

Registration & Celebratory Services - Customer Feedback 2023-2024 Ceremonies and Celebrations



What people said about us! - so many positive comments received –

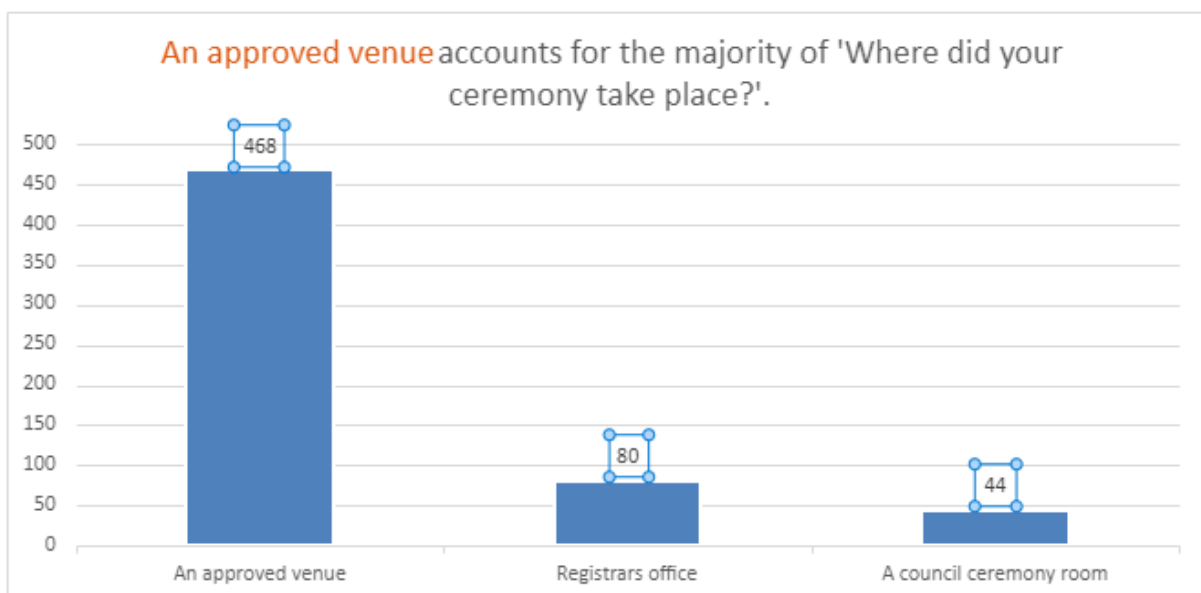
Thank you all – you made our day!!

Ceremonies and Celebrations

During 2023/24 significant changes in the fee structure and content of ceremonies were implemented. This followed 5 years of no increase as the service and the Council tried to be fair to couples who had their plans disrupted by the pandemic. The customer feedback process has allowed us to examine the impact of the changes which were made and how these were perceived by our customers. Clearly there is never a suitable time to increase costs, and this is absolutely recognised by the service management team, but it was also unreasonable to expect the service to continue operating at 2018/19 costs given that so much has changed economically over the last few years.

During the 2023/24 period 1909 customers who had either a marriage or civil partnership ceremony with us were sent customer feedback forms. Of these 592 (31%) couples responded.

Of these 79% of ceremonies took place in an approved venue



97% of couples were very satisfied or satisfied with the courtesy and respect afforded to them by the registrars on the day of their ceremony.

94% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the ceremony booking process.

97% were either satisfied or very satisfied with how their ceremony was conducted

90% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the options for personalisation of their ceremony.

What is the most crucial element to this exercise given the significant changes which were introduced, is to find out what did not go so well and to see how – if possible, these negative things can be avoided in the future. It is our policy to be transparent in our communication and as such, we have included all negative comments and have provided honest and transparent answers to any points made.

