

SCRUTINY ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES	INTERNAL AFFAIRS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	17 APRIL 2024	4
WEDDING SERVICE			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The report provides a review of the service and performance since the Wedding Service carried out at St Anne's Town Hall was introduced in 2018

SOURCE OF REFERRAL

Referral from Scrutiny Workplan.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Link to Website - [Weddings at Fylde – A stunning wedding venue on the Fylde Coast](#)

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATION

To comment on the operation of the Wedding Service and make any suggestions on its enhancement going forward.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

1. In 2016, following a suggestion to improve income generation for the council as an observation made in the Council's Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge Report, the Self-Sufficient Officer Working Group was established to consider income generation. One idea for income generation was providing a wedding service at the Town Hall in St Annes.
2. A recent refurbishment of the Town Hall had just been completed with a new Council Chamber created together with a redecoration of the Reception Room, thereby making it an ideal time to utilise and maximise the spaces available as a wedding venue.
3. The Town Hall also provides a unique venue for weddings with its location overlooking the sea front which provides a fantastic backdrop.
4. Members of the Self-Sufficient Officer Working Group visited Wyre Council, who also offered wedding ceremonies within its Council Chamber and Members Lounge, to see the operation at first hand. Following

the advice and information provided by Wyre Council and viewing a wedding in situ, officers believed that the operation could also be successfully adopted at Fylde whilst generating an income for the council.

5. As an outcome in June 2018, the Town Hall Reception Room was utilised for the first time as a wedding venue.
6. The initiative was initially offered on a trial basis for 12 months, subject to operational requirement with a review thereafter. Following the trial the service was embedded as a permanent service.

INITIAL SET UP OF THE SERVICE

7. The original setup cost was minimal with cosmetic silk flower displays being procured, together with tablecloths and chair coverings. The cost of this was met from existing budgets.
8. A license was obtained to carry out the wedding ceremony via a Registrar through Lancashire County Council, the licence provides the status of an "Approved Premises" to allow legal ceremonies to be conducted on the premises by a registrar.
9. In addition, a license for the consumption of alcohol but not the sale of, on the premises was authorised to allow for and compliment the wedding service provided.
10. A Wedding Booking Form including Terms and Conditions, Appendix 1 has been produced.
11. Training for employees managing the wedding ceremonies has been carried out together with training notes established.
12. Promoting the facility through Facebook and word of mouth was initially used to increase publicity, and social media remains the main method of promotion. In addition, several open days have also taken place to promote the service.

WEDDING CEREMONY OPERATION

13. The main elements involved in the operation comprise setting up the room including decoration arrangements, seating, and taking care of the audio arrangements. Another operational facet is meeting guests as they arrive and directing them accordingly.
14. The Reception Room is used for the wedding ceremonies allowing the use of the Members Room for the Registrar preparations ahead of the service. The Council Chamber can also be used if requested to allow for a drinks service consisting of canapes and drinks after the ceremony.
15. Drinks and canapes are sourced and provided by the wedding party at their own cost; however, a corkage fee is made.
16. To access the Reception Room, members of the groom, bridal party and wedding guests enter the Town Hall via the main door located on the promenade. The corridor areas and stairs are temporarily closed off to other members of the public and employees for the duration of ceremony. If a wedding is carried out Monday to Friday, employees working in the Town Hall are provided with sufficient notice to advise of the temporary restrictions and politely reminded to keep noise levels to a minimum in and around the Reception Room to ensure the wedding ceremony remains private and respected.
17. Subject to availability and operational requirements, the Town Hall is available seven days a week for wedding ceremonies.
18. For weddings ceremonies taking place on a weekend, staff managing the service take time off in lieu as opposed to overtime.
19. The size of the weddings ranges from small and intimate, to much larger occasions. We cater for up to 80 people in the Reception Room. One wedding service was live streamed in order that the service could be viewed by relatives abroad and an additional 80 guests viewed the live stream in the council chamber.

WEDDING CEREMONY FEES AND CHARGES

20. The wedding fees are set within the Fees and Charges Schedule annually. The initial fees from inception were charged at:
Monday to Friday £350
Saturday, Sunday, and Bank Holidays £550
21. Following a price review carried out in 2022, our current fees and charges are as follows:

Monday to Friday - £450
 Saturday, Sunday, and Bank Holidays - £650
 Corkage per bottle - £10

22. In comparison, Wyre Council’s weddings and civil partnerships fees for the hire of either the Council Chamber or the Members Lounge for a Civil Ceremony back in 2016 were Monday to Friday £330 and Saturday £650. Their current fees are Monday to Friday £350 and Saturday and Sunday £650.

COSTS/INCOME

23. The success of the service has been greater than originally anticipated. Initial conversations with Wyre Council anticipated a slow uptake with up to 1-3 wedding ceremonies in year one with the potential to increase the bookings gradually over 3-4 years. In the first full year, 13 ceremonies took place. However, due to Covid many bookings for 2020 had to be cancelled. Upon resuming ceremonies, we average around 12 ceremonies a year. In comparison, Wyre Council carries out up to 15 weddings per year.
24. During the past 5 years there have been 53 ceremonies to date with another 6 bookings for 2024, at the time of producing this report.
25. Total income generated so far amount to approx. £25,000.

