

3 September 2019**Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR PLACE AND COMMUNITIES****APPROVED PREMISES FOR CIVIL CEREMONIES****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an annual update and overview of the County Council's role in licensing premises for the solemnization of marriages and the registration of civil partnerships.

Information and AdviceBackground

2. This report provides an update and overview regarding the County Council's role in licensing premises for marriages and civil partnerships.

Approved Premises

3. Current legislation allows for the solemnization of marriages and the formation of civil partnerships to take place at venues other than register offices. Secular premises such as historic buildings, stately homes, civic buildings, sports stadia and hotels can all be licensed, provided there is no compromise of Parliament's intention to maintain the solemnity of the occasion. In order to be approved, a venue must be seemly and dignified, it must be a permanently immovable structure, comprising at least one room, or any boat or other vessel which is permanently moored. Premises outside this definition, such as the open air, a tent, marquee or any other temporary structure, and most forms of transport, are not eligible for approval. An approved venue cannot be a religious premise, other than for the formation of Civil Partnerships, and it must be regularly available to the public, which precludes a domestic home.
4. There are currently 69 Approved Premises in Nottinghamshire, which is the same number as last year. These are listed at Appendix A. There is one new premise (Willow Marsh Farm, East Leake) and one premise that did not renew their licence (Oscar's Lounge, Calverton). The fee for approval of a premise is included in the set of registration fees, which is reported annually for approval by the Communities and Place Committee.

Civil Partnerships in Religious Premises

5. The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 allow civil partnership ceremonies to be conducted in places of worship in England and Wales. The Registration Services' role is to approve the premises. Nationally, the leaders

of Liberal Judaism, the Quakers and the Unitarians have all expressed interest in holding ceremonies. The procedure, and the basis on which approvals will be granted, is broadly the same as that which currently applies to secular premises. Once approved, a premise will be included in the list of approved venues for civil partnerships, indicating that they are a religious premise. However, at present there have been no applications for a religious building in Nottinghamshire to be licensed for Civil Partnerships.

Procedures

6. The registration service procedures for approval of premises have been developed following 'The Registrar General's Guidance to Authorities for the approval of premises as venues for civil marriage and civil partnerships' (Sixth Edition, Revised June 2015). The premises are assessed for suitability, fire safety, and the need (or otherwise) for planning permission. Once granted, each approval lasts for three years.

Law Commission Review on Marriage Reform

7. The legal position described in this report is expected to change in the coming years, subject to the outcome of a national consultation and the availability of parliamentary time. The Government announced a review of civil marriage legislation in 2018 and this has begun with the Law Commission publishing the principles and scope for a public consultation. Once this has been completed they will make recommendations to the Government on how the law can be reformed. The aim of the review is to reform wedding law to provide couples with greater choice, within a simple, fair and consistent legal structure that fits the needs of all couples and religious faiths.
8. The review will look at legal preliminaries, the content of a wedding ceremony, where weddings can take place, who can solemnize a marriage and how marriages should be registered. The Commission will also consider options for how marriage law could be extended to non-religious belief groups. The Government has said that a separate piece of work will explore what can be done to deliver interim reform within the existing system for certain civil ceremonies. In particular, the Government intends to consider if the regulations governing approved premises can be reformed to allow outdoor locations for civil ceremonies, whilst maintaining the requirement that venues be seemly and dignified.

Statutory and Policy Implications

9. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

10. There are no financial implications contained in this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That members agree to receive an update report in the next 12 months and that this be included in the work programme.

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Constitutional Comments (SG 29/07/2019)

11. I confirm that the recommendation falls within the remit of the Planning and Licensing Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SES 29/07/2019)

12. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

The Registrar General's Guidance to Authorities for the approval of premises as venues for civil marriage and civil partnerships (Sixth Edition, Revised June 2015)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All