

Frequently Asked Questions

We find that couples often want to ask similar questions, so we have compiled a list which should answer most of your queries.

These are divided into the following categories:

Planning the day

Room 99 ceremonies

Giving notice

Meeting the registrar

Personalising the ceremony

Music

Arrangements on the day

After the ceremony

If you have a question that is not on this list, please email registrars@islington.gov.uk or call 0207 527 6350.

Planning the day

What is the difference between a marriage and a civil partnership? What is a civil ceremony?

A marriage in England and Wales can be between same-sex or opposite-sex couples. Marriages can be civil or religious (although most religions don't offer same-sex marriages). At the Town Hall and our licenced venues, we perform only civil marriages which means no religious content can be incorporated. Marriage is a verbal contract, meaning you must say prescribed words to be legally married. After a marriage ceremony you will be declared to be husband/wife and husband/wife. Your legal status will be 'married'.

A civil partnership in England and Wales is only available to same-sex couples. This was the only option for same-sex couples before the law changed to allow same-sex marriages, and same-sex couples can still choose to have a civil partnership if they prefer. Again, no religious content can be included. After a civil partnership ceremony, you will be declared to be civil partners in law. Your legal status will be 'civil partner'. A civil partnership can be converted into a marriage at a later date if the couple choose to do so.

The legal preliminaries to marriage and civil partnership (giving notice) have the same waiting times and documents required.

'Civil ceremony' is a term we use to make it clear that the ceremony has no religious content. The term covers both marriages and civil partnerships.

Do we have to have the ceremony in our local council area?

No! You can choose any licenced building in England or Wales. A licenced venue can be any non-religious building that has applied for and been granted a licence to hold civil ceremonies on its premises, such as a hotel or restaurant.

How many guests do your rooms hold at the Town Hall?

Council Chamber: 100 in the main room

60 on the balcony (extra fees apply)

Richmond Room: 60

Mayor's Parlour: 12

Room 99: 28

**What if our guest numbers increase beyond the capacity of our booked room in the Town Hall?
Can we 'squeeze in' extra guests? Can guests stand at the back of the room?**

Each room has a strict maximum number of people that can be safely accommodated, decided by fire regulations, and these are listed above. If your guests exceed the number allowed in the room, then some of them will be asked to remain outside.

If you find out after you book a room that it will be too small for your expected guest numbers, and you wish to move the ceremony to a larger room, contact us and we will check the availability of other rooms on your chosen date. Extra costs will apply if there is a difference in fees between the rooms.

Do the couple, photographer and registrars count towards our total number of guests?

No, you don't need to include these people in your total.

Do children count towards our total number of guests?

All children over two years old should be counted in the total.

What is included in the fee we pay to Islington and London City Registration and Nationality Service?

If you are having your ceremony at Islington Town Hall, the cost includes the hire of the room, the registrars' attendance and one marriage or civil partnership certificate.

If you are having your ceremony at a licenced ceremony venue, the cost includes the registrars' attendance and one marriage or civil partnership certificate. You will need to book the ceremony venue directly with their staff.

Can we bring our own flower arrangements to the Town Hall?

We have artificial flower arrangements in each ceremony room so there is no need to bring your own. You are welcome to bring your own personal flowers with you, but you won't be able to take them into the room beforehand. They will need to be brought into and taken out of the room within the ceremony slot you have booked.

Can we change the layout of the room at the Town Hall?

Unfortunately, no. There is not enough time between ceremonies to rearrange the seating or layout.

Can we reserve seating at the Town Hall?

Your ushers or guests are welcome to bring and put out 'reserved' signs on the chairs. The order of seating is something that is completely up to you and organised by your party.

Does the Town Hall have air-conditioning?

The Council Chamber and Room 99 have built in air conditioning.

At the moment, the building's listed status prevents us from installing air conditioning in the Richmond Room and the Mayor's Parlour. Please note this means these rooms can be quite warm on summer days.

In addition to this, we are unable to open the windows in the Richmond Room during ceremonies, due to the close proximity of our neighbours and the noise they experience if the windows are open.

