

Report of Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Report to Director of Communities and Environment

Date: 27th March 2017

Subject: Bereavement Services – Charges 1st April 2017

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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 price increases within the Bereavement service were necessary for the Council to reduce the estimated net subsidy. The focus remains on providing the best possible standards of service, which includes not only the maintenance of our 24 cemeteries but the ongoing aim of ensuring the long-term needs of the city for burials and cremations are met.
2. The Council's budget for 2017/18 was approved at full Council on 8th February 2017 which included a 2% above inflation increase in Bereavement charges to remove the current estimated net subsidy from the 1st April 2017. These proposals have also taken into consideration comments received following the consultation paper that was circulated to Funeral Directors and published on the Council's website.
3. The proposed charges from 1st April 2017 will increase income by £300k and the schedule of charges are listed at appendix 1 and is attached to this report.

4. Recommendations

The Director of Communities and Environment is recommended to note the contents of the report and 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 April 2017, as set out in Appendix 1.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The City Council's 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.
- 2.2 In previous years increase in charges within the Bereavement service provision were necessary for the Council to reduce the estimated net subsidy. 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 In line with the Council's approved budget that was agreed at full Council on 8th February 2017, it is proposed to increase Bereavement charges from 1st April 2017 by 5% 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	2,871	747	222
Bradford	1,835	672	155
Bristol	1,700	745	140
Calderdale	1,650	687	125
Harrogate	1,929	787	171
Kirklees	1,815	699	245
Leeds	2,312	809	302
Liverpool	1,640	755	100
Manchester	1,940	752	192
Newcastle	1708	690	288
Nottingham	2,002	580	214
Sheffield	1,725	690	170
Wakefield	1,993	793	218
York	-	835	-

- 3.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that Leeds has the highest memorialisation fee, it is difficult to make a true like for like comparison as each Council sets its budget differently. Some authorities have an electronic memorialisation to display the book of remembrance, whilst others similar to Leeds have the more traditional leather bound

ledgers. Whilst some authorities offer a different selection of available options, it is noted that Birmingham's exclusive right of burial is for a 75 year term as opposed to that in Bradford which is for 100 years compared to others including Leeds, where it is for 50 years. This is in direct contrast to York where no provision for new burial appears to have been made.

- 3.4 It is also acknowledged that each authority will review their Bereavement service charges in the coming months and each one will differ in terms of the current level of net subsidy each authority chooses to make. 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 Environment and Sustainability has been consulted and a consultation document was distributed to the Funeral Directors and was also included on the Council's website, and a copy of this is attached to this report at Appendix 2.

- 4.2 A summary of responses to the consultation, regarding the proposal to increase Bereavement Service charges by 5% from 1st April 2017 were as follows:

- 1) The cost of memorialisation is still considered to be too high in Leeds in comparison with adjacent authorities.
- 2) A 5% increase is well above inflation and is more than the basic wage rises, difficult to justify above inflation price rises given the current climate.
- 3) Any help families get will be limited and they will struggle to meet this increase in charges.
- 4) The cemeteries in Leeds are muddier than in comparison to the other adjacent authorities.
- 5) Some authorities provide a container for ashes included in the price for the cremation fee.

- 4.3 In relation to the above inflation price rise, this is in response to removing the current estimated net subsidy and the Council's commitment to remain focused on providing the best possible standards of service, which includes not only the maintenance of our 24 cemeteries but the ongoing aim of ensuring the long-term needs of the city for burials and cremations are met.

- 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 5%.

5 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3. Although it is difficult to make a true like for like comparison with other authorities, it is proposed to increase the age threshold for child interments from 7 years to 16 years to bring this in line with other core cities.

5.2 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 and charges is in line with the Council's approved budget that was set out at the full council meeting on 8th February 2017 and supports the Best Council Plan.

6.2 The cemeteries and crematoria also contribute towards the Vision of Leeds 2011 to 2030 which sets out a revised vision for the city with the specific objective for Leeds to be the best city in the UK by 2030.

6.3 Establishing this vision one of the top priorities to emerge from consultation was for the city to be a cleaner greener city. Aspects of this priority can be found in all of the areas in which the vision is intended to make a difference, although specific reference can be made to the commitment within the vision for Leeds to be the best city to live with good green spaces where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life.

6.4 Our cemeteries and crematoria provide places for quiet reflection where people are treated with dignity and respect at all stages of their lives.

7.0 Resources and value for money

7.1 It is estimated that the proposed charges set out in Appendix 1 will contribute £300k full year effect and that this additional income will support increased costs of service provision and remove the estimated current level of net subsidy.

7.2 It is proposed to introduce a new fee of £72 for every application that the Council has to make to the Ministry of Justice or Faculty if a Funeral Director requires any changes or an exhumation that requires a licence prior to disturbing an existing grave. Whilst it is acknowledged that these applications are not made on a regular occurrence, they are time consuming in the administration and pursuance of the said licence.

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 key decision and is subject to call in.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 Among the broader financial considerations, the Council continues to face serious budget pressures and has experienced a reduction of core funding in the region of £214m from central government between 2010/11 and 2016/17 budgets with a further reduction of £25.1m in 2017/18. This has also impacted on the Parks and Countryside service, with a £3.8 million budget reduction between 2010/11 and 2016/17. This equates to a reduction of 32% and further reductions are expected to be required over the coming month.
- 9.2 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 Communities and Environment is recommended to note the contents of the report and approve the schedule of charges across the Bereavement Service as set out in Appendix 1.

11.0 Background documents

- 11.1 None