

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Decommissioning of Statutory Ceremony Room at Shaw House</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	31 March 2011
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX2270

**Purpose of Report:** To consider proposals to decommission the current Ceremony Room at Shaw House and if agreed to provide the present Interview Room as the Statutory Room for ceremonies from 1st January 2012.

**Recommended Action:**

(a) To approve the decommissioning of the current Ceremony Room at Shaw House and for the current Interview Room to become the Statutory Room with effect from 1 January 2012 subject to approval of plans by the General Register Office.

(b) To licence the Ceremony Room as a non statutory room.

(c) Any additional changes or amendments to service provision under New Governance arrangements are delegated to the Proper Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

**Reason for decision to be taken:** In order to further develop the Registration Service bring it in line with neighbouring authorities and to provide additional income to the Service.

**Other options considered:** To keep arrangements as they currently exist.

**Key background documentation:** GRO Guidance; comparable information from other Registration Authorities (see Appendix); Approved Premises Regulations

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Theme:

**CPT13 - Value for Money**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:

Allowing the Council to be able to charge an appropriate fee for ceremonies under the 'well being' powers of Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Portfolio Member Details	
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<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	01 February 2011

Contact Officer Details	
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### Implications

- Policy:** The proposals contained within the Report form part of changes proposed when the Registration Service moved to New Governance arrangements in July 2010.
- Financial:** There will be an increase in income if the proposals are approved with a small outlay for the approved premises, licence and office changes which will be covered from part of the first year's income.
- Personnel:** A fourth marriage registrar, already provided by the General Register Office, will be used and as this cannot be covered by existing staff we will need to recruit a Deputy Superintendent Registrar and Deputy Additional Registrar. Deputies are only paid when they work and any additional salary costs will be covered by the additional income the use of a fourth registrar will generate
- Legal/Procurement:** In accordance with guidelines issued by General Register Office and new governance arrangements.
- Property:** None
- Risk Management:** Both rooms currently used by the public and staff and have been assessed by the Council's Health and Safety Officers.
- Equalities Impact Assessment:** Stage 1 Assessment completed

<b>Is this item subject to call-in?</b>	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# Executive Summary

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Every registration district in England and Wales must provide a Register Office room in which marriages and civil partnership registrations can be performed for the statutory fee, currently £40.00.
- 1.2. The Register Office room for West Berkshire is currently the Ceremony Room at Shaw House. This room holds 50 people, so couples can invite 46 guests. This capacity is high for a Register Office ceremony room and the room is also of a very high standard. Since West Berkshire Registration Service relocated to Shaw House the Register Office has become very popular for ceremonies, attracting couples from areas outside this district.
- 1.3. By law, two Registrars have to attend a civil marriage ceremony. The Superintendent Registrar, or one of her deputies, and a Registrar of Marriages or deputy. The Service also offers a fully enhanced ceremony, which includes music and readings of the couples' choice. The statutory fee of £40.00 does not cover the cost of providing this service, especially on Saturdays when staffing costs increase. Baby Naming and Renewal of Vows are also offered, but as these are not statutory services a different, higher fee is charged.
- 1.4. Many other registration districts have decided to decommission their main ceremony rooms. This means that they can charge an appropriate fee for ceremonies in these rooms under the 'well being' powers of Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. The room is licensed in the same way as Approved Premises in the district. A Register Office room still has to be provided statutorily, but this is usually a smaller room, often an office, which can hold the bride and groom, the two Registrars, two witnesses as required by law and possibly a few other guests.
- 1.5. Four of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities have already decommissioned their rooms: Bracknell Forest, Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough. All of our neighbouring County Authorities have also done this: Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

## 2. Proposals

- 2.1. It is proposed that West Berkshire Registration District decommission the current ceremony room at Shaw House with effect from 1 January 2012. This date has been chosen as notice of marriage can only be given a year in advance. No notices of marriages already taken will be affected by this change. At present no couples have booked the room expecting to pay the statutory fee for 2012 ceremonies.
- 2.2. The room next to the Ceremony Room, currently the Interview Room used for taking notices and conducting the pre marriage interviews, will become the statutory Register Office room. The Council's Health and Safety Advisor has been consulted and it has been agreed that this room is suitable, with a maximum occupancy of 11 persons.

2.3. The current Interview Room would need to be relocated to another office within Shaw House. As the occupancy levels in Shaw House will reduce in 2011 an alternative office space should be available preferably within the area currently occupied by the Service.

2.4. The proposed fees for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies in the Ceremony Room are as follows:

Monday to Thursday	£90.00
Friday	£120.00
Saturday:	
10.45am, 11.30am and 12.15pm	£140.00
1.30pm, 2.15pm and 3.00pm	£200.00
Sunday	£300.00

2.5. Fees charged by surrounding authorities are attached (Appendix A).

2.6. Plans of the Register Office showing the new statutory room and removing the current room, would need to be submitted to the Registrar General for approval. The new Ceremony Room would also need to be licensed under Approved Premises regulations, which would cost approx £400. It is also proposed that any further changes or amendments to service provision is delegated by the Proper Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder under the New Governance arrangements.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 The current Ceremony Room at Shaw House is an attractive venue of a very high standard. The proposal to decommission it and provide an alternative smaller venue will not disadvantage local users but will allow the room to be used to its maximum effect whilst reflecting the costs of service provision. It is proposed the current ceremony room is decommissioned from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 subject to approval by the General Register Office.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Fees charged by surrounding Authorities for use of their non statutory ceremony rooms.

Benchmarking of Fees for ceremonies in non statutory Register Office  
Rooms  
2010/2011

South Eastern Registration Board

Authority	Mon to Thurs	Friday	Saturday Morning	Saturday Afternoon	Sunday and Bank Hol	Notes
Bracknell Forest	£91.50	£106.50	£121.50	£221.50	£316.50	
Brighton & Hove	£145.00	£215.00	£267.00	£318.00	£395.00	
Buckinghamshire	£80.00	£150.00	£150.00	£150.00	£290.00	
East Sussex	£70.00	£100.00	£155.00	£155.00	£290.00	
Hampshire	£100.00	£120.00	£180.00	£180.00	£330.00	
Isle of Wight	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No decommissioned rooms
Kent	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	All approved premises
Medway	£170.00	£170.00	£210.00	£210.00	£250.00	
Milton Keynes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No decommissioned rooms
Oxfordshire	£160.00	£160.00	£160.00	£160.00	£470.00	
Portsmouth	£105.00	£155.00	£205.00	£205.00	N/A	

Reading	£90.00	£90.00	£160.00	£160.00	£400.00	
Windsor & Maidenhead	£80.00	£100.00	£100.00	£100.00	N/A	
Southampton	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	All approved premises
Surrey	£95.00	£160.00	£220.00	£220.00	N/A	
West Sussex	£60.00	£110.00	£170.00	£170.00	£300.00	
Wokingham	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No decommissioned rooms

## Consultees

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### Local Stakeholders:

**Officers Consulted:** Health and Safety; Fire Officer, Corporate Board

**Trade Union:** N/A