Can we Skype our friends or family abroad during the ceremony?

Yes, you are welcome to, but please be aware we don't have reliable Wi-Fi in all of the Town Hall ceremony rooms, so you will need to use your own data.

What time can we have access to the Town Hall rooms on the ceremony day?

We aim to be able to give you access 15 minutes before your scheduled ceremony start time.

Do you have changing rooms at the Town Hall?

No, only public bathrooms.

Is it ok to have champagne delivered to the Town Hall?

There is no storage space at the Town Hall, so having deliveries made to the Town Hall in advance of your ceremony is not advised.

Someone in our party needs special access. What facilities are there at Town Hall?

We have limited special access parking spaces available on the Town Hall forecourt, and these need to be booked well in advance. There is also a ramp into the Town Hall, and lifts to all levels.

Can you recommend a photographer/ make-up artist/ reception venue?

Yes! Please see our suppliers page: <http://sayidoislington.com/suppliers/>

Room 99 ceremonies:

Please note that ceremonies in Room 99 during the weekdays are standard ceremonies, due to tight time constraints. They are not able to be personalised, there can be no co-ordination meetings with the registrars, choosing of ceremonies or personal vows, readings or bride/groom entrances.

There is no facility to conduct separate interviews in Room 99 at any time and if you really do not wish to see each other prior to the ceremony or if you want to personalise your ceremony in any way, you will need to book one of our other rooms for your ceremony.

Though a walk-in is allowed as part of the Room 99 enhanced ceremony on a Saturday, you both need to be seen together before the ceremony starts to go through a pre-ceremony interview. You are then allowed to exit after the interview if you wish, your guests can enter and then you may proceed with your entrance. You are able to include one reading into a Saturday Room 99 ceremony.

Giving notice

After you have booked your ceremony, you are both legally required to give a Notice of Marriage or Civil Partnership, in person, at a Register Office.

This means making an appointment to see a registrar to show them proof of your identity, address and that you are free to marry, and fill out some paperwork. This can be done up to a year in advance, but must be done at least one month before the ceremony.

The information will be placed on a noticeboard at the Register Office for 28 clear days for anyone to make any legal objections. If there are none, the legal paperwork will be issued to the Register Office who will be conducting your ceremony.

Where do we give notice?

If you are both British or EU citizens, you will do this in the Register Office for the council area you live in, even if that is not the one you are having your ceremony in. Only residents of the London Borough of Islington should come to Islington Town Hall.

If either of you are foreign nationals, subject to immigration control, you must give your notices at a designated Register Office. This is a Register Office that is authorised to take the notices of foreign nationals. The Register Office for the council area you live in may be a designated Register Office, but if it isn't, you will need to find a designated Register Office you can go to. Most London Register Offices are designated.

What documents do we take?

Most people need to bring passports and recent proof of address like a bank statement or utility bill.

If you have been married or in a civil partnership before, you will need to show proof that that union has ended. This could be a death certificate, decree absolute or final dissolution of civil partnership document.

This is a brief outline, so please see our website for full details: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/birth-death-marriage-and-citizenship/marriage-and-civil-partnerships/giving-notice>

I have given my notice. Will you let me know when it has been issued?

No, we will only contact you if there has been a problem with your notice.

Meeting the registrar

Can we meet the person who is conducting our ceremony?

For weekend ceremonies, a registrar will be allocated a month before. Please email us a month before your ceremony at registrars@islington.gov.uk and we will put you in touch with them.

You can then arrange to meet that person or talk on the phone at a time of mutual convenience to discuss your ceremony.

If your ceremony is on a weekday it will be conducted by one of our experienced registrars. We are unable to allocate a specific registrar as there are occasions where substitutions need to be made due to unforeseen circumstances. Please get in touch if you would like a meeting and we will try to arrange this wherever possible.

Can we request a male/female registrar?

Unfortunately, no.

Personalising the ceremony

For ceremonies in the Town Hall (except for Room 99) and all of our licenced venues, you are able to fully personalise your ceremony. You will be sent a link to examples of scripts to choose from and a form to fill in with your choices when you book.

Can we have more than one witness each?

