

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

## **REVIEW OF MARRIAGE ROOM ARRANGEMENTS**

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### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report contains a proposal to decommission the marriage room at Birkenhead Town Hall, and introduce a new scale of fees for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at Birkenhead Town Hall and the Round Room at Wallasey Town Hall.

### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

2.1 Currently couples wishing to have a civil marriage ceremony or a civil partnership ceremony on the Wirral are offered marriages and civil partnerships at Wirral Register Office (Birkenhead Town Hall) and Wallasey Town Hall (Round Room). Couples may also choose to be married in a number of approved premises where a separate fee is charged (see paragraph 3.4 below).

2.2 The fees for marriage in Birkenhead and Wallasey Town Hall are £43.50 (£40.00 for the ceremony and £3.50 for the marriage certificate). The fees for marriage at the register office are statutory fees set by Parliament. By law, the Council is required to offer a room within the Register Office where marriages and civil partnerships can take place for the statutory fee of £43.40.

2.3 The fees for weddings and civil partnerships on a Saturday do not cover the costs of opening up the building, heating, lighting and 2 attendants. The costs of this are approximately £183.82 to open up Wallasey Town Hall on a Saturday and £248.50 for Birkenhead Town Hall (not including the Register Office staff).

### **3.0 PROPOSAL**

3.1 It is proposed that Wirral Register Office marriage room will become the Superintendent Registrar's office at Birkenhead Town Hall. Small marriage parties of up to 6 people could use this room for the statutory fee of £43.50.

3.2 The current marriage room would be redesignated as an Approved Premise and as such the authority would be able to set a discretionary fee. This would allow a similar charge to be levied for The Round Room in Wallasey which is already an approved premise.

3.3 Other Merseyside authorities that have a Local Authority owned Approved Premise charge the following fees:

Liverpool City Council	£100	
Sefton MBC	£100 (Monday – Friday)	£120 Saturday

Halton Council	£77 (Friday afternoon)	£103 Saturday
Knowsley	£90 (Monday – Friday)	£120 Saturday

3.4 The fees would be on a 'sliding scale' depending on which day of the week the couple wish to marry, which is the system currently operated for outside venues. The charges for 2007/2008 for outside venues are

- Monday to Friday £263.50,
- Saturday £299.50,
- Sunday & Bank Holidays £357.50.

3.5 The fees for the ceremony rooms at Birkenhead and Wallasey would be:

- Monday to Thursday £70.00
- Friday £90.00
- Saturday (Mornings only) £114.00

These fees are felt to be comparable with other Merseyside authorities. Weddings only take place in the Round Room on Friday Afternoons and Saturday mornings so the same fees would apply.

#### **4.0 IMPLEMENTATION**

4.1 It is recognised that many couples have already given notice of their intention to hold their ceremony at Wallasey or Birkenhead and therefore it is proposed to implement the new scheme for couples who register their intention to hold their ceremony at Birkenhead Town Hall or Wallasey after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. Couples who have already given notice will be charged the current fee, whenever their ceremony will be held.

4.2 In addition, the General Register Office would need to be informed and the marriage room at Birkenhead would have to be licensed by the authority as an approved premise.

#### **5.0 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

5.1 This proposal links to the Council's Strategic Objective of 'creating an excellent Council' and the Council's aim for 2008-2013 to 'create a sustainable and stable budget providing value for money'.

#### **6.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 It is anticipated that an additional £14,000 of income would be generated by the decommissioning of the marriage room at Birkenhead Town Hall.

#### **7.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are none arising from this report. Couples would still be able to have their ceremony conducted at the Register Office in Birkenhead for the statutory fee.

#### **8.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **9.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **10.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no human rights implications from this report.

## **11.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **12.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT**

12.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **13.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

That

(1) the marriage room at Birkenhead Town Hall be decommissioned as set out in the report; and

(2) the revised scale of fees, as set out in paragraph 3.5, be implemented for those couples giving notice of their intention to marry, or have a civil partnership ceremony at Wallasey or Birkenhead from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.