

Registration Service

Report Title: Decommissioning Marriage Room
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Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To outline proposals to decommission the current statutory marriage room within Registration Services to achieve an increase in income.

Details

Currently Stockton is the only Register Office that offers a marriage room that holds up to 34 people as a statutory marriage room. The charge for weddings in this room is the statutory fee of £40.00 + £3.50 for marriage certificate.

Consultation with other local Register Offices in the Tees Valley has revealed that, since decommissioning their marriage room, the decommissioned room is preferred rather than the statutory room. For example; Darlington has had no weddings in their statutory wedding room. Darlington decommissioned in December, 2006. Middlesbrough decommissioned June, 2009 and have had very few ceremonies in the Statutory marriage room since de-commissioning. Hartlepool decommissioned in 2007 and have had only 7 weddings in their Statutory marriage room up to this time.

Having a smaller room would also benefit those customers who are having a small intimate ceremony e.g. Bride and Groom, 2 witnesses & 2 registrars. On these occasions some couples have commented that the current marriage room is too big for them and they would rather have had their ceremony in a smaller room.

(GRO stipulate that a statutory marriage room must be able to accommodate 6 people as a minimum.)

Proposed Charges

It is proposed that charges for the decommissioned room are as follows:

Stockton-on-Tees	£ 90.00	Monday – Thursday
	£120.00	Friday
	£150.00	Saturday
	£200.00	Sunday/Bank Holidays

The costs above have been based on current charges of neighbouring authorities and taking into account the need to be competitive.

Other local Register Offices currently charge the following:

Middlesbrough	£162.00	Monday - Saturday
Darlington	£ 85.00	Monday - Thursday
	£125.00	Friday
	£200.00	Sunday/Bank Holidays
Hartlepool	£103.50	Monday - Friday
	£218.50	Saturday
	£313.50	Sunday/Bank Holidays

As well as increasing the cost – we would also book weddings every hour instead of half hour. This would provide a better personal service to the Customer. It would also alleviate any entrance and exit problems for differing bridal parties. (This only tends to be an issue for Saturday weddings, particularly when the bride is late or weather conditions cause a problem so parties cannot wait outside).

Risks:

- All couples who have given notice for Stockton Register Office will need to give fresh notices for the decommissioned room.
- Careful consideration will need to be given to ensure the most appropriate time to decommission that will cause the least disruption for couples.
- Potential of low take-up/underachievement of income due to the increase, however, after consultation with other neighbouring Authorities they did not find this to be the case.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, although this will increase revenue for the Registration Service by increasing the costs to Customer, the Customer will also benefit by having 45 minutes allocated for their ceremony instead of the current half hour, alleviating any cross over of wedding parties due to only one entrance and exit.

Proposed Recommendations:

- Decommission the marriage room and increase costs as suggested.
- Couples who have given Notice at Stockton Register Office will need to give fresh notices for the decommissioned room. (The service will bear the cost of this i.e. staff time x 30minutes per notice).
- All current bookings would be honoured and the extra fee would not be charged to the couples who have already booked this room as the statutory register office
- Consider booking ceremonies in the decommissioned room every hour.

PROCESS AND GUIDANCE:

To decommission the marriage room the following process would need to be followed:

Register Office plans would need to be submitted to Local Government Support (GRO) with the register office clearly highlighted showing the room to be decommissioned.

As with any other approved premise, the Register Office would have to go through the Licensing procedure. The cost of this is £1,000 to license for 3 years. An advert will be placed in a local newspaper for 21 days. The licence would be granted after 21 days subject to responses received. Further consultation is undertaken directly with:

- Building Control
- Environmental Health
- Fire Services
- Register Office

New plans would then need to be submitted to formally show that the room is removed from the plan of the register office by the local authority. This should be sent to the Registrar General (Local Services Branch in GRO) before the room is brought into use as an approved premise.

The decommissioned room would need to be given a name e.g. 'Nightingale Suite'. An office within Nightingale House would be turned into the Statutory Room i.e. the SR Room

Careful consideration will need to be given to ensure the most appropriate time to decommission in order to cause the least amount of disruption. After looking at the current bookings - February, 2012 would be the most appropriate time.