

**GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE
6 APRIL 2021**

**REVIEW OF LICENCE AS A PREMISE APPROVED FOR MARRIAGES AND
CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS**

Town Hall, Darlington

Purpose of Report

1. To review the arrangements for marriages and civil partnerships in the Town Hall Darlington to ensure business continuity in accordance with the provisions of:
 - The Marriage Act 1949 (as amended by the Marriage Act 1994),
 - The Civil Partnership Act (2004)
 - The Marriage and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005, and
 - The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013)

Information

2. The Register Office relocated from the Dolphin Centre to the Town Hall, Darlington in October 2016 and has since then been a successful choice for couples for a register office marriage or civil partnership.
There are currently three options for couples:

<i>Area</i>	<i>Maximum number of persons who can attend (without any government restrictions)</i>
The Statutory Marriage Room (former Radio Cleveland Office)	7 people (the couple, two witnesses and one photographer and two registrars)
Council Chamber Foyer	20 people (the couple, 17 guests, one photographer and two registrars)
The Council Chamber	70 people (the couple, 64 guests, two photographers and two registrars)

Background

3. Marriages and Civil Partnerships can take place in one of four places:
 - (a) A religious building;
 - (b) A register office statutory marriage/civil partnership room (the couple being married/civil partners and two witnesses only)(our statutory marriage room is currently the former radio cleveland office adjacent to committee room 3);
 - (c) A register office ceremony room other than the statutory room which is known as a “decommissioned marriage room” ie. the Council Chamber or Council Chamber Foyer.
 - (d) A building approved by the local authority deemed suitable as a venue for civil marriages and civil partnerships. Known as an “approved venue” most of these are hotels, museums and leisure-based venues.

In addition to the three venues within the register office accommodation at the Town Hall, Darlington currently has nine approved premises for civil marriages and civil partnerships (seven hotels, the Head of Steam and the Hippodrome Theatre)

Marriages and Civil Partnerships in the Town Hall

4. Since relocating to the Town Hall in 2016, marriages and civil partnerships have worked successfully at the Town Hall. However, we have not considered the potential impact of the current register office accommodation not being available due to an emergency situation for example a flood or fire. Alternatively, there may be a high profile civic engagement or public inquiry which would render the council chamber unavailable for a wedding.
5. To maximise the potential options for a location for a wedding in an emergency or urgent situation the following areas would be deemed suitable as an emergency alternative to the Council Chamber and Council Chamber Foyer. These rooms would not be offered as options for couples wishing to be married, they are for business continuity use only.

Area proposed to be licensed for marriages and civil partnerships	Proposed maximum of persons (1)
Committee Room 1	40 persons
Committee Room 2	40 persons
Committee Room 3	20 persons
Committee Room 4 (2)	20 persons
The civic reception lobby	30 persons

The maximum number of persons permitted are relevant when no government restrictions on the limitation of persons able to be present. The maximum numbers also include the two registrars, couple being married any guests and photographers.

If a wedding cannot go ahead because of building issues and we do not have a contingency plan the local authority might be subject to complaints or claims from customers.

Financial and Legal Implications

6. This report has been considered by the Assistant Director, Law and Governance, for financial and legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Conclusion

7. Members are asked to approve the additional rooms and capacities as being suitable places for marriages and civil partnerships for emergency and business continuity use.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that the Council Chamber, Council Chamber Foyer and statutory marriage room continue to be the venues for marriages and civil partnerships in the Town Hall but that the following be licensed as additional rooms for marriages and civil partnerships for business continuity purposes:
 - (i) Committee Room 1 – maximum of 40 persons;
 - (ii) Committee Room 2 – maximum of 40 persons;
 - (iii) Committee Room 3 – maximum of 20 persons;
 - (iv) Committee Room 4 – maximum of 20 persons;
 - (v) The civic reception lobby – maximum of 30 persons.

Reasons

9. The reasons are:
 - (a) To enable a greater degree of flexibility over the rooms that can be used for marriages and civil partnerships in the Town Hall Darlington, particularly in an urgent situation where a designated room is not available due to an unexpected incident.

**Luke Swinhoe, Assistant Director, Law and Governance and Proper Officer
for Darlington Registration District**