

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****MARK NUTI, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES**

**DATE:** 31 MAY 2022

**LEAD OFFICER:** MARIE SNELLING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMER & COMMUNITIES

**SUBJECT:** REGISTRATION SERVICES: CHANGES TO FEES AND CHARGES

**ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA:** Growing A Sustainable Economy So Everyone Can Benefit/  
Empowering Communities

**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Surrey County Council's Registration & Nationality Service is proposing to align its fees and charges for marriage ceremonies and civil partnership ceremonies, along with non-statutory ceremonies such as vow renewals and naming ceremonies. In addition, following a benchmarking exercise, the service is proposing to increase its fees and charges for 2024/25 in line with inflation.

Aligning marriage and civil partnership and other non-statutory ceremonies fees and charges will mean that customers are paying a consistent and equal amount for these services. Increasing fees and charges for 2024/2025 in line with inflation will mean the Registration & Nationality Service can start to take bookings at the new rates and continue to offer a high-quality service to customers, as well as provide an important source of income for the Council.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:

1) Approves the following changes to fees and charges for the Registration Service with immediate effect:

- Civil partnership fees and charges to be aligned to those for marriages.
- Non-statutory ceremony fees and charges to be aligned to those of marriages/civil partnerships

2) Approves the proposed increase to fees and charges for 2024/25 in line with inflation (as detailed in Annex 1).

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

These recommendations will level up fees and charges for marriage ceremonies, civil partnership ceremonies and other non-statutory ceremonies, to ensure parity for

customers and best value for the service. Increasing fees and charges for 2024/2025 in line with inflation will also enable the Registration & Nationality Service to continue to offer a high-quality service to customers, as well as continue to provide an important source of income for Surrey County Council.

<b>DETAILS:</b>
-----------------

1. The Registrar General for England & Wales sets the charges for statutory services delivered by local registration offices. These include the fees for:
  - Birth, Death, Marriage or Civil Partnership Certificates
  - Marriage
  - Civil Partnership
  - Conversion of Civil Partnership into Marriage
  - Changes to initial Registration
  - Searches in Indexes
2. In addition, local authorities have the power to set their own fees and charges for the approval of venues and for registration officers to attend ceremonies at those venues, as well as for additional discretionary services that customers can choose to receive above and beyond the core statutory service offer. These fees and charges are normally reviewed on an annual basis. Users of discretionary services are expected to pay for the full cost of the service received, rather than the general taxpayer.
3. In Surrey, services connected with civil partnerships are currently being offered at a lower rate than those for civil marriages. Given the similarities between the two services, the Registration Service proposes aligning the fees and charges for these services, so they are equal. Aligning the fees represents an increase of approximately 20% for those currently charged at the lower rate.
4. The Registration Service has also been charging a lower fee for non-statutory ceremonies, such as renewal of vows or naming ceremonies. It is proposed to bring these fees and charges in line with those connected with statutory ceremonies because they utilise the same amount of service resource.
5. Surrey Registration Service can take bookings two years in advance of the proposed event, and ceremony fees are payable in full at the time of booking. Therefore, it is important that the service sets its fees in advance to make sure customers are clear about the cost of their ceremony. Customers will be required to pay the fee applicable for the date of their ceremony, so it is important they are charged the correct amount at the time of booking to avoid the need for further transactions. This is why the service is setting its fees and charges for 2024/25 in the current financial year.
6. In reviewing the current fees and charges for 2022/23 and 2023/24 and having carried out a benchmarking exercise with other registration services in the South East region, Surrey Registration & Nationality Service is also

proposing to uplift its fees by 5% for 2024/25 in line with inflation. More detail can be found in Annex 1 to this report. This increase will allow the service to continue to deliver a high-quality service for customers in supporting all key life events within the county.

#### **Financial and value for money implications:**

7. The increases only relate to the fees that can be set locally and discretionary services offered in addition to the core statutory offer. Customers have a choice whether they wish to pay for, and receive, these additional services. Any customers experiencing financial hardship are able to choose a statutory ceremony at a cost of £46, which is the statutory fee set by the Registrar General for England & Wales. The Registrar also has power to waive these fees in certain circumstances.
8. Based on existing demand, the fee increase will achieve the MTFS income target. This will enable the service to continue to meet customer demand.

#### **Section 151 Officer commentary:**

9. Although significant progress has been made to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2022/23 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.
10. As such the Section 151 Officer supports the recommendation.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:**

11. The legislation governing the powers to charge for registration services is set out in the Marriage Act 1949, and the Civil Partnership Act 2004. The Registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Fees) Regulations 2016 ("the Fees Regulations 2016") sets out the level of statutory fees for the core service of attendance of a Registrar attending a marriage at a register office of £46 and attending a marriage at a registered building at £86. Regulation 3 gives discretion to the Registrar to reduce, waive or refund all or part of the statutory fee on the grounds of hardship, compassion, or error.

#### **Equalities and diversity:**

12. An EIA was not completed because this proposal is an alignment and adjustment of existing fees and charges for the purpose of creating parity; not an introduction of new charges that might inadvertently disadvantage those with different protected characteristics.

**Other implications:**

13. The potential implications for the following Council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

<b>Area assessed:</b>	<b>Direct Implications:</b>
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications arising from this report
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report
Public Health	No significant implications arising from this report

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

14. If approved, the following actions will be undertaken:
- a. The changes to fees and charges as set out in this report will be adopted with immediate effect.
  - b. Public information on the Council's website and other information sources will be updated accordingly, so that customers are made aware of the change as soon as possible.
  - c. Registration fees and charges will be kept under regular review as part of the budget setting process and may be adjusted again in future should the need arise.

**Contact Officer:**

Adeel Hussain, Registration Service Manager & Proper Officer - 07971 665 502

**Consulted:**

Strategic Finance Business Partner – Nicola O'Connor  
Executive Director Customer & Communities – Marie Snelling  
Cabinet Member – Councillor Mark Nuti

**Annexes:**

Annex 1: Regional benchmarking and proposed fees and charges for 2024/25

**Sources/background papers:**

General Register Office: Proper Officers' Guide to Registration Services in England & Wales (Section 1: Paragraphs 1.23 – 1.25) Issued April 2022

[Fees for other types of ceremonies - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk)