

Title of Meeting:	Resources Portfolio
Subject:	Extension of Ceremony Hours
Date of decision:	7 th March 2013
Report by:	Head of Customer, Community & Democratic Services
Wards affected:	All
Key decision (over £250k):	No

1. Purpose

This report is to advise of changes in the law (introduced via the Freedoms Bill) which now enable local authorities to offer marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at any time outside of the previous constraints of 8.00am to 6.00pm.

In addition it seeks approval of the recommendations listed below

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- a. The Council decides, as a matter of course, to book ceremonies up to a new, later specified time of 7.00pm.

AND

- b. In addition to the above, flexibility is given to book ceremonies to/at a later time on a case by case basis.

3. Background

Until the 1st October 2012 legislation stipulated that all weddings/civil partnerships had to be concluded by 6.00pm. We currently offer ceremonies from 9am to 5.15pm and that could remain as the changes are permissive and entirely up to each Local Authority to decide what hours they wish to apply.

Portsmouth is unique in many ways as a waterfront city blessed with culture and history and it is felt that the change in legislation could bring further opportunities to share some of the wonderful things about our city on a national level. We are already working with the Head of Culture to get more venues licenced and together with the

opportunity to market events at say midnight on New Year's Eve or Valentine's Day could put a spotlight on what Portsmouth has to offer.

Having undertaken some basic surveying of customers and staff on this matter, it would appear at this stage our customers are fairly ambivalent regarding a change of hours, typically most want the 2pm slot. To a large extent the same applies to discussions we have had with some of our approved premises. Staff were generally happy to consider conducting and registering services at other times but it would of course depend on the level of remuneration available.

If we are to offer the proposed extension to hours, it would mean higher staff costs as we would need two staff working together at all times during the extended hours for health and safety reasons and staff would be entitled to additional payment when working outside of their core hours - particularly if we expect them to work at midnight on New Year for example.

During discussion the following fees were suggested by staff. The first set are what we will be charging for 2013/2014 and the fees in **bold** are what the staff thought we ought to charge at the time of the discussion. It was generally felt, that a simple system of £100 on top of the "usual" fee ought to be charged for the early evening ceremonies with a further £200 on top of that added for later evening ceremonies.

Day of the week	9.00am-5.15pm	5.30pm-7.00pm	7.30pm-10.00pm
Monday-Thursday	£380	£480	£680
Friday	£400	£500	£700
Saturday	£475	£575	£775
Sunday/bank holiday	£575	£675	£875

It was felt that after 10.00 p.m. the charge for these days should be £1000.

It was also felt that the £1000 could be charged for anytime on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Portsmouth City Council may charge whatever fee they wish though we should be mindful, naturally, that we could be challenged on the figures. The only other Local Authority who appears to have set their later hour ceremony fees is Oxfordshire and these are comparable to our proposals.

It is important that the fee structure for the public and the pay structure for the staff are considered in tandem. This would ensure that the correct level of fees are charged, achieving greater income for the Local Authority, whilst suitably recompensing staff for working these extra unsociable hours.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment is not required as the recommendations do not have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010.

5. Legal Comments

Legal advice is contained within the body of this report.

6. Finance Comments

The additional costs of providing ceremonies outside of current time constraints will be met by the charges proposed in the table above and will be reviewed as part of the annual review of fees & charges. At this stage, budget provision has not been made for this extension of service as the potential take up is unknown. It should be noted that the budget for the Registrar’s Service is included within the Governance and Audit Committee.

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Signed by:

Appendices:

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/
deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: