

Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies

The following is designed to provide all couples with guidance as they prepare for the date of the ceremony. This is based on the guidance contained on the gov.uk website – COVID-19: Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships?utm_source=9d1c64c3-6a1d-4a89-9c3d-f5857280b2d1&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate and supplementary guidance produced for Local Authorities by the General Register Office.

The information below will provide you with an understanding of what will be currently possible, before, during and after your ceremony.

This is not an exhaustive list and therefore should you have any questions that are not answered here, please email us at registeroffice@worcestershire.gov.uk

COVID safe

All venues are required to provide a Risk Assessment to the Registration Service to ensure that the venue is safe to carry out the ceremony. We will not be able to attend until we have received this document. This may include one-way systems through buildings, hand sanitiser or extra washing facilities and required social distancing (and/or mitigating measures).

Each room licenced will be set out to the appropriate capacity and therefore the number advised by the premises is the maximum that will be permitted in the room. The number will include, registrar(s), photographer, couple and witnesses. If this number is exceeded, then the ceremony cannot take place until the numbers are reduced accordingly. Please work with your venue who will do their best to assist within the current guidelines

Outdoor Structures

Due to the restrictive size of the outdoor structures at our Approved Premises and the social distancing requirements it will not be possible for us to undertake any ceremonies in the outdoor structures.

Marriages and Civil Partnership ceremonies

The government guidance advises that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time and limited as far as reasonably possible to the parts of the marriage or civil partnership that are required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales.

Unfortunately, this will mean that we may have to curtail some aspects of the ceremony. This may include restrictions on readings and live music.

Prior to the Ceremony

Your pre-ceremony interview will take place as normal prior to the ceremony to ensure that the information that is entered into the register is correct and there have been no changes since your notice of marriage/civil partnership. The venue will co-ordinate this with us to ensure that the required social distancing is maintained. We ask that we only see you and your partner and therefore any attendants remain outside the room or socially distanced. For this reason, hotel bedrooms will not be appropriate.

The registrars will check that all appropriate measures have taken place to ensure that the ceremony can continue safely, working with the Approved Venues where applicable.

During the Ceremony

Whilst we will do our best to provide the best ceremony we can, you will notice that the format of the ceremony will be somewhat different to that of the documentation we have sent you. This is to ensure that we operate within the guidelines provided and we keep yourselves as well as your guests and the registrars safe.

Entering the Room

The co-ordinator of the venue will arrange for the guests and Groom/Party 1 to be brought into the room 5 minutes before the ceremony is due to begin. The Bride/Party 2 will then enter the room with their attendants at the start time of the ceremony. Please be reminded that social distancing will be required as you enter the room.

Whilst we advise against being accompanied down the aisle, it is a matter for the couple and the venue to decide.

The Ceremony

The ceremony will be completed as per the documentation sent you and subject to this guidance.

Exchange of Rings

The rings should be handled by as few people as possible. It is therefore suggested that the rings are placed on the ceremony table prior to the ceremony beginning. This is to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

The guidance also recommends that you should wash, or hand sanitise before handling the rings. You may wish to consider how this may happen.

Signing of the Register

The register must be signed as part of the completion of the ceremony. We ask that couple and witnesses provide a black or black/blue ink pen (or gel pen) in order to sign the register. This is to minimise the risk of infection. A pen will be provided if required but you will have to wipe the pen or use hand sanitiser after use.

The register will have arrows indicating where you will need to sign so the registrar is able to maintain social distancing. The witnesses will then be asked to sign the register maintaining social distancing.

We will issue the marriage/civil partnership certificates at the ceremony. To minimise any risk of infection we will place the certificate in an envelope and leave on the ceremony table for you. If you would rather, we sent it out a few days after the ceremony, please let the registrar know on the day.

Photographs

Whilst we wish you to have memories of your day, we need to ensure that social distancing to minimise the risk of infection are in place. Therefore, appointed photographers will not be able to move about the room whilst the ceremony is underway. Please can you ask your photographer to speak with the registrar prior to the ceremony.

There will be a brief opportunity to take photos after you have signed the register whilst we are arranging for the witnesses to sign but there will not be a blank register provided.

Conclusion of the Ceremony

Historically we invite the guests to cheer upon announcing the newly formed couple. Guidance suggests this should not happen and therefore will we invite guests to clap further reducing the risk of infection.

Upon the conclusion of the ceremony the couple and guests will leave the ceremony room as per the arrangement with the venue.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: Where a person is shielding, can a marriage be solemnized, or a civil partnership formation take place remotely by video conferencing technology?

A: No, there is no provision within current legislation for a virtual marriage or civil partnership to take place, however the venue may be able to broadcast the event so that guests may join virtually.

Q2: What if someone with Covid-19 symptoms attends the Register Office/Approved Venue? Can we ask them to leave?

A: Yes. Anyone who has covid-19 symptoms should be self-isolating at home along with others in their household. Your local guidance regarding public health and social distancing should always be followed. If it is one of the parties to the marriage or civil partnership a new date can be rearranged over the phone. If it is one or both of the witnesses the couple will be required to provide new witnesses. It is acceptable for a member staff to volunteer to be witnesses in this circumstance.

Q3: Can enhancements to the solemnization or a marriage or formation of a civil partnership be offered?

A: The government guidance advises that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time and limited as far as reasonably possible to the parts of the marriage or civil partnership that are required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales. Please see above

Q4: The grounds of the Register Office/Approved Venues are lovely – as there is less risk outside can the ceremony take place there instead?

A: No. A marriage or civil partnership must take place within the venue as detailed on the notice and authority, and as specified in the approval of the premises. The outside space is not included as part of the venue.

Q5: Can I invite more guests if they stand outside the Register Office/Approved Venue? Either outside or standing just outside the door to the room?

A: No. The total number of people attending the wedding cannot exceed that allowed by Government restriction within the building. Anyone standing outside the building is not part of the wedding party. Should additional people attend and stand outside they are subject to the Government's restriction for outdoor gatherings.

Q6: Why can't witnesses use video technology to witness the ceremony?

A: There is still a requirement within the legislation for 2 witnesses to attend to witness a marriage or civil partnership and then sign the register.

However, video technology could be used for other guests where this is available

Q7: Does the marriage register still need to be signed with registration ink? This would mean that everyone would use the same pen.

A: Although it is preferable for registration ink to be used at all times, it is considered to be safer for the use of your own pen (either black or blue/black), which should be permanent ink where possible.

Q8: Am I able to have live music?

A: The guidance mentions that any live music which incorporates wind instruments cannot be part of the ceremony. It is strongly suggested that recorded music is used instead

Q9: Are children and babies included in the numbers? Are babies allowed to attend?

A: Yes, children and babies are included in the overall numbers and a parent/guardian or member of the household must hold the infant throughout the ceremony.

Q10: Can one of the guests' video link the ceremony for those guests who cannot attend?

A: Yes, the only thing we do ask is that you tell us before hand and the person undertaking the recording does not move about the room whilst the ceremony is underway. The person responsible cannot also be a witness.

Q11: Will I need to wear a mask at the wedding or civil partnership ceremony? Will the bride or groom or civil partners?

A: Yes, face coverings are mandatory at all weddings and civil partnership ceremonies, those exempt from wearing face coverings during the ceremony are the registrars, the couple, children 11 years of age or under, and those with a medical exemption. Everyone else attending the ceremony must wear a face covering.