

Report of Trading and Operational Support Manager

Report to Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Date: 26th February 2018

Subject: Bereavement Services Charges

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, 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. A scrutiny inquiry by the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board recommended proposals are brought forward to recruit two additional rangers to work with existing volunteers and 'friends of' groups as well as establish new community groups that support practical volunteer activities in cemeteries and crematoria.
2. A subsequent report to the council's executive board in December 2017 on the budget for 2018/19 assumed the need for an inflationary increase in bereavement charges and a 1% above inflation increase to enable the recruitment of two rangers to engage community volunteers.
3. In light of feedback raised during consultation it is proposed that the charge for rights to erect and inscriptions on memorials (as stated in the schedule) are not subject to an increase for 2018/19.
4. It was announced in Council on 21st February 2018 during the budget speech by the Leader of the Council that burial and cremation fees would be waived for child deaths. This would apply up to and including the age of 16 for Leeds' residents and Leeds NHS Trust for services in normal working hours with full details outlined in the main body of this report.

Recommendations

The Director of Communities and Environment is recommended to approve the schedule of charges set out in Appendix 1 in line with the contents of this report from 1st March 2018.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for increases in most bereavement services charges along with waiving burial and cremation fees for Leeds' children from 1st March 2018.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The Council is responsible for the management of 26 cemeteries, 25 closed church yards and 3 crematoria. Over the last few years, the council has reinvested over £5m as part of the council's long term burial strategy and mercury abatement programme and has also carried out general improvements across the council's cemeteries and crematoria. Some examples include the following:

- Extending the car parking facilities at Cottingley Crematorium
- Improving the entrance and vehicular movements at Lawnswood Crematorium
- Increasing the memorialisation and the installation of a water supply at Garforth Cemetery
- The replacement of cremators at Cottingley and Rawdon has also taken place which has created opportunities for other refurbishment works to be undertaken at both of these locations.

- 2.2 The Council remains committed to improving our cemeteries and crematoria and is also mindful that they are also used as places for quiet reflection. This in turn helps bereaved families when they come to visit and remember their loved ones.

3. Main issues

3.1 Managing Inflation and Improving Community Engagement

- 3.1.1 A report to the council's executive board in December 2017 on the budget for 2018/19 assumed the need for an inflationary increase in bereavement charges and a 1% above inflation increase to enable the recruitment of two rangers to engage community volunteers. Furthermore a recommendation was also approved following an Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board review of cemetery and crematoria horticultural maintenance grave conditions. This stated that a proposal is brought forward to recruit two additional rangers to work with existing volunteers and 'friends of' groups as well as establish new community groups that support practical volunteer activities in cemeteries and crematoria.
- 3.1.2 It is considered that the best way to meet this recommendation without increasing the level of subsidy is an above inflation price increase. This would enable cemeteries and crematoria to benefit from practical volunteer tasks who would undertake basic maintenance to improve their appearance supervised by a suitably

qualified ranger. Recruiting a ranger in this way would help alleviate concerns raised during consultation that standard of basic maintenance should improve.

3.1.3 Those who may struggle to meet the proposed increase in charges through financial hardships or other such circumstances, will continue to have support in the following three ways.

- 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.
- A person on low income may be eligible for a Funeral Payment if they are in receipt of qualifying benefits. The payment covers various aspects of the funeral, but is recoverable from the deceased person's estate if they have left one.
- NHS Trusts become responsible for the funeral arrangements of a person who dies in hospital when no relatives can be traced, or relatives are not able to afford the cost themselves and do not qualify for Funeral Payments. A claim may be made on the deceased person's estate to offset the cost involved.

3.1.4 In light of feedback raised during consultation it is proposed that the charge for rights to erect and inscriptions on memorials are not subject to an increase for 2018/19 (with the exception of sanctum memorials). The pricing schedule in Appendix 1 also retains the "no service" charge at £550 and now that there is a new cremator installed at Lawnswood this is included in the sites available for non-attended services.

3.2 Waiving Burial and Cremation Fees for Leeds' Children

3.2.1 It was also announced in Council on 21st February 2018 during the budget speech by the Leader of the Council that burial and cremation fees would be waived for child deaths up to and including the age of 16. In order to provide clarity on the detail of this announcement, it is proposed that the following will apply:

- That the waiving of fees would only apply to Leeds residents and Leeds NHS Trust. The waiver of child burial / cremation fees is only applicable where services are held within normal working hours. A cremation / burial fee would therefore be applied for non-residents in line with fees applicable and subject to general increases.
- The allocation of a new grave would be for one child and therefore a family grave would not be free in these circumstances. If a decision was made to purchase a family grave then the interment fee for the child would be free.
- The fee waiver includes the right to erect a memorial and add inscriptions to existing head stones but does not include memorials.
- That charges for child organ cremation along with foetal remains would be waived.

3.3 It should be noted that the waiver of child burial and cremation fees relates to those charged by the council and therefore any other fees (such as that levied by the funeral director) will still apply.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 The proposal to increase fees in line with inflation with a further 1% increase to cover the cost of recruiting a ranger to work with community groups in cemeteries and crematoria was subject to public consultation. In response a suggestion was made that fees for memorials were not subjected to an increase given the current level of charges made. The consultation report referred to an implementation of 1st February and a concern was raised about implementing charge increases from as early as this date. Further comments made reference to the general standards of maintenance in cemeteries and crematoria. Increases that have been applied enable funding of a ranger to help engage community groups to improve basic maintenance tasks. Not all fees are subject to an increase and for example rights to rights to erect and inscriptions on memorials have not been increased. The planned implementation is now from 1st March 2018.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 An equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screen has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

4.3 Council policies and best council plan

4.3.1 Cemeteries and crematoria support the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030 and in particular the aspiration that 'there are high quality buildings, places and green spaces, which are clean, looked after, and respect the city's heritage, including buildings, parks and the history of our communities' as part of the overall aim that 'all Leeds' communities will be successful'. They contribute to the Best Council Plan outcomes to 'enjoy greater access to green spaces, leisure and the arts' and 'enhancing the quality of our public realm and green spaces'.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The proposals to increase fees in line with inflation plus 1% towards recruiting a ranger are in line with the budget proposals contained in the executive board report in December 2017. The proposal to waive fees for child burial and cremations is estimated to have a £240k impact for which provision has been made in the budget from 2018/19.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 The decision maker has delegated authority under the scheme of delegation to take the decision. This is a not a key decision and not subject to call in.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation in this report.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Director of Communities and Environment is recommended to implement the schedule of fees as set out in Appendix 1 and in line with the contents of this report.

6. Background documents¹

6.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.