



City of Westminster Cabinet Member Report

Meeting or Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Sports, Leisure and Open Spaces Cllr Steve Summers
Date:	24 September 2014
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Westminster Registration Service Fees and Charges
Wards Affected:	All
Better City, Better Lives Summary	A More Enterprising City by promoting use of the local economy
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	Review of fees and venues to cover inflation and generate income to recover costs of service delivery. Additional net income projections: 2014/15 £40,000; 2015/16 £134,000 These are planned to further reduce the projected financial deficit and combined with previously implemented initiatives should eliminate the ceremonies income deficit by 2015/16.
Report of:	Tri-borough Director of Libraries

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Registration Service last reviewed its ceremonial fees and charges in March 2014. It runs a rolling two year booking diary and in January 2015 the booking diary is extended by another year up to December 2016, meaning bookings can be taken for the calendar year 2016. Any new bookings will be made based on the latest approved fees and charges.
- 1.2 The fees and charges review has highlighted the need to increase ceremony fees above inflation in some cases. The fees proposed result from analysis relating to

efficiency targets, benchmarking and profiling of customer demand based on their residence.

Mayfair Library is not able to meet demand for all ceremonies due to restrictions on capacity and DDA-compliant access, therefore an additional venue has been procured in Westminster, which will require its own set of fees.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Cabinet member

- Approves the proposals for ceremony fees at Mayfair Library (3% to 17% increases)
- Approves the proposals for Approved Venue fees (2% to 4% increases)
- Approves the proposal to increase the booking fee (by £25)
- Approves the proposals for ceremony fees at the partnership venue

as set out in the benchmarking and proposed fees set out below.

- Approves taking Notice of Intention (to marry) fees in advance of the appointment as opposed to on the day
- Approves the ability to charge new citizens a cost recovery fee for attending a group citizenship ceremony hosted at an external venue

3. Reasons for Decision

3.1 The service reviews its charges at least annually and uses benchmarking analysis and customer demand to inform this process, as well as working towards a strategic objective of becoming cost neutral to the Council.

3.2 Any new bookings are made based on the latest approved fees and charges. Due to the nature of bookings being in advance, there is a lead in time for financial impacts, therefore the annual cycle of review is recommended to be earlier in the financial year.

4. Background, including Policy Context

4.1 Charges for registration services fall into two categories - statutory and non-statutory. Charges for Statutory services are set by the Registrar General under the Marriage Act 1949 and cannot be amended. Local authorities can set charges for non-statutory services. Specific rooms in City Hall have been designated as the 'register office' with only statutory charging applicable. In order to provide greater customer choice, Mayfair Library has been designated as an 'approved venue' (as per The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 1995, and the fees set are discretionary.

4.2 Benchmarking with surrounding districts has formed part of the process of as well as the need to recover cost. Fees for Mayfair Library must and do remain competitive whilst the Old Marylebone Town Hall (OMTH) is closed for refurbishment until early

2016. The service objective is to make Mayfair Library the marriage venue of choice for couples who would otherwise have chosen to have their ceremony at OMTH, rather than losing their custom to another district.

- 4.3 As Mayfair Library does not meet demand for larger capacity ceremonies and is not DDA-compliant, a partnership DDA-compliant venue has been procured as part of the “in-house” ceremony offer.
- 4.4 Maximising bookings at Mayfair and other approved licensed venues contributes to the Council’s Better City Better Lives vision (**A More Enterprising City**) by encouraging couples to use local businesses for their ceremonies and receptions.
- 4.5 A review of neighbouring authorities’ ceremony charges for 2014/15 has been presented in the table below alongside proposed fee changes to Westminster ceremony fees for comparative purposes.
- 4.6 Notice of Intention (to marry) fees are paid by the customer when the appointment is attended. The option to book Notice appointments will soon be available online. To mitigate the risk of customers booking multiple appointments and subsequently cancelling with no time to re-fill, it is proposed to take a booking fee. When the appointment is attended the fee will be transferred to become the statutory notice fee. Should the customer not attend or cancel outside of the required period the fee is to be transferred to a VAT-able income code.
- 4.7 Group citizenship ceremony offerings are currently restricted to City Hall on Monday mornings. The opportunity exists to provide customers with greater choice at superior venues by hosting ceremonies externally. This would be managed by charging an additional per head fee per citizen to recover the cost of room hire.

