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|--|--|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>Report to:</b>                      | Environment and Neighbourhood Committee  | <b>Date:</b> | 11 March 2020   |
| <b>Report title:</b>                   | Civil Ceremonies in Heritage Houses  |              |                 |
| <b>Report from:</b>                    | Jan Underhill, Assistant Director, Wellbeing   |              |                 |
| <b>Ward/Areas affected:</b>            | Carshalton Central, Cheam  |              |                 |
| <b>Chair of Committee/Lead Member:</b> | Councillor Manuel Abellan  |              |                 |
| <b>Author(s)/Contact Number(s):</b>    | Kelly Saini Badwal, Head of Cultural Services, 0208 7704 755   |              |                 |
| <b>Corporate Plan Priorities:</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Active Citizens</li> <li>• Making Informed Choices</li> </ul> |              |                 |
| <b>Open/Exempt:</b>                    | Open   |              |                 |
| <b>Signed:</b>                         |                            | <b>Date:</b> | 5 February 2020 |

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to licence Whitehall Historic House and Honeywood Museum as civil ceremony venues. The introduction of civil ceremonies will widen the appeal of Sutton's Heritage Houses to couples who are looking for an alternative, intimate and local setting for a civil ceremony.
- 1.2 Sutton's Heritage Houses exist to preserve and promote the Borough's heritage. National Lottery Heritage funding has been used to restore Sutton Council's Heritage Houses which are now accessible, informative, creative and inspirational heritage venues for local people.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree to register Honeywood Museum and Whitehall Historic House as venues for civil ceremonies, with effect from 1 May 2020.

## 3. Background

### Whitehall Historic House and Honeywood Museum

- 3.1 Honeywood Museum received Heritage Lottery Funding and work was completed to improve the fabric and infrastructure of the building in 2012. Similarly, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Whitehall Historic House's substantial refurbishment was completed in



June 2018. Opening hours were reviewed as part of the project, and have been altered to reflect new social habits and demands on families and the community for Whitehall.

- 3.2 New initiatives at Honeywood and Whitehall including: Diwali celebrations; ‘The State of Education’; Mice, and Curiositea, have contributed to reaching new audiences.
- 3.3 Statistics show that visitor figures are rising to the numbers achieved before Whitehall was closed for refurbishment. Table 1 below shows annual visits to Sutton’s Heritage Houses.

Table 1: Annual visits to Sutton’s Heritage Houses (2015 to present)

| <b>Dates</b>             | <b>Number of annual visitors<br/>(includes Little Holland House)</b> | <b>Notes</b>                 |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| April 2015 to March 2016 | 33,624   |                              |
| April 2016 to March 2017 | 21,731   | Whitehall closed             |
| April 2017 to March 2018 | 21,189   | Whitehall closed             |
| April 2018 to March 2019 | 30,034   | Whitehall reopened June 2018 |
| March 2019 to April 2020 | 30,000   | On target for April 2020     |

Sutton Register Office

- 3.4 Annually the Sutton Register Office has 250 civil ceremonies. The Register Office currently licences the following venues in Sutton:
  - Croygas, 48 Mollison Drive, Wallington SM6 9BY
  - Holiday Inn, Gibson Road, Sutton SM1 2RF
  - Russetings, 25 Worcester Road, Sutton, SM2 6PR
  - The Grange, Beddington Park, London Road, Wallington SM6 7BT
  - The Oaks, Woodmansterne Road, Banstead, Carshalton SM5 4AN

**4. Issues**

- 4.1 Providing high quality heritage services to residents remains the primary purpose for Honeywood Museum and Whitehall Historic House. The proposal to offer civil ceremonies at the heritage sites aims to enhance and extend the current offer without detriment to the function of the buildings and visitor experience. Access for residents, events programming, and activities held at Honeywood Museum and Whitehall Historic House would not be impacted under the project proposals. Annual events and committed activities, such as the Carshalton Frost Fair or Heritage Lottery funded activities, would take precedence over civil ceremony bookings.