Issue raised	Service response
<p><i>Confirmation may have been better, appreciate the service is very busy especially with after all the weddings were cancelled in 2020 but after I handed back the forms, I didn't receive any communication or confirmation despite sending multiple emails (I'm a bit of a worrier!) but on the day, it was all fine.</i></p>	<p>There are several similar comments. We are shortly to introduce a self-serve and automated system which will help with these types of worries. Hopefully, this will be of some reassurance</p>
<p>Issue raised</p>	<p>Service response</p>

No one informed me that because my ceremony was to be held in Shropshire, but I lived in telford - I would have to register our wedding at the telford office. It was only when I rang Shrewsbury and queried a date, I was informed that I had been given the wrong information, this lead to a very stressful time just before my wedding trying to get a last-minute appointment at telford.

It was all good except that the gentleman registrar got my surname wrong and 2 of the "reading" members of family names wrong too after we had a pre chat about getting names right, he did seem a bit nervous, and the photographer said he had not come across this guy before. Overall, it was good

Issue raised

It is clearly indicated in confirmation emails that notice is to be given to the registrars in the district in which a person lives.

This is very unfortunate. We accept that sometimes people make mistakes, but this should not happen. Have raised with Training officer.

Service response

We would have preferred to have the ceremony at the Bridgnorth Registrars, it didn't make sense that we had to go to Shrewsbury when there is a registry office in Bridgnorth. The ceremony was brief - it would have been good to have been talked through exactly what would happen in the ceremony when we attended the interview. We had no idea how long it would be. Nothing was mentioned about personalising the event. My partner gave me a ring in the car on the way home. We were not exchanging rings, but I think he would have liked to have said a few words to me to give me the ring as part of the ceremony. Finally, a comment from my witnesses - why did we sign the documents on a clip board on our laps when there was a table available? Especially when we were all wearing lovely clothes, and one person was left-handed which always makes writing difficult.

The small office in Bridgnorth is not sufficiently large enough to accommodate 5 people. A civil partnership formation is not like a wedding, it is a purely contractual appointment. As the couple had not opted for a non-statutory celebratory ceremony there would be nothing to personalise. At the time that this ceremony took place there were still protective measures in place. There was a duty of care in place around covid and given the pressures the services faced it would have been unfair to expose anyone to unnecessary risk

Issue raised

Service response

We had a celebrant who did absolutely everything, so from a ceremony perspective, you guys didn't really do anything.

This is only partially true. The couple provided the information about a celebrant led ceremony to another registration district and not to our registration district. Unfortunately, it is a bit like speaking to the Nat West Bank about your Barclays Bank account (other bank accounts do exist).

(X) made my wife cry with the unkind emails she sent. There was initial confusion from you guys around the celebrant, saying that we hadn't told you guys that we we're using one. Even though we said in our first meeting we we're going to use one. (we still have the email chain if you need

to see it). We we're also told that all we needed to do was provide a script 4 weeks before the wedding, and then she emailed saying we left it too late and there was more to do.

It's unfair that there isn't a lesser payment for people like us who get married when we are using a celebrant instead of having a registrar conduct the ceremony. We understand that you have to do the legal part, but surely the payment could be less when you only have to sit and watch a ceremony, instead of conducting it.

The onus is entirely on the couple to discuss ceremony requirements with the registrars' service where the ceremony is to take place.

As it happened, our district is one of a small number who allow combination ceremonies under specific contract arrangements which clearly set out the responsibilities of all parties to ensure that a legal marriage takes place.

Far from there being confusion about this on the services part, the service knew nothing about it. At short notice it became apparent that the couple had plans in place which they had not discussed. The email trail referred to bears this out.

Whilst we understand that our urgent enquiries and need to inform the couple that no arrangements had been made with this service, with only a short number of days to go before the ceremony, was understandably distressing for the bride, however, it is not easy to give unwelcome news.