Income for ceremonies		Number of ceremonies	Total income
Mon-Friday	£350	37	£12,600
Sat, Sun, Bank Holidays	£550	11	£6,050
From April 2023			
Mon-Friday	£450	3	£1,800
Sat, Sun, Bank Holidays	£650	6	£3,900
		57	
Corkage Charges			£710
Total Income			£25,060

26. Weekdays, especially Fridays have proven to be a popular choice.
27. The main costs involved are due to resource for the time taken to set up and dissemble the venue for the ceremony. There are also small costs involved for the time allocated to making bookings and responding to any enquiries. The Admin Support and Facilities Team manage and resource the service, which is absorbed within the team's budget, there is no separate budget for the wedding service.
28. The time it takes to set up the rooms for a ceremony depends on how many guests will be attending; the average time for a small ceremony of between 5 and 30 guests would take 2 employees approximately 4 hours, for a larger ceremony of between 30 and 70 guests would take 2 employees approximately 5 hours to set up.
29. If the customers require a drinks service after the ceremony, this will take 2 members of staff another 1 hour to set up the public gallery and council chamber to accommodate this.
30. Although the actual ceremony only takes 30 minutes, the wedding party and guests can stay on average 1-2 hours after the ceremony for photographs. Taking down of the wedding set up usually takes on average 1 hour with the custodians helping put the furniture back in place.
31. The average cost totals £261 which covers the above requirements.
32. There are also annual License fees as detailed later in this report along with the cost and upkeep of the venue decorations and consumables.
33. Promotion and marketing of the wedding service is carried out via a dedicated website and social media, links are available at the end of the report. Other than the initial set up, there are no further costs involved.

34. Competitions have been created to promote the service which have included a free wedding and discounts on the service fee to generate publicity and further bookings.

LICENCE

35. Lancashire County Council Registration Service charge an annual Licence Fee of £200.
36. A condition of the Licence agreement states that a "Responsible person" must be named on the licence and must be present during a ceremony. We currently have 5 staff members on this list to allow for resource flexibility.
37. Part of the licence agreement is that 2 parking spaces are made available for the 2 registrars attending.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

38. Since the wedding service began, the income totals £25,060 with a net profit of £10,060 being generated after costs as outlined.

FEEDBACK

39. Since inception, the ceremonies have all been conducted without any incidents therefore enhancing the Council's reputation in delivering high quality services.
40. After the ceremony, the team approach's the newly married couple for feedback. Some of the positive comments are captured below:
"A wonderful venue for a wedding; the room looked beautiful. Maria and her team have great attention to detail and helped make our day extra special. Thank you. "
"Our marriage at the Town Hall was made so special by the kindness and thoughtfulness of all the staff who were more like friends. The setting was fabulous, every stop was pulled out to make our day one we will remember always. We were so taken back by the wonderful room and service."
"St Anne's Town Hall was a wonderful venue for our wedding. The room was decorated beautifully with great detail. We will never forget this day."
"What a wonderful place and what fantastic people! Maria and Shannon could not have been better hosts and witnesses; the room and the arrangements were faultless and helped to make our day very special. Thank you so much!"
"A truly beautiful setting for our special day with our nearest and dearest friends and family."

GROWING THE SERVICE FURTHER

41. The wedding service is managed within an already busy service area, Admin Support and Facilities team, that comprises a small team providing many different core council services to both customers and employees therefore ceremonies must be co-ordinated around the availability of rooms and staff availability.
42. The current wedding bookings are absorbed and managed with the current staffing arrangements. The booking levels are manageable, however with sufficient notice, additional bookings could be catered for.
43. Additional bookings would need to be outside of the main summer season and ideally Monday to Friday if we are to use the same existing resource levels.
44. To increase the bookings significantly would require extra resource. Alternatively, other work would have to be de-prioritised to focus on and carry out the wedding ceremonies, this would impact the council's overall operational services given the nature of the Admin Support and Facilities team main function.
45. To grow the wedding service further would require more advertising to increase and maximise bookings. The service is currently advertised via in-house, free marketing platforms. Ideally 'paid-for' advertising campaigns would be required to increase visibility and booking numbers. There is no budget for the wedding service, with all costs absorbed within the teams existing budget, therefore a new budget would need to be established if this option were to be approved.
46. In addition, a new wedding services publication is currently being compiled by an advertising company who have offered to feature Fylde Council free of charge. Alongside the publication there will also be a website

available. We are hoping this will improve the wedding service visibility which will lead to further bookings that can be accommodated within the existing staffing arrangements.

SUMMARY

47. Most staff and members welcome the wedding service; however, some find it an inconvenience when a ceremony is booked that the rooms and the civic areas are unavailable and that they are not permitted in the area for part, sometimes most of the day.
48. For ceremonies during the week parking can be a problem as it is mainly used by staff and members working at the Town Hall, however a few spaces are needed for the registrars (as part of the licence agreement) and a space for the wedding car, also any disabled wedding guests may need to be accommodated.
49. The impact on the Town Hall is minimal for ceremonies during the week, most ceremonies tend to be on a Friday when the Town Hall is generally quieter, and weekends and Bank Holidays has no impact at all.
50. Despite the challenges, the reputation of the Council has been enhanced through the Wedding Service, by providing a high-quality service in a unique venue within a historic building and offering stunning traditional décor in the Town Hall. Also, we have a beautiful coastline and local features like the bandstand and promenade gardens waterfall for unique photo opportunities right on our doorstep. This can be shown by the many positive feedback/reviews received from many couples that have had their ceremonies with us.
51. The wedding service has been a successful project, albeit with a modest profit made to date it is believed that the popularity of the Town Hall as a wedding venue will continue to be just as successful in future years as we look to grow and continually improve the service within its current operating constraints.
52. If the bookings are to be increased, additional planned resource and an appropriate budget would need to be established whilst acknowledging the impact to the council's core services, which may occur. Either way, the priority will continue to ensure there is minimal negative impact to staff, members and customers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS REVELANT TO THIS ITEM		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Main Council Wedding Website		https://weddings.fylde.gov.uk
Social Media Wedding Website		https://www.facebook.com/WeddingsatFylde

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Attached documents

Appendix 1 – Wedding Booking Form