

# Registrars Ceremony Fees Review 2027

Date: 25 October 2024

Report of: Superintendent Registrar

Report to: Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

The Registrars service applies an annual increase to ceremony fees. This report proposes that a delegated decision is taken to approve revised fees for the period 1 January to 31 December 2027.

## Recommendations

- a) That a delegated decision is taken to approve the proposed fee increases

### What is this report about?

- 1.1 The Registrars service applies an annual increase to ceremony fees. This helps to cover service costs and contributes towards the council's overall income levels. Fees have previously been approved by delegated decision up to 31 December 2026. This report proposes revised fees for the period 1 January to 31 December 2027.
- 1.2 Under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 Local authorities are empowered to set a fee of an amount reasonably representing all the costs for staff attending a marriage or civil partnership ceremony at 'Approved Premises'. This includes ceremonies taking place at hotels and conference venues as well as Leeds Civic Hall, which has been licensed as an Approved premise.
- 1.3 Ceremony fees are separated into the following bands, with associated 2026 fees. The fee includes a provisional booking fee (£44) and the certificate fee (£12.50):

#### Civic Hall

Monday	£112.50	(West Room)
Tuesday – Thursday	£360	(West Room)
Friday	£460	(West Room)
Saturday	£510	(West Room)
Saturday	£575	(Banquet Hall)

Saturday	£535	(Conference Room)
Saturday	£575	(Council Chamber)

### Approved Premises

Monday – Thursday	£680
Friday	£770
Saturday	£840
Sunday/Bank Holiday	£940

1.4 **Table 1** shows the distribution of ceremonies and income across the different daily bands for the 12 months from **16 September 2023 to 15 September 2024**.

These ceremony volumes are shown alongside projected 2026 income levels. The proportion of total ceremony income for each daily band is also shown, highlighting that the largest share of income derives from Saturday ceremonies at Approved premises (\*). These volumes will later be used to show projected income for 2027. However, it should be noted that there are generally annual fluctuations in the demand and distribution of ceremonies.

**Table 1 Ceremony Income and Distribution**

Leeds Civic Hall	Total no. of Ceremonies	Total projected income 2026 (£k)	% share of total income
Monday	127	14	1
Tuesday-Thursday	501	180	18
Friday	226	104	10
Saturday (West Room)	275	140	14
Saturday (Conference Room)	40	21	2
Saturday (Banquet Hall)	189	109	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1358</b>	<b>568</b>	
<b>Approved premises</b>			
Monday-Thursday	89	61	6
Friday	83	64	7
Saturday	309	260	26 *
Sunday	48	45	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>430</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1887</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>100</b>

1.5 As many customers choose to book ceremonies well in advance, the appropriate fees must be in place on our ceremony booking system at an early stage to ensure that customers can book a ceremony and that the correct fee can be collected.

- 1.6 Leeds Civic Hall is the “Register Office” venue for ceremonies in Leeds with ceremonies taking place in the West room on Mondays to Saturdays and in the Banquet Hall on Saturdays only. On the occasions when these rooms are unavailable, for example due to noise issues during the Millennium Square Summer concert series, the Conference room at the rear of the building and the Council Chamber can be used. However, the Council Chamber is not a popular option and an income opportunity of up to £23k is lost to the service by not having a suitable 2<sup>nd</sup> ceremony room available during these weeks.
- 1.7 Although demand for ceremonies fluctuates, the service usually performs between 1800 and 1900 ceremonies a year with around two thirds taking place at the Civic Hall and the remainder at other approved venues eg hotels.
- 1.8 A non-refundable £44 booking fee is charged for all ceremony bookings. It forms part of, and is deducted from the ceremony fee, and is in effect a deposit. Any change to a ceremony booking will require a new booking fee to be paid. The balance of the ceremony fee is payable 2 weeks after the couple give notice.
- 1.9 The statutory ceremony fee is currently £68.50, comprising £56 for the ceremony and £12.50 for the certificate, plus £44 booking fee. In Leeds, as in a number of other Local authorities, availability of the statutory ceremonies is limited. In Leeds, one Monday each month is assigned for statutory ceremonies.
- 1.10 In view of the substantial increases applied to ceremony fees in recent years (£421k total additional projected income over the 2022 income estimate, representing an overall 74% increase), we need to ensure that our fees remain competitive and do not lead to a reduction in demand as customers seek cheaper service providers ie other local authorities or private celebrants.
- 1.11 Competition within the ceremony market is likely to be strongest amongst adjoining authorities. The Yorkshire area has a wide range of ceremony fees, reflecting the varying levels of affluence and popularity of the areas covered. Currently, ceremony fees in Leeds are significantly higher than most other neighbouring authorities despite the quality of facilities being markedly inferior.
- 1.12 Table 2 shows the comparative 2024 ceremony fees (£) for Leeds and neighbouring local authorities.

