

Bereavement Service Charges: Consultation

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

The aim of this consultation is to seek the views of the public regarding the proposal to increase Bereavement service charges by 4% from 1st February 2015.

The Council remains committed to improving our Cemeteries and Crematoria and is also mindful that they are not only places used for the purposes of cremation or burial, but are also used as places for peaceful and quiet reflection. This in turn helps the bereaved when they come to visit to remember their loved ones.

Over the last few years, the bereavement service has seen an increase in fees and charges at above inflation rates which has brought charges more in line with other service providers and has helped to reduce the net subsidy of service from Council Tax receipts. However, more importantly, it has enabled the Council to progress with the number of improvement projects that have occurred at the various crematoria and cemeteries across the city.

Any proposed increase in charges is likely to be a sensitive issue and perhaps even more so within a Bereavement Service area. In order to secure the continued level of resource, the Council now needs to review its Bereavement service charges and similar to previous years, is proposing to increase these charges by 4% from the 1st February 2015 and seeks the views of the public regarding this proposal.

If you want to help shape the future of our cemeteries and crematoria locally, please read this document and then let us have your views. You can feed your views back to us in the following ways:

- write to us at **Bereavement Services, Parks and Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA.**
- e-mail us at parks@leeds.gov.uk

TIMESCALE

The consultation period will close on Friday 19th January 2015. Following this, the details will be set out within a delegated decision report for a final decision to be taken.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

The aim of this consultation is to seek the views of the public regarding the proposal to increase Bereavement service charges by 4% from 1st February 2015.

Background

The Council is responsible for the management of 24 cemeteries, 23 closed church yards and 3 crematoria.

Since 2008 and as part of the Council's long term burial strategy, the Council has committed through the capital programme £1.5m of which £1.1m has been used to secure new land for burial provision and to extend existing cemeteries where possible.

Work has been completed to extend, Kippax, Garforth and Harehills cemeteries and feasibility work has also been carried out to ensure that new land is suitable for burial purposes.

A new 5 acre cemetery at Whinmoor opened last year and is the Council's first new purpose built Cemetery to open in Leeds since 1937 and work is about to begin on a new site at Elmete.

New security measures were also put in place at Harehills with security cameras being installed and new metal fencing installed at Hunslet cemetery. The main entrance to Lawnswood Cemetery was widened to allow two way traffic and path improvements and drainage works were also carried out at other cemeteries across the city.

The Council has also secured £2.9m for the refurbishment of the cremators to meet requirements under Government legislation to abate mercury emissions from cremations by 50%. Work has been completed at Rawdon and is nearing completion at Cottingley. This refurbishment work also includes a new music system for chapel services offering a new webcast facility for chapel services for those who are unable to attend the funeral.

Among the broader financial considerations, the Council continues to face serious budget pressures and has experienced cash funding cuts of £94m from central government between 2010/11 and 2013/14 with a further £81m required by 2015/16. This is a reduction of £175m with further reductions expected in 2016/17 and 2017/18, all in addition to internal budget pressures that the council faces. This has also impacted on the Parks and Countryside service, with a £2.7 million budget reduction between 2010/11 and 2014/15. This equates to a reduction of 23% and further reductions are expected to be required in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

In previous years above inflation price increases within the Bereavement service were necessary for the Council to remove the subsidy on Bereavement Charges. However, it is projected that there will be a £375k shortfall in income against budget for 2014/15 and to ensure that costs incurred can be met, it is proposed to increase charges from 1st February 2015 by 4%. This will ensure a continued level of revenue for maintenance and improvement work across the cemeteries and crematoria.

The table below shows the current core city comparisons as well as some other authorities within the region for burial and cremation fees:

	New Burial Including Interment £	Cremation £
Birmingham	3,690	628
Manchester	2,655	715
Leeds	2,138	748
Bristol	1,555	667
Sheffield	1,430	595
Nottingham	1,644	449
Liverpool	1,550	711
Newcastle	1,584	666
Harrogate	1,623	720
York	-	734
Bradford	1,690	636
Kirklees	1,600	550
Calderdale	1,709	595
Wakefield	1,695	681

It is difficult to make a direct comparison between Leeds and other authorities because each authority are working to their own budgetary provisions and charges vary dependent upon the level of subsidy an authority has chosen to make. 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 without taking into consideration their proposed price rises for the new financial year.

It is also noted that not every authority operates in the same way. York Council for example do not appear to have made any provision for new burials within their list of charges.

ISSUES AND OPTIONS

The key issue for the Council is financial sustainability and to maintain a level of revenue resource for improvement works across the Council's cemeteries and crematoria.

One option for the Council to consider is to subsidise the Bereavement Service as an alternative to an increase in charges. However, this is likely to reduce services elsewhere across the Council and is not considered to be a sustainable option.

There is a significant risk that budget targets will not be met due to increased costs of providing the service and within this context, the Council is committed to ensure that the costs for providing the service should be met, but not exceeded through income.

A further option to consider is to bring expenditure in line with existing income levels by reducing the level of maintenance across the cemeteries and crematoria.

For those who are unable to meet the proposed increase in 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.

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.

PROPOSAL

Bereavement Service Charges - WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Thank you for reading this document. Now please let us know what you think about the 4% increase in bereavement charges by filling in and returning the following form.

1. Please indicate where you live by stating your postcode:

2. If you have any comments on the proposal please state them below

3. Are there any other options to generate this level of income from bereavement services that you think have not been considered in this consultation document?

Yes

No

If you have answered 'Yes', please indicate which further option should be considered in the box below:

The closing date for consultation is **Friday 19th January 2015**. You can respond in the following ways:

- Print off this page and send it to **Parks and Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA**.
- e-mail the filled in document to parks@leeds.gov.uk
- Provide feedback via <https://consult.leeds.gov.uk/>.