

Shropshire Registration & Celebratory Services

Marriage and Civil Partnership Ceremony Guidance

The following guidance is issued to provide you with an understanding of how updated Government guidelines will affect your ceremony. Whilst not an exhaustive list, the information given has been sourced from [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and from supplementary guidance produced for Local Authorities by the General Register Office.

We understand that this guidance may change the plans that you have put in place for your day. Please be assured that we will work with you and your venue to try and meet your needs as safely as we are able.

COVID secure

Approved Venues

Shropshire Registration Services are currently working hard with your venue to ensure that your ceremony can be conducted safely and within the latest social distancing regulations.

As part of this work we have asked that all Venues provide a copy of their COVID secure Risk Assessment and details of the maximum number which can be accommodated in each of their licensed rooms. We have also asked them to provide us with their planned layouts of any ceremony rooms This is likely include implementing mitigating measures such as providing hand sanitiser or extra washing facilities and introducing a one-way arrival and departure system. Your venue will be able to discuss what has been put in place for your safety and that of your guests.

The Risk assessments and plans will be scrutinised to ensure that they adhere to government requirements in advance of the recommencement of ceremonies at an individual venue.

Where necessary for reasons of health or social distancing your registrars may wear face shields, face coverings or gloves. You and your guests are also welcome to do so.

Outdoor Structures

Some of our Approved Premises have licensed outdoor structures these will be included within any risk assessment provided by your venue. In some venues the structures may not be large enough to support the social distancing requirements so it is important that if you are planning a ceremony which would take place in one of these structures that you liaise with your venue in advance. Any ceremonies in structures are subject to prevailing weather conditions as was the case prior to Covid 19.

Ceremony Rooms – Local Authority and Approved Venues

Current Government regulations specify that a maximum of 30 people can attend your ceremony. This includes the registrars, yourselves and your witnesses, and any person attending the ceremony who are not employed by the approved venue (where the ceremony is taking place in one of these facilities). If you have an official photographer or videographer, then they also need to be included.

Not all rooms at a Venue will be able to accommodate this number whilst adhering to social distancing. The venue will be able to share with you how many guests the room will be able to accommodate including those above. If numbers on the day exceed that permitted, our registrars will request that numbers are reduced before your ceremony can begin.

Changes to Ceremonies

Government guidance advises that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time and be 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.

To ensure that your family and friends, along with registrars attending your ceremony, are kept as safe as possible we need to introduce some changes to the format of the ceremonies we conduct;

Unfortunately, this will mean that we may have to curtail some aspects of your ceremony;

- It will only be possible for recorded music to be played at your ceremony.
- Singing and or live musical instruments are not to feature in your ceremony
- Enhancements to your ceremony such as Readings will be reviewed on an individual basis however it is likely that long readings and personal vows will be unable to play a part in the ceremony to ensure that we meet the guidelines set by Government in terms of concluding the ceremony in the shortest reasonable time.
- Witnesses will need to be seated towards the front of the room in order that they can clearly hear what is being said and follow proceedings
- If you have chosen to exchange rings they should be handled by as few people as possible. All parties are advised to thoroughly wash or sanitise their hands before handling the rings. This may be before the ceremony. To maintain social distancing during the ceremony it is recommended that the rings are placed on the ceremony table prior to the ceremony starting
- Photographers will not be permitted to move about the room whilst the ceremony is underway. Your photographer may wish to speak with the registrar prior to the ceremony starting.
- Guests will not be able to move around the room for the purpose of taking photographs to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

The ceremony

Pre-ceremony interview

For couples having ceremonies at the Shropshire Register Office or in the Ceremony Room at Shirehall, Shrewsbury, we are now able to undertake your pre- ceremony interview prior to the actual day of your ceremony. We will contact you to establish a suitable date and time for your pre-ceremony interview which will be no more than two days prior to the actual day. At this time we will complete the legal formalities and go through the checklist to ensure we have the details correct and to note any changes to the format of your ceremony.

For couples having ceremonies in approved venues, the pre ceremony interview will be conducted in a private location at the venue with parties socially distanced appropriately. Only the couple and the registrars are permitted to attend these interviews immediately before the ceremony.

Your Ceremony

The registrars will have either discussed the ceremony format with you prior to the date of the ceremony or if the ceremony is at an approved venue this will have been done at your pre ceremony interview.

The Government guidance stating that ceremonies should be kept as short as possible will not prevent us from delivering a dignified service.

They registrars will wait in the ceremony room for your arrival and that of your guests.

The venue co-ordinator will arrange for guests to enter and be seated whilst complying to social distancing regulations

The Groom/Partner 1 will enter the room approximately 5 minutes before the ceremony is due to begin

The Bride/Partner 2 will enter the room at the ceremony start time. All attendants must take heed of social distancing guidance in that they must be either 2 metres apart or 1+ metre which is 1 metre plus mitigation to reduce risk. This includes but not restricted to face coverings or walking side by side 1 metre apart.

To reduce the risk of spreading infection, cheering and/or shouting are to be discouraged. We therefore suggest that guests are be invited to mark the union of the couple by clapping which can be led by the registrar

Signing the register

The register must be signed as part of the completion of the ceremony. To minimise the risk of infection, we ask that couple and witnesses each provide their own black or black/blue ink pen (or gel pen) in order to sign the register. If necessary, a pen will be provided, but you must undertake to sanitise the pen after each use.

To ensure our registrars maintain social distancing, arrows in the register will indicate where you need to sign

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Your witnesses will be asked in turn to sign the register whilst maintaining social distancing

There will be a brief opportunity to take photos after you have signed the register (whilst registrars arrange for the witnesses to sign), but a blank register will not be provided.

A certificate, if required, will be issued after the ceremony and the signing of the register. The registrars will place it on the table for you to collect.

After the ceremony

The venue co-ordinator will guide the exit of the couple and their guests.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: From what date can marriages be solemnized, and civil partnerships formed?

A: In Wales marriages can be solemnized and civil partnerships formed from 22 June. In England this can take place from 4 July.

Q2: 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.

Q3: Should PPE be worn by all parties at all times? How can you tell if it's the same person who gave Notice if they have a mask on?

A: Wearing PPE is optional for all in attendance. If an individual chooses to wear a face-covering we will not ask for it to be removed during the ceremony. Identity can still be checked before the ceremony (if required) by the wearer briefly removing it whilst complying with social distancing guidelines.

Q4: What if someone with Covid-19 symptoms attends the Register Office/Approved Venue? Can we ask them to leave?

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A: Yes. Guidance regarding public health and social distancing should always be followed. Anyone who has covid-19 symptoms should be self-isolating at home along with others in their household. 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 (providing the member or staff is not already officiating at the ceremony)

Q5: 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

Q6: We are getting married in a Local Authority Ceremony room or in a register office, 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.

Q7: 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.

Q8: 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 always preferable for registration ink to be used , it is considered to be safer to use your own pen (either black or blue/black), which should be permanent ink where possible. Please ensure that you bring one with you.

Q9: 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.

Q10: Are babies and small children included in the numbers? Are they allowed to attend?

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

Q11: Can my father walk me down the aisle?

Providing you live in the same household or are in the same bubble, or that you adhere to social distancing requirements.