Yes, you can, if you are having a marriage ceremony. It is usual to just have one witness each, but if you want to have two each then you need to advise the registrar before the marriage.

Civil partnership law is different: it is only possible to have a maximum of two witnesses, so if you have chosen to have a civil partnership, you only need to choose two witnesses in total.

Can the witness be a friend/family member?

Yes, they can be anyone you like, as long as they speak good English and are an adult.

Can the Register Office provide witnesses?

You need to bring your own witnesses as we do not have the staff levels to supply them.

Can our pet come to the ceremony?

While this could be a fun thought, the only animals permitted in the Town Hall are guide dogs, hearing dogs, and other assistance animals. Your animal should wear their vest to show that they are a trained assistance animal and not just a pet. If your animal does not have a vest, please bring the paperwork to show that they are a trained assistance animal.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced premise, you will need to check with your venue if they permit pets.

Can we use our own celebrant/ family member/ friend to conduct our ceremony?

The whole ceremony will need to be legally conducted by one of our registrars, though your friends and family can read poems etc.

Do we need to give each other rings?

Not at all. The exchanging of rings is a traditional part of a ceremony rather than a legal requirement. Some couples choose to exchange only one ring, some choose a token more personal to themselves, others choose not to include this part of the ceremony at all.

Can we include a ‘hand-fasting’ ritual into our ceremony?

Unfortunately, this ceremony has its roots in the pagan religion, so we are unable to incorporate it into a civil ceremony, which must be free of all religious connotations.

Can we use the words ‘to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part’?

Although these may seem like standard traditional marriage vows, they are in fact, part of the Church of England marriage vows, and so we are not able to use them in a civil ceremony.

You may like to consider different words with the same meaning, like ‘I promise to love, honour and care for you, to support you through good fortune and adversity, joy and sadness, as long as we both shall live.’

Can we choose a reading from the Bible or other religious text?

Registrars can only perform civil ceremonies, which must be free of all religious connotations, so unfortunately not. This means that the “Song of Songs”, or St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (“Love is patient, love is kind”. etc) cannot be read at a civil ceremony.

If you have a reading that mentions God or heaven or similar, but you don’t think it is a religious reading, please submit it to us and we will check whether it is acceptable. For example, the poem “Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven” by William Butler Yeats would be acceptable as it is not religious in content.

Some other examples which would be acceptable although they have reference to God would be “How Do I Love Thee” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (“Sonnets from the Portuguese”) and “Howard’s End” by E M Forster. The extract on marriage from “The Prophet” by Khalil Gibran (a philosophical / spiritual work but perhaps not specifically a religious one) is acceptable, but other passages may not be.

Why can’t we have religious content or a religious blessing in our civil ceremony?

Civil marriage and civil partnerships are intended to provide a non-religious option to couples who would like to make a legal commitment to each other outside of a religious setting. The law prevents civil marriages from containing religious elements.

We are having another blessing/ceremony abroad/outside so we want a very low key ceremony with just the minimum amount of fuss. Is that OK?

That is fine. Although we would encourage you to celebrate both ceremony days in these circumstances, we do have a choice of ceremonies available for you to choose from, and some are very simple.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced venue, the Council Chamber, Mayor's Parlour, Richmond Room or on a Saturday in Room 99, please note down your choices on the form you are provided with when you book. If you are having your ceremony in Room 99 on a weekday, just mention your other plans to your registrar on the day.

We are a same-sex couple having a civil partnership, do we need to have a ceremony?

As civil partnership law is different from marriage law, there are no legal words you need to say, so if you would prefer to simply sign the paperwork with your witnesses you can. Many couples like to have a ceremony and make promises to each other as a public pledge of their love and commitment, even though it is not a legal requirement. You will need to book a ceremony room and timeslot for the civil partnership paperwork to be done whether you are choosing to have a ceremony or not.

Do we need a rehearsal before the ceremony?

In our experience we have found that once you have discussed the details of your ceremony with your registrar, there is no requirement for a rehearsal. We do not offer rehearsals at Islington and London City.

Music

Who will manage the recorded music?

