

Walsall Registration 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

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

As part of this work we have COVID secure Risk Assessments and details of the maximum number which can be accommodated in our licensed rooms. This includes implementing mitigating measures such as providing hand sanitiser and introducing a one-way arrival and departure system.

Ceremony Rooms

Current Government regulations specify that a maximum of 30 people can attend your ceremony. This includes the registrars, yourselves and your witnesses. If you have an official photographer, then they also need to be included.

Our rooms here at the Register Office are not able to accommodate this number whilst adhering to social distancing. The Hatherton Suite holds up to 10 people which includes the 2 registrars and you, the couple as well as your 2 witnesses and a photographer if you have one). The register office holds 6 which includes 2 registrars and you, the couple as well and your 2 witnesses.

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.

This will mean that we may have to curtail some aspects of your ceremony:

- **Guests at weddings and civil partnership ceremonies taking place in register offices or other approved venues will be required to wear face coverings.**
- Face coverings will not have to be worn by the bride, groom or civil partners.
- Recorded music only can be played at your ceremony.
- Readings will currently not be permitted 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 toward the front of the room in order that they can clearly 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
- Your photographer will not be permitted to move about the room whilst the ceremony is underway. The 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

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.

Your ceremony

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

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

The Bride/Party 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.

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.

Certificates will not be issued to you on the day of your ceremony. This is to minimise the potential risk of infection. We will post your certificate(s) to your nominated address during the following 7 days. Should your personal circumstance mean that you urgently require your certificate, you must let us know when we call you to undertake the pre-ceremony interview so the registrars can ensure that they bring your certificate(s) along with them on the day.

After the ceremony

The registrars will guide the exit of the couple and their guests.

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

A: Face coverings will be required in places of worship and this applies to guests at weddings and civil partnership ceremonies including those taking place in register offices or other approved venues. Face coverings will not have to be worn by the bride, groom or civil partners.

Q3: What if someone with Covid-19 symptoms attends the Register Office? Can we ask them to leave?

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.

Q4: 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

Q5: 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.

Q6: 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.

Q7: 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.

Q8: Are babies included in the numbers? Are babies allowed to attend?

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