Far from doing nothing, this team worked extremely hard with the celebrant to put together a legally binding and acceptable

Issue raised

The registrar who dealt with our wedding could have been more sympathetic to our situation (my in laws ended up missing our wedding due to being stuck in traffic) instead of pushing me into a frenzy telling me he would be moving onto his next wedding and we would lose crucial parts of our ceremony if I did not get upstairs in the next five minutes. It turns out he did this, made me into a nervous wreck for nothing as we were not even late! I understand this is something he does every day, but a little care and courtesy would be nice. I would not recommend this gentleman if asked. He is rude and does not have very good people skills, maybe a lesson in how to be friendly would be good for him. He called me Rihanna when speaking to my husband, which is not my name,

marriage ceremony which required considerable concentrated effort by the registration service, so that this couple could have the ceremony which they wanted and one which was also legally binding.

Unfortunately, we must abide by the law and cannot be held responsible for the disappointment of couples who do not understand the requirements and had not discussed their wishes in advance.

Service response

It is the duty of the venue to make sure that a ceremony runs to time. It appears in this instance that rather than doing this, the registrar took it upon himself to do.

If the interaction was as described, this is disappointing and has been passed to the Training Manager to investigate.

However, late running ceremonies impact on the ceremonies planned by other couples at which registrars must attend.

Issue raised

We didn't need such a big room as only 4 of us but had to pay the full price of the large room, time was of the essence as partner was terminally ill, now passed away Jan 2023

<p>The team do their best to accommodate late ceremonies if necessary but are instructed to leave if the ceremony is running more than 15-20 minutes late and they must attend another one.</p> <p>The registrars' team may be prepared to come back and do the ceremony later in the day in order that others are not inconvenienced.</p> <p>This is all made clear in terms and conditions which all couples have.</p>
<p>Service response</p>
<p>So deeply sorry to hear your sad news. Please accept our sincere sympathies.</p> <p>We are pleased that we were able to arrange something for you at short notice.</p> <p>We apologise that it was not possible to arrange for you to have a smaller room, but unfortunately must consider what appointments or ceremonies would have to be cancelled or rearranged to accommodate a short notice ceremony in a smaller room.</p>

Issue raised

Whilst I absolutely appreciate the legal need for this process to be stringent and tight, with no real choice to get married outside of a church to use anything but the registry office at some point it felt in the 21st century old fashioned and antiquated and whilst the ladies were polite it did not feel particularly heart felt.

Not being able to book a wedding more than 1 year in advance without losing the deposit is also frustrating, there volume of weddings remains the same in a year and I fail to see how this would affect your office in any way other than to be more organised, so it was another costly part of the process.

Service response

Unfortunately, the legislation which must be worked to is very prescriptive and is not as flexible as perhaps we would like. Our team do their best to deliver sincere and heartfelt ceremonies.

It is possible to book a ceremony up to 2 years in advance for those who wish to do so.

Our pricing structure has changed since this booking was made and no longer makes any distinction between 1 and 2 years in advance in terms of cost.

Unfortunately, it does make a difference to our office if we are managing 4000 ceremonies instead of 2000+ which is not something which can be easily ignored.

Issue raised

Actually, booking the registrars was a very bad experience. There was very little communication from Shropshire Council, and I was continually calling to ask for information. I even had to call to get confirmation that first my deposit had been accepted then that the Registrars had even been booked.

Service response

Couples who book with Shropshire Registration Service are provided with confirmation emails acknowledging bookings and providing next steps. Not sure what had happened here

Issue raised

Allow dogs!!

Service response

Sorry, only service dogs are welcome in our offices.

Issue raised

Not having to stay in England for 9 days before giving notice. It was very expensive and pointless. A Scottish approach would be better for those who live abroad.

Service response

We agree, however the law is prescriptive and offers no discretion. Hopefully, this may be relaxed at some time in the future

Issue raised

Well, I originally booked the wrong type of ceremony, I don't think it's crystal clear as I wasn't aware there was different options. Luckily it was rectified before the day but caused a bit of stress when I thought we would be just in an office with 2 witnesses. I wish someone

Service response

Not sure how to answer this?