At the Town Hall it is requested that you choose one of your guests to be in charge of playing the music. They will be shown where the connections are, and all cues for when to play the music will be given by the registrar.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced venue, please arrange the music management with the venue staff.

What format shall we supply the music on at the Town Hall?

Council Chamber, Mayors Parlour or Richmond Room – any device that has a standard headphone jack

Room 99 - any device that has a standard headphone jack or CD

Can we have live musicians?

If you are booked for the Council Chamber, Mayor's Parlour or on a Saturday in Room 99 you are welcome to bring live musicians. If they require amplification they will need to bring that themselves.

The Richmond Room faces onto a residential street, so it is subject to strict licensing restrictions. Acoustic instruments such as harps, violins or guitars are permitted, but there can be no amplified music. The other restriction is that all the windows must be kept closed at all times in order to stop any noise from being heard by residents.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced venue, you can have live music as long as the venue permits it.

Can we play hymns or religious music?

Unfortunately, we are unable to incorporate religious music (whether words or music) into a civil ceremony, which must be free of all religious connotations.

If you would like a song that mentions God or heaven or similar, but you don't think it is a religious song, please email us and ask. For example, "Angels" by Robbie Williams and "I Say A Little Prayer" by Aretha Franklin are not considered religious songs although they mention angels and prayer. There are also some popular pieces of music such as Wagner's "The Wedding March" from Lohengrin (more popularly referred to as "Here Comes the Bride") which was written for an opera and would be acceptable, as would be Mendelssohn's "Wedding March".

The music for Schubert's "Ave Maria" (without the words) is acceptable as the music was not written for the Latin prayer.

Arrangements on the day

Can we have a nerve-steadying drink beforehand?

It is best to avoid drinking alcohol before your ceremony. If the registrar believes that if either you or your witnesses are intoxicated and unable to comprehend what you are doing, then the ceremony will be stopped from going ahead.

When should we arrive?

If you are seeing each other before the start of the ceremony, please both arrive around 15 minutes before the ceremony start time.

If you don't want to see each other before the start of the ceremony, we would advise that one person arrives around 15 minutes before the ceremony start time, and the other person about 10 minutes before. This way your ceremony should be able to start on time.

How will it work if we don't want to see each other before our ceremony at the Town Hall?

By both arriving at different times we are able to minimise the risk of you accidentally running into each other before the ceremony begins. At the Town Hall we have our own ushers to assist you once you arrive.

What happens if we are late?

It is important that you and your guests arrive in plenty of time so your ceremony can start on time. We do understand that sometimes things don't always go to plan, and if you are late then we will try to accommodate your party. There is a possibility that your ceremony will need to be rescheduled, depending on availability and registrar flexibility, to a later time or another day.

What time will the registrars arrive to our ceremony in a licenced venue?

We aim to arrive half an hour before the booked ceremony start time. We find that this is early enough to make sure that the ceremony can begin at the booked time.

What happens when we arrive for the ceremony?

The registrars will take you to a private room for an interview. This is to check that all the details given at the time of notice are correct and up to date, so that they can be entered onto the legal paperwork. At this point we will also discuss the details of the ceremony if this is the first time the couple have met the registrar.

Do we have to bring ID with us on the day?

No. Just bring yourselves, your guests and your witnesses!

What happens if the information we gave when we gave notice has now changed?

There are some details that are expected to change such as age, address and occupation. If these details change before the day of your ceremony, there is nothing you need to do. You do not need to bring any documents to support those changes; you just need to confirm them with the registrar at the pre-ceremony interview. If anything else changes, you must contact the register office as soon as possible.

Why do you ask for my father's details and not my mother's? Can I use my mother's details instead?

A marriage certificate has spaces for the couple to record their natural, adoptive or stepfather if they would like to. It is not a legal requirement to include the father's details but it may be useful for tracing family records by relatives in the future.

The current marriage law does not allow us to record the mother's details in the register instead, and our registrars must work within the law.

How long will the ceremony take?

The average ceremony will take about 30 minutes, depending on the length and number of any readings.

Will we run into other ceremony parties at the Town Hall?

