

2 November 2015

Policy, Finance and Resources Committee

Licensing the Town Hall Rooms for Wedding, Civil and Celebratory Services

Report of: *Gregory Campbell, Programme and Project Manager*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *All*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has been approached by Essex County Council (ECC) to apply for a licence to have marriage ceremony rooms in which to hold weddings, civil and celebratory services. This could generate an income 'upwards of £20,000 per annum' based on historical data. This takes into account on-going costs estimated at £22,000 and set up costs of £5,000.
- 1.2 The service would offer rooms for hire from Wednesday to Saturday, maximising revenue, whilst enabling Committee Rooms to be available on Mondays and Tuesdays for Council use. Committee Rooms would therefore be out of use day and evening from Wednesday to Saturday.
- 1.3 The Council would seek to commence the service by early 2016.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Council apply for a licence to hold ceremonies in the committee suite area including Committee Rooms 1, 2 & 3, Meeting Room 1, the Mayor's Parlour and the Council Chamber.**
- 2.2 That the Council seek to commence bookings from early 2016 for Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.**
- 2.3 That the group rooms be freed up for booking meetings by officers during normal office hours**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The Council has been approached by Essex County Council (ECC) to consider whether it is willing to establish a decommissioned room to hold wedding, civil and celebratory ceremonies. This request has materialised

following consultation by ECC who will seek to improve the service for Essex residents and to reduce costs by consolidating the registrar's head office service and its assets to a more central location for the County in Chelmsford.

- 3.2 A full registration service for births, deaths and marriages will in any case continue to be available to residents in the locality. The only service which would move to Chelmsford would be the county-wide paper-based registration of marriages. As a consequence, the Brentwood area would lose a local venue for un-packaged weddings, civil and celebratory ceremonies.
- 3.3 Previously Brentwood Council assisted ECC by allowing ceremonies to be held in the Council Chamber at The Town Hall when their building was damaged. This worked well and it is considered that a similar provision could be provided in the future.
- 3.4 Please note that during the previous arrangement ECC ran the weddings and the venue. This opportunity is for Brentwood Council to take charge of the hiring of the venue and therefore assume the revenue benefits and related risk. The Council would look to applying for a licence for the venue, carry out the hiring of, administration and caretaking requirements of the venue. The Register Service would provide the Registrars to deliver the ceremony itself.
- 3.5 Although the service at present is available every day, Monday to Sunday, the Council would seek to operate on the most popular and cost effective days (Wednesday to Saturday). This would be more financially beneficial whilst enabling the committee rooms to be available Monday and Tuesday for other purposes. Wednesday to Saturday benefits are listed below:
 - assist with management costs,
 - reduce daily set up costs,
 - reduce impact on working arrangements and staff,
 - increase use of committee rooms and
 - improve the cost-to-use ratio of rooms.
- 3.6 Information from a study indicates that the committee rooms are occupied for 45% of the time between 10am and 5pm Monday to Friday. However, in order to maximise opportunity to use space and free up other meeting areas within the Town Hall in case they are required, it is proposed that the Liberal and Conservative group rooms be made available for booking of internal meetings by officers.

3.7 The investment in developing this service should be considered as a revenue-generating opportunity for the Council. No funds are being offered by ECC to assist in developing this service or refurbishment of the rooms. It should be considered as a funding opportunity for the Council.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

4.1 In order to provide a marriage ceremony venue the Council would need to comply with, set up and consider the following:

1, Purchase a three year licence at £1,700 and meet the following requirements:

- have a room to hold the wedding / civil ceremony(s)
- have a room to interview the individual persons getting married
- have a reception area for holding guests
- be DDA compliant
- have appropriate toilet facilities

2, A booking system (potentially use one in place - if not need to purchase)

3, Administration will be required to look after the process including pre-wedding meetings, viewing and agreeing any finer details

4, Someone on site to manage ceremonies (the public in and out of the building)

5, Funding for redecoration

6, Promotion of the venue (website, photography, advertising)

4.2 In order to run this service administration would be required, as would a part time caretaker to manage ceremonies when they occur. These costs have initially been identified at £22,000 per annum.

4.3 One off set up costs have been estimated in the region of £5,000 including music and venue licence

4.4 Although licences for the entire Civic Suite will be applied for, the basic ceremony booking and costs within this report relate to the booking of Committee Room 1 only. Further options and rooms within the licence will be available however these will be at an increased charge.

4.5 Essex County Council is seeking to fix the cost of the use of marriage ceremony rooms across Essex. Therefore the proposed charges are different to those set at the previous Policy, Finance and Resources Committee (Draft Min 143 / 2015) Based on a conservative estimate of information from last year an income after overheads and outgoings in the region of £20,000 could be achieved.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 This represents an opportunity to realise an income from an area that is under utilised.
- 5.2 Using this space exclusively for ceremonies is unlikely to have a detrimental effect on the ability to book rooms and hold meetings at the Town Hall if other rooms are made available.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Discussions have been held with ECC Registrars and the Corporate Leadership Board

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Economic Development – maximise Council assets to deliver corporate objectives and ensure community benefit.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 The hire of rooms would create an additional income for the Council estimated at up to £20,000 after expenses.

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 Under section 1(1) of the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970, the Council can enter into an agreement with Essex County Council to provide a range of administrative and other services. Such intra public body trading can be for profit (R v Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation ex parte British Educational Supplies Limited [1998] ELR 195). This contrasts with the position under section 95 of the Local Government Act 2003 which requires commercial trading to be undertaken only through a trading company.
- 8.3 Any 'section 1(1) agreement' may contain such terms as to payment or otherwise as the parties to the agreement consider appropriate (section 1(3) of the Act).

- 8.4 Under section 2 of the Act the Council is required to include a separate account in respect of any 'section 1(1) agreement' in the Council's accounts.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.5 Health and safety will be adhered to and a full check made before licensing the venues. Any other licences will be obtained if necessary

9. **Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

10. **Appendices to this report**

None

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