**Table 2 2024 Fees**

	<b>Leeds</b>	Bradford	Nth Yorks	Wakefield	York	Kirklees	Calderdale
<b>Register Office</b>							
Tues – Thu	<b>325</b>	175/185	275	152/269	311	312.50	180
Fri	<b>420</b>	205	275	189/325	423	407.50	250
Sat	<b>460/525</b>	245	350	189/325	423	407.50	300
Sun/BH			350				
<b>Approved premises</b>							
Mon- Thu	<b>620</b>	445	475	432	644	577.50	450
Fri	<b>700</b>	508	575	560	747	577.50	500
Sat	<b>765</b>	551	575	560	747	602.50	550
Sun/BH	<b>855</b>	615	575	578	807	602.50	600

- 1.13 It is proposed that no overall increase is applied to the statutory Monday ceremony fee (£112.50). This will ensure that an affordable option remains available. However, it is recognised that a growing number of customers are choosing to hold a statutory ceremony and are following this up by having an independent celebrant perform a celebratory ceremony at a different location eg a hotel at a fee which is less than we currently charge.

- 1.14 Following the initial approval of 2026 ceremony fees in September 2023, fees have been subject to a second increase from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 owing to the council's budget shortfall. This meant, for example, that the Saturday fee for a Civic Hall West room ceremony increased overall by £35 (7%) over the 2025 fee, and a Saturday Approved venues ceremony by £50 (6%).
- 1.15 It is therefore proposed that for all other ceremonies a rounded 3% increase is applied to the approved 2026 fees. This will create increases ranging between £10 and £25 per ceremony.
- 1.16 The proposed fees for 2027 and projected additional income are shown in Table 3

**Table 3 Proposed 2027 Fees and Projected additional income**

Civic Hall	Existing 2026 Fee £	Projected 2026 income total £		Proposed 2027 fee £	Increase amount £	Projected income total 2027 £	Projected additional income £
Monday	112.50	14		112.50	-	14	0
Tuesday-Thursday	360	180		370	10	185	5
Friday	460	104		475	15	107	3
Saturday (West room)	510	140		525	15	144	4
Saturday (Conference room)	535	21		550	15	22	1
Saturday (Banquet Hall)	575	109		595	20	112	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>568</b>				<b>584</b>	<b>+16</b>
<b>Approved premises</b>							
Monday-Thursday	680	61		700	20	62	1
Friday	770	64		795	25	66	2
Saturday	840	260		865	25	267	7
Sunday	940	45		965	25	46	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>430</b>				<b>441</b>	<b>+11</b>
<b>Overall projected income</b>		<b>998</b>				<b>1025</b>	<b>+27</b>

- 1.17 The proposed fee changes for 2027 are expected to generate a total £1,025k ceremonies income, an estimated additional £27k. This would be split proportionately across 2026/27 and 2027/28 due to the increase being applied from 1 January 2027 (until 31 December 2027). Ceremonies taking place between 1 January and 31 March typically account for approximately 15% of annual ceremony income (£4k) leaving £23k to be assigned to 2027/28.

**What impact will this proposal have?**

- 2.1 Setting fees in advance will allow couples to book their ceremony at an early stage.

- 2.2 The proposal is expected to generate £27k additional income in 2027 where current levels of demand continue. This will help to cover service costs.
- 2.3 The higher fees may put the cost of a ceremony in Leeds out of reach for some customers.
- 2.4 Alternatively, the option of cheaper ceremony venues across the region risks customers choosing other providers for their marriage or civil partnership ceremony.

**How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

- Health and Wellbeing       Inclusive Growth       Zero Carbon

- 3.1 Retention of the minimum ceremony fee ensures that we are still able to offer an affordable ceremony option.
- 3.2 An Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening has been completed.

**What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- 4.1 Under the relevant legislation there is no requirement for a public consultation on increasing ceremony fees.
- 4.2 It has not been possible to bench-mark against 2027 fees charged by other local authorities as these fees have not yet been made available elsewhere.
- 4.3 Councillor Coupar as Executive Member has been consulted regarding the proposed fees and the risk that demand for ceremonies in Leeds may reduce due to the high fee levels.

**What are the resource implications?**

- 5 There are no additional resource implications.

**What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 6.1 Failure to implement the fee increases will impact on service running costs and may result in the service failing to meet its budget.
- 6.2 The Approved premises legislation requires that fees are charged on a cost-recovery basis only. We may need to respond to HMRC, Freedom of Information or audit challenges to justify fee levels/increases.
- 6.3 There is a risk that setting fees which are significantly higher than other local authorities may deter customers from booking a ceremony in Leeds. Setting fees too high may also impact on low-earning customers.
- 6.4 Where proposals following the Law Commission’s recent review of marriages are implemented, enabling private celebrants to legally officiate at ceremonies, this is likely to result in a significant reduction in the number of ceremonies performed by the Register Office, along with a corresponding reduction in income. The impact of this will be seen all the more where fees continue to rise.
- 6.5 Despite the retention of the £112.50 Monday ceremony fee, customers facing poverty may still struggle to find a suitable and affordable ceremony date owing to the popularity of this service and the difficulty in securing a booking.

## **What are the legal implications?**

- 7.1 The council may be open to legal challenge where fees are perceived to exceed the costs of providing the service.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

- 8.1 The option to maintain fees at 2026 levels was considered but was not taken up due to the council's need to meet future budgets.

### **How will success be measured?**

- 9.1 By measuring the impact of implementing the proposed fee increases on the demand for ceremonies. Despite the rising fees, there is no evidence yet that demand for ceremonies is reducing.

### **What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

- 10.1 Fee increases are applied annually. The proposed fees would be implemented on 1 January 2027.

## **Appendices**

- Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening

## **Background papers**

- None