Benchmarking and Proposed Fees

AUTHORITY	PRICES (2014/15)			Comment
Marylebone Room (22 guests)	Monday - Thursday	Friday - Saturday & Weekdays after 5:00 pm	Sunday	
Westminster (current)	£175	£245	£300	
Islington (12 guests)	£300	£580	£700	Mayor's Parlour
Camden (30 guests)	£120	£150	£228	Ceremony Suite
Kensington & Chelsea (12 guests)	£185	£210	N/A	Rosetti Room
Westminster (proposed)	£205	£255	£315	
% Change of current to proposed	17%	4%	5%	

Mayfair Room (38 guests)	Monday - Thursday	Friday - Saturday & weekdays after 5:00 pm	Sunday	Comment
Westminster (current)	£300	£320	£425	
Islington (100 guests)	£200	£300 (Fri) £580 (Sat)	£700	Council Chambers option
Camden (40 guests)	£229	£455	£578	Average cost of various rooms and prices
Kensington & Chelsea (38 guests)	£350	£450 (Sat)	£575	Brydon Room +£100 to fee for evenings
Westminster (proposed)	£310	£345	£445	
% Change of current to proposed	3%	8%	5%	

Approved Venues	Monday - Friday	Saturday	Sunday / Bank Holiday	Evenings after 5pm	Comment
Westminster (current)	£360	£435	£540	£540	
Islington	£500	£500	£600 / £900	£600 / £700 From 6pm onwards	
Camden	£418	£478	£578 / £658	£478 / £658	
Kensington & Chelsea	£350	£450	£575	+ £100 to fee From 6pm onwards	
Westminster (proposed)	£375	£445	£560	£560	
% Change of current to proposed	4%	2%	4%	4%	

All prices exclude non-refundable booking fees

AUTHORITY	PRICES (2014/15)	Comment
Booking Fee		
Westminster (current)	£50 Non-refundable booking fee	
Islington	£100 Non-refundable deposit	
Camden	£75 Non-refundable deposit	
Kensington & Chelsea	£125 Non-refundable booking fee	
Westminster (proposed)	£75 increased	Cost of administering the booking has increased
% Change of current to proposed	50%	

AUTHORITY	PRICES (2014/15)		Comment
Partnership Venue	Friday - Saturday	Sunday	
Westminster (proposed)			Currently no benchmark offering
Fine room 1 (100 guests)	£625	£725	
Fine room 2 (80 guests)	£525	£625	
Fine room 3 / Library / Hutchinson (30-40 guests)	£345	£445	

All prices exclude non-refundable booking fees

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Fees and charges are reviewed to cover inflation, generate additional income to recover the cost of service delivery. The service is currently operating at a financial deficit since moving its ceremonies to Mayfair Library due to the impact on income from reduced premises capacity. The projected deficit is £150,000 for 2014/15 after generating a net additional income of £40,000 from this report. The proposals set out below, combined with earlier implemented initiatives, are planned to eliminate the deficit by 2015/16, subject to continued customer demand: Once the venue partnership is operational from October, capacity to provide ceremonies will equate to former OMTM levels. This enables demand for advance bookings for ceremonies taking place in Spring/Summer 2015 (high season) to be met, and eliminate the current year deficit arising from reduced capacity and seasonal fluctuation by 2015/16.
- 5.3 Projected income arising from the proposals is set out in the table below. Income projections are modelled based on either i) appointments offered at Mayfair Library, ii) demand assumptions at the new partner venue, or iii) actual activity levels for external Venue weddings in recent months. It includes an estimated additional staff resource to deliver this activity.

Proposal	September to March 2014/15	2015/16	Comments
Mayfair Library			
Increased booking fee	£16,000	£38,000	Based on appointments per week – 31 during low season (Autumn/Winter); 37 during high season (Spring/Summer)*
Increased ceremony fee	£12,000	£30,000	
Venues			
Increased booking fee	£2,000	£13,000	Based on actual activity according to seasonal trends*
Increased ceremony fee	£1,000	£7,000	
Partnership Venue			
Additional	£31,000	£133,000	Modelled on a 3 day a week shared income arrangement based on appointments per week – 6 during low season; 12-18 during high season
Resource Cost			
Additional staffing hours	(£22,000)	(£87,000)	
Net Income	£40,000	£134,000	

* Additional income relates to **new** bookings at new price structure only. Currently 308 ceremonies at Mayfair Library and 363 ceremonies at Venues pre-booked up to December 2015 to which increased fees not applicable.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The legal implications are contained within the body of this report.

7. Staffing Implications

7.1 There are no staffing implications.

8. Consultation

8.1 There is no consultation required

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact:

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

For completion by the **Cabinet Member** for Sports, Leisure and Open Spaces

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____
NAME: _____

State nature of interest if any
.....

(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled *Westminster Registration Service Ceremonies Fees and Charges* and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Cabinet Member for the Sports, Leisure and Open Spaces

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
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If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Chief Operating Officer and, if there are resources implications, the Director of Human Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.