When bookings are made a series of questions are asked and the customer decides where they would like their

would have confirmed 'you have booked XYZ' when I booked and what was included, then confusion wouldn't have happened. Also I was told ceremonies only took place on one particular day so the date we had wasn't what we would have chosen so maybe some more availability throughout the week would be good

ceremony to be and what type of ceremony they would like.

Unfortunately, the rooms we have are in use constantly and are required for registrars to register births, deaths as well as marriages. It would be nice if we had better accommodation which would then allow us to potentially offer more availability for statutory ceremonies

Issue raised

Service response

More documentation needs to be given at the time of booking. Terms and conditions, floorplans, points of contact, FAQs, whats allowed and what isn't (candles, dogs), accessibility information, disabled car parking, letting brides know that confetti isn't allowed (found this out the week of the wedding). Nowhere online was there this information and I had to bug the staff for answers.

This information is widely available online for ceremonies taking place at the register offices. Staff do not mind being asked questions, so please do not worry

For ceremonies taking place at approved venues, we are aware that they provide couples with extensive information.

Issue raised

Service response

Use of correct pronouns.

Unfortunately, we do our best, but the legal words of the ceremony are prescribed and

	<p>unable to be amended at present to account for pronouns.</p> <p>Hopefully, there will be some loosening up of terminology which we will then be able to implement for our customers.</p>
<p><i>Issue raised</i></p>	<p>Service response</p>
<p><i>Felt £25.00 a bit over the top to change a date not sure how this figure is arrived at.</i></p>	<p>The figure is calculated based on the cost of making amendments. Oh dear, sadly this fee has also increased this year to £50!</p> <p>This has been calculated to the minute. Changing dates and times of ceremonies in some cases can be more time consuming than others and truthfully is not something which we want to encourage.</p> <p>The knock-on impacts of requests to change dates and times has wide ranging effects on staff scheduling and on other ceremonies which may have been booked.</p>
<p><i>Issue raised</i></p>	<p>Service response</p>

The second registrar arrived over 20 minutes late causing some distress and forcing lateness. It was quite emotionally challenging as we knew we required two. It led to some uncomfortableness, it was the most important day of our lives, and it costs a lot of money for the ceremony, so this was very disappointing.

Have no idea why the registrars did not arrive together. The only circumstance which would provide for this would be sudden illness or accident which may necessitate having to divert another member of staff. Staff are expected to be onsite about 30 minutes prior to the start time of the ceremony. Have passed to a team manager to investigate further

Issue raised

Service response

Our only gripe was the price rise and the fact that you waited until we had paid the original amount in full and only gave us 1 weeks' notice to pay the rest. The only thing that made this ok was that you extended our time to pay as we had other things to pay

This clearly was not by design. Unfortunately, until the Council authorise fees and charges, they are not able to be publicised.

On this occasion Council did not authorise these changes until Mid-March and as soon as possible after that all impacted couples were notified.

We have requested that this service is able to have fees and charges authorised up to 3 years in advance as we are very aware of the issues which can be experienced.

Issue raised

I feel the room is too small for the price you charge. It's expensive and feel there should be space for more guests, as 32 including bride and groom is quite small.

We truly are deeply sorry for the situation you experienced.

Service response

We would very much love to have a bigger ceremony room, but this is not possible at present as our building does not have a larger space. Our fees and charges are comparable with other districts, and we are sorry that you were disappointed.

Issue raised

'It was very difficult to reach you before the wedding. We were also given wrong advice regarding giving notice. We live in Scotland and got married in Shropshire, but my parents live in Powys so sometimes stay there. The advice we received was very confusing and turns out we could have both just given notice in Lochgilphead rather than me travelling to wales and staying there to give notice which was advised by Shropshire council. When I turned up to give notice, she was surprised that I had chosen to do it from Powys! If I had been able to speak to an advisor, I think this could have been better communicated so that we got it right.

Service response

It is not possible for 2 people who live in Scotland to give notice of marriage for a wedding in England or Wales. One person can give notice in Scotland 3 months before the wedding, however the other party must have established a residency of 7 complete days (Day of arrival not included) in England or Wales and then give notice to the registrars for the district in which they have completed their residential qualification. We can assure you that you were advised correctly but clearly this has proved confusing as someone else has provided you with incorrect information.