- 4.2 The Sutton Register Office identified that the venues currently licenced have different offerings such as funerals, events, birthday parties and fully licensed bars but civil ceremonies are not a priority for them. Venues for smaller intimate civil ceremonies are lacking in Sutton. Customer enquiries clearly outline the need for venues that offer smaller ceremonies. Residents meet their needs currently by booking venues in neighbouring boroughs. Honeywood and Whitehall are ideally placed to meet this shortfall in Sutton, offering intimate and unique spaces. Each site can host small ceremonies for up to 30 guests.
- 4.3 Together, Cultural Services and the Sutton Register Office have ensured that the requirements to register Honeywood and Whitehall for civil ceremonies are met. Regulatory services have approved the applications, all subject to committee decision.
- 4.4 Nationally, evidence shows that hosting ceremonies in Heritage Houses provides opportunities to reach new audiences and increase return visitors, boost donations and fundraising, alongside promoting sites by increasing their value, importance, advocates, and marketability. Nearby examples of heritage venues that host civil ceremonies include Morden Hall Park, Morden Park House, Nonsuch Mansion, Wandsworth Town Hall and Kingston Court House.
- 4.5 Civil ceremonies within Honeywood and Whitehall will further develop and sustain the independent cafes in each site run by local entrepreneurs. There will also be opportunities for local businesses, such as pubs, caterers, florists, photographers, event planners and bridal dressmakers to benefit from civil ceremonies being held in Honeywood and Whitehall.
- 4.6 The Friends of both Honeywood and Whitehall offer considerable support to each site. Initial discussions in principle with Chairs of the Friends Groups have been positive. If the recommendation is agreed, the detailed development plans would be discussed with Friends and volunteers to ensure their involvement and support.

## **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1 Option 1: To offer civil ceremonies across all three Heritage Houses, namely:

- Honeywood Museum
- Whitehall Heritage House
- Little Holland House

The fabric and contents of Little Holland House are too delicate to withstand regular large events. Further, the House is currently only opened once monthly and is located in a residential street. For this reason, this option is not recommended.

- 5.2 Option 2: To offer civil ceremonies at the two larger Heritage Houses only, namely:

- Honeywood Museum
- Whitehall Heritage House

Both of these Houses have the structural and operational facilities to host civil ceremonies. If approved, these Houses would be able to host civil ceremonies by May 2020.

- 5.3 Option 3: To retain the function of Honeywood and Whitehall as at present. Given that funding provided by the National Heritage Lottery Fund has outcomes to promote and diversify the reach of these properties, not taking this opportunity to offer civil ceremonies is not recommended.

## 6. Impacts and Implications

### Financial

- 6.1 The one off set up costs to apply for a three year licence and prepare the Houses to host civil ceremonies has been reviewed and the total for both Houses is £4,110.
- 6.2 On consulting with the Sutton Register Office, they are very confident that bookings would be received for at least one ceremony per month, per house. If a venue hire charge is set at £525 per ceremony, then this would yield a total income of £12,600 income per year for the venues alone. Year one net income on this basis would be approximately £8,000. Going forward, ongoing costs of £500 - £700 per annum for maintaining the ceremonies are anticipated, giving an annual net income of approximately £12,000 on the same basis.
- 6.3 Research across other local authorities where heritage houses are used for civil ceremonies has helped to guide the charges proposed in paragraph 6.2, for hiring Sutton's Heritage Houses as venues. The recommendation is to charge £525 for the hire of a room, including access to the garden area, in each venue. This does not include any extra costs, such as catering. Venue hire will remain separate from Register Office fees.
- 6.4 It is also proposed that a discount of 10% of the venue hire charge for bookings is offered in the first year, in order to promote the venues. The discount offered would be reduced to 5%, for bookings made in year two and the full charge of £525 applied in year three onwards.

### Legal

- 6.5 The relevant primary legislation permitting a local authority to approve the use of certain premises as venues for Civil Marriages and Civil Partnerships are as follows:-
- A. Marriage Act 1949
  - B. Civil Partnership Act 2004
  - C. The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005
  - D. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2103
  - E. The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
  - F. The Civil Partnership (Opposite-sex Couples) Regulations 2019
  - G. The Equality Act 2010
- 6.6 The laws relating to "approved premises" permit proceedings to take place in heritage houses.

## 7. Appendices and Background Documents

| Appendix letter | Title                        |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| A               | Equalities Impact Assessment |

| Background documents |
|----------------------|
| None                 |

| Audit Trail                         |       |                       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Version                             | Draft | Date: 5 February 2020 |
| Consultation with other officers    |       |                       |
| Finance                             | Yes   | Carol Worne           |
| Legal                               | Yes   | Rowenna Warburton     |
| Other Officers:                     | Yes   | Annette Madden        |
| Equality Impact Assessment required | Yes   | Completed             |

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