

Report of Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Report to Director of Environment and Housing

Date: 28 January 2015

Subject: Bereavement Services – Charges 1st February 2015

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. In previous years above inflation price increases within the Bereavement service were necessary for the Council to remove the subsidy on Bereavement Charges. However, given the shortfall of £375k in income against budget for 2014/15 and the opportunity to ensure any additional costs incurred can be met, it is proposed to retain the same level of charges for the memorialisation's and increase all other charges from 1st February 2015 by 4%.
2. These proposals have also taken into consideration comments received following the consultation paper that was circulated to the Funeral Directors and published on the Council's website 'Talking Point.'
3. The proposed charges from 1st February 2015 will increase income by £235k and the schedule of charges are listed at appendix 1 and are attached to this report.

4. Recommendations

The Director of Environment and Housing is recommended to approve the schedule of charges across the bereavement service as set out in Appendix 1.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks authorisation for revised charges applicable to Bereavement Services from 1st February 2015, as set out in Appendix 1.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The City Council is the burial and cremation authority, and the Parks and Countryside Service is responsible for the management of 3 crematoria, 24 cemeteries and 22 closed churchyards. On average, the service deals with over 5,000 cremations and 1,000 burials each year and is the fifth busiest burial authority in the country.
- 2.2 In previous years above inflation price increases within the Bereavement service were necessary for the Council to remove the subsidy on Bereavement Charges. In addition, the Council remains committed and continues to ensure that re-investment is made for various improvement works across the Council's Cemeteries and Crematoria.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 There is currently a shortfall of £375k against budgeted income within bereavement services and to meet this shortfall and to address the rise in costs of providing burials and cremations, it is proposed to increase charges from 1st February 2015 by 4% as set out in Appendix 1, with prices shown to the nearest pound.
- 3.2 The table below shows the current core city comparisons as well as some other authorities within the region for the book of remembrance, burial and cremation fees:

	New Burial Including Interment £	Cremation £	B.O.R £
Birmingham	3,690	628	209
Manchester	2,655	715	180
Leeds	2,138	748	302
Bristol	1,555	667	132
Sheffield	1,430	595	164
Nottingham	1,644	449	-
Liverpool	1,550	711	100
Newcastle	1,584	666	280
Harrogate	1,623	720	171
York	-	734	-
Bradford	1,690	636	-
Kirklees	1,600	550	230
Calderdale	1,709	595	135
Wakefield	1,695	681	197

- 3.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that Leeds has the highest memorialisation and cremation fee, it is difficult to make a true like for like comparison as each Council sets its budget differently and also offer a wider selection of available options. For example, Sheffield's new right of burial is for a 30 year term as opposed to that in Leeds where it is 50years. This is in direct contrast to York where no provision for new burial appears to have been made. Some authorities have an electronic memorialisation to display the book of remembrance whilst others similar to Leeds have the more traditional leather bound ledgers.
- 3.4 It is also acknowledged that each authority will review their Bereavement service charges in the coming months and therefore, it is again difficult to make a true like for like comparison with other authorities.

4.0 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1 The Executive Board Member for Cleaner, Stronger, and Safer Communities has been consulted and a consultation document was distributed to the Funeral Directors and was also included on 'Talking Point', and a copy of this is attached to this report as Appendix 2.
- 4.2 In response to the consultation, there were only two comments that the service received regarding the proposal to increase all Bereavement service charges by 4% from 1st February 2015 which were as follows:
- 1) There should not be a separate charge for a poly container to hold ashes as this should be included within the cremation fee.
 - 2) The cost of memorialisation is considered to be too high.
- 4.3 Although most Local Authorities cover the cost of the poly container within the cremation fee, this does not take into account the occasions where a Funeral Director will provide their own container. Therefore, it is proposed to continue with a separate fee for each poly container used.
- 4.4 In comparison to other Authorities, Leeds does have one of the highest charges for the book of remembrance and although it is accepted that other Authorities have yet to set their charges, it is proposed to keep the memorialisation charges at the same level and not increase these by 4%.

5 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3. In the case of a death with no next of kin or should some members of the public be unable to meet these new charges through financial hardships or other such circumstances, support is available to bereaved families. There are 3 main means of support:
- Social Services
 - Hospital where the death occurred
 - Funeral Payments, available via the Department of Work and Pensions.
- 5.2 Under Section 50 of the National Assistance Act 1948 a local authority will meet the costs of a basic funeral where the deceased or the next of kin are not in a position to

meet the expenses. In Leeds there is an existing contract with a funeral director to undertake arrangements in these circumstances in partnership with Adult Social Care.

6.0 Council policies and City Priorities

6.1 The increase in fees will enable the City Council to meet statutory obligations as a burial authority, and contribute to responding to environmental legislation by abating 50% of mercury emissions from our crematoria.

7.0 Resources and value for money

7.1 It is estimated that the proposed charges set out in Appendix 1 will contribute £235k full year effect and that this additional income will support increased costs of service provision.

8.0 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

8.1 The decision maker has delegated authority under the scheme of delegation to take the decision. This is a significant operational decision but is not a key decision and therefore is not subject to call in.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 There is a significant risk that budget targets will not be met due to increased costs of providing the service and therefore this decision is important in ensuring the sustainability of burial and cremation provision.

10.0 Recommendations

10.1 The Director of Environment and Housing is recommended to approve the schedule of charges across the bereavement service as set out in Appendix 1.

11.0 Background documents

11.1 None