Issue raised

Communication from SCC absolutely useless. Any queries made via email either ignored or answered rudely. Price rise an absolute joke. Cost is ridiculous over £500 for an hour's work

Service response

It would be highly unusual to receive any rude communication from this service, however we do receive it from time to time. All emails are answered promptly, they are not answered promptly on occasion if the email has been sent to a personal inbox instead of the service in box. Members of staff are sometimes on leave or absent for other reasons from time to time which leads to emails being missed.

The fee for ceremonies does not represent the cost of performing the wedding ceremony. The fee covers all the required administrative duties and has been accurately costed using a complex costing model. It is difficult to give unwelcome information.

Issue raised

Payment wasn't very clear; a structured invoice would have been better. A simplified payment would be easier.

Service response

We agree, however, the current systems do not provide for us to do this. We are hopeful that our new system, which is being installed this year (2024) will enable us to do exactly as requested in future.

Issue raised

The small registry office (4 people max) was impersonal. There is plenty of room in there to arrange the chairs in a semi-circle (around the small table with the flowers on?) rather than in a line against the wall. Being close to a table would have made the signing of the documents easier for everyone.

we were not offered any options to personalise the ceremony.

Service response

Again, there is no option to personalise a statutory civil partnership formation as this is not a ceremony and is entirely contractual in nature.

Issue raised

We were only having 1 reading and wanted to do 2 short poems to each other. Copies were sent to you, but we had to pay an extra £200 for just a few lines and the enhanced package. This was very mean particularly as X's poem was only a few very short lines. We asked nothing else of you. We were ready on time. A gesture of good will would be appreciated!!

Service response

It is essential that all couples are treated the same. To start to make exceptions makes it incredibly difficult to provide consistent service levels. We are sorry you were disappointed.

Issue raised

Service response

Would have helped had we been told at the onset that a civil ceremony must happen before the religious ceremony.

Had we realised that the intention was to hold a religious ceremony it would have been made clear. The main issue here was that it became clear that a religious ceremony was to be held at the venue and that the finish time of the religious ceremony could not be guaranteed to coincide with the time booked for the civil ceremony, which could easily have an adverse impact on other ceremonies booked for later that day.

Issue raised

Service response

Contact between myself and the office was minimal, and some emails not answered. I originally asked if we could have a welsh ceremony however, we were told in no uncertain terms- no. I believe we could have had more of an option of which vows we had on the day, however when asked on the phone, the gentleman told me we'd just 'find out on the day.' Communication could definitely improve.

Whilst we are sorry to have disappointed you, a marriage ceremony in the welsh language can only be taken by a welsh speaking registrar in Wales – as Shropshire is not a welsh district there is no legal basis which would have allowed it.

In relation to vows, the conversation had was not with the registration service but with a customer service advisor.

The query should have been passed to the registration service to respond to.

Emails are answered promptly, however if emails are not sent to the generic email address and instead are sent to an individual member of staff, these could go unanswered

Issue raised

It was never made clear, even from your brochure, what documentation we needed to "bring" to the ceremony. We travelled over 100 miles to our venue, but I woke up in the middle of the night prior to the wedding because I realised that I had forgotten to bring the decree-absolute documents with me and was ready to drive home at 2:30am to collect them. Your brochure should state clearly what, and if any, documents will be required....maybe even an email a few days before as a reminder. As it turned out, the registrars told me I didn't need the documents after all. If this were spelled out in the brochure, I would have been able to sleep.

should the member of staff be absent, work part time, or have left the service. Always better to use the generic inbox. registrars@shropshire.gov.uk

Service response

If it had been necessary for documents to have been produced on the day of the ceremony, it would have been made clear. Sorry that you were worried.

The suggestion for a reminder to be sent out a few days before is something we are keen to take up and should be able to do this later this year (2024) following the successful implementation of new software application.