We make every effort to limit the possibility of ceremony parties running into each other.

Ceremonies are booked at staggered times and we have ushers to help out as well. However, there may be unavoidable instances where parties could cross paths and we aim to deal with this as quickly as possible.

To facilitate this, we ask that couples and guests arrive on time, and photographers be respectful of other ceremonies by not blocking the main stairs taking multiple group photos.

What do we need to know about using the balcony in the Council Chamber?

You will need to book the balcony separately to your booking for the Council Chamber. Once you have booked the Chamber, please call or email us to add the balcony to your booking. The current cost for this is £180.00.

The balcony is accessed only by a staircase, so it is unsuitable for children in pushchairs or any person who struggles with, or is unable to climb stairs.

The entrance to the staircase is on the left of the Town Hall building, so we advise that you provide someone in your party with a list of the guests who are to be shown to the balcony, and ask them to stand at the front door of the Town Hall to direct those people around the side of the building and up the stairs.

We have booked the Council Chamber; can our photographer use the balcony to take pictures?

Yes, but only if you book and pay the additional fees to use the balcony. This fee includes the extra member of staff we need to have on duty to ensure safety on the balcony.

What name should I sign in when we sign the register/schedule?

You should always sign the register/schedule in the name you are using at the time. If you are planning to change your name after the ceremony, you could consider this to be the last time you sign in your old name.

After the ceremony

What should we do if we notice a mistake in the register/schedule?

We know it's all a bit overwhelming by the time you come to actually sign the register but it is extremely important that all the information recorded in the entry is correct. Your registrar will direct you to check everything before you put pen to paper, and please use those moments to double check your details.

It is your responsibility to make sure all is right before you sign. If you spot anything that is wrong tell the registrar straight away and they can amend it for you. It is very difficult to correct the registration after the event.

Please be aware that any errors in the information given will cost £90.00 to amend after you have signed to say the details are correct.

Can we have a glass of champagne in the room to celebrate after?

There is no alcohol permitted at any time, in any of the rooms in the Town Hall. You are welcome to have that celebratory glass of champagne outside instead, just as long as you aren't impeding the access of other ceremony parties.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced venue, you can have drinks in the room once the registrars have left, if the venue permits it.

Is there somewhere in the Town Hall where we can celebrate after?

Although there is no facility for holding any kind of reception within the Town Hall, the Islington Assembly Hall next door to the Town Hall can be hired for ceremonies and receptions. For availability and costs you will need to contact them directly at assemblyhall@islington.gov.uk

Can we have sparklers/ confetti/ confetti cannons/ rose petals/ bubbles/ glitter/ drones/ candles/ doves/ something else messy or hazardous inside the Town Hall? We will tidy up afterwards.

We do not permit anything messy, potentially damaging, or on fire! You are welcome to have these things outside of the building. If you have something in mind that is unusual but not messy/hazardous/on fire, please ask us beforehand if it will be possible.

If you are having your ceremony in a licenced venue, it will be up to the venue whether they permit any of these things.

We have booked transport to pick us all up afterwards. Can they park at the front of the Town Hall?

The old Routemasters are a common sight outside the Town Hall picking up parties. It is usual that the transport provider will ask you for a time to collect you all, and while there is no parking on Upper Street outside the Town Hall, your booked transport will be allowed to stop there long enough for you and your guests to get on.

What time should our transport arrive to pick us up?

Most ceremonies take 30 minutes from start to finish, plus photographs. Ideally your transport should be there waiting for you as you all emerge from the Town Hall ready to whisk you all away to your celebrations. Your registrar can advise you on an estimated time your ceremony will conclude once they know more about your requirements.

Can we get more than one certificate?

The fee you pay for the ceremony includes one certificate, but you are welcome to order as many as you need online on our website after the ceremony.

Do I have to change my name?

There is no legal requirement in this country to change your name after your ceremony. This is a personal choice and not everyone wishes to do so. Your certificate is evidence of the name change and no further legal processes need to be followed.

If you are nationals of another country, then we suggest you contact your consulate or embassy to find out if that is a legal requirement in your country.