions indicated that detailed assessments were required, the screening questions and their answers are listed in the next section. This led to 1 out of 5 detailed impact assessments being completed. The assessments required are:

- Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty

In total there are 0 positive impacts as part of this activity. There are 3 negative impacts, of these negative impacts, 4 have been mitigated and 0 cannot be mitigated satisfactorily.

A detailed action plan with 1 points has been provided.

This assessment has been approved by elaine.stirton@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

The remainder of this document sets out the details of all completed impact assessments.

2. Screening

Could your activity / proposal / policy cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres?	No
Would this activity / proposal / policy have consequences for the health and wellbeing of the population in the affected communities?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e) in the Council or community and / or the procurement, use or disposal of physical resources?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the resilience to extreme weather events and/or a changing climate of Aberdeenshire Council or community?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have an impact on people and / or groups with protected characteristics?	No
Is this activity / proposal / policy of strategic importance for the council?	Yes
Does this activity / proposal / policy reduce inequality of outcome?	No
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's rights?	No
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's wellbeing?	No

3. Impact Assessments

Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Not Required
Climate Change and Sustainability	Not Required
Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty	All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated
Health Inequalities	Not Required
Town Centre's First	Not Required

4. Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment

4.1. Protected Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Age (Younger)		Yes		
Age (Older)		Yes		
Disability		Yes		
Race		Yes		
Religion or Belief		Yes		
Sex		Yes		
Pregnancy and Maternity		Yes		
Sexual Orientation		Yes		
Gender Reassignment		Yes		
Marriage or Civil Partnership		Yes	Yes	

4.2. Socio-economic Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Low income		Yes	Yes	
Low wealth		Yes	Yes	
Material deprivation		Yes		
Area deprivation		Yes		
Socioeconomic background		Yes		

4.3. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
Marriage or Civil Partnership	<p>In order to ensure that fees reflect i) the cost of provision, ii) quality of services provided and ii) remain in line with national averages, some fees for provision of some civil ceremonies will increase.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Revised ceremony fees remain in line with, or slightly below, the national average for similar registration ceremony services. They also fall significantly below the average fees charged by other local providers of 'non-religious' marriage and civil partnership ceremonies.</p> <p>Timescale Immediate effect</p>

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
Marriage or Civil Partnership	<p>In order to ensure that fees reflect i) the cost of provision, ii) quality of services provided and ii) remain in line with national averages, some fees for provision of some civil ceremonies will increase.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Fees for small weekday ceremonies hosted in an Aberdeenshire Council ceremony suite will remain unchanged at £125 per ceremony. Availability of these ceremonies will not be restricted; they remain accessible at any ceremony suite between Monday - Friday, 9-5.</p> <p>Timescale Immediate effect</p>
Low income	<p>Marriage or Civil Partnership: In order to ensure that fees reflect i) the cost of provision, ii) quality of services provided and ii) remain in line with national averages, some fees for provision of some civil ceremonies will increase.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Fees for small weekday ceremonies hosted in an Aberdeenshire Council ceremony suite will remain unchanged at £125 per ceremony. Availability of these ceremonies will not be restricted; they remain accessible at any ceremony suite between Monday - Friday, 9-5.</p> <p>Timescale Immediate</p>
Low wealth	<p>Marriage or Civil Partnership: In order to ensure that fees reflect i) the cost of provision, ii) quality of services provided and ii) remain in line with national averages, some fees for provision of some civil ceremonies will increase.</p> <p>Can be mitigated Yes</p> <p>Mitigation Fees for small weekday ceremonies hosted in an Aberdeenshire Council ceremony suite will remain unchanged at £125 per ceremony. Availability of these ceremonies will not be restricted; they remain accessible at any ceremony suite between Monday - Friday, 9-5.</p> <p>Timescale Immediate</p>

4.4. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
Other Evidence	National and local benchmarking of ceremony fees	Provides evidence of fees currently advertised for provision of marriage & civil partnership, baby naming, renewal of vows and citizenship ceremonies.	Ensures that our revised fees fall in line with national, and below local averages.

4.5. Engagement with affected groups

Public consultation carried out for four week period 24/9/21 - 24/10/2021.

This public consultation has been promoted in a variety of platforms in order to ensure a range of responses:

- * Press releases to local media
- * Featured in Grampian Online and Fraserburgh Herald
- * Promoted on Aberdeenshire Council Twitter / Registration Facebook page
- * Posters in registration offices, libraries and service points

4.6. Ensuring engagement with protected groups

Consultation has been accessible online, in person and by telephone. Advertised in libraries and service points, and promoted to wider partners and marginalised groups with cooperation of Poverty and Inequalities Coordinator.

4.7. Evidence of engagement

Responses to this public consultation, annotated with service comments, will be attached to this committee paper for review.

4.8. Overall Outcome

All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

The decision to provide ceremonies at minimum (statutory) cost, and to continue to make these ceremonies available from any Aberdeenshire ceremony suite, ensures that marriage and civil partnership ceremonies remain accessible to couples in low income or poverty circumstances. These ceremonies are treated with the same care and attention as any other, with a registrar providing a bespoke ceremony tailored to meet their wishes, with enhancements as desired. It is recognised that fees applied to these ceremonies may not cover the cost of provision, but this is mitigated through provision of more commercially competitive ceremonies which can generate revenue in excess of cost of provision.

4.9. Improving Relations

Promotion to increase awareness of the range of ceremonies provided by Aberdeenshire Registrars will help to ensure that couples considering non-religious marriage or civil partnership ceremonies are aware of the range of affordable options available to them in order to make an informed decision.

4.10. Opportunities of Equality

This will ensure couples recognise the range of affordable options for non-religious marriage or civil partnership ceremonies.

5. Action Plan

Planned Action	Details
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Planned Action	Details	
Promotion of the range of registration ceremonies provided by Aberdeenshire registrars via social media / advertising in local press & wedding magazines / wedding exhibitions / improved business partner relations	Lead Officer	David Nicholson
	Repeating Activity	Yes
	Frequency	Ongoing
	Duration	Ongoing
	Expected Outcome	Increased awareness of range and affordability of civil marriage and partnership ceremonies available from Aberdeenshire Registrars.
	Resource Implications	Weekly FTE / advertising budget