



Report of Trading and Operational Support Manager

Report to Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Date: 31st March 2021

Subject: Bereavement Services Charges – 1st April 2021

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open 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

1. Main issues

- A report to the Council's Executive Board on 10th February 2021 on the budget for 2021/22 assumed the need for a 5% inflationary increase in bereavement charges included a figure of £367k.
- The Council has listened to the feedback received following the consultation period and made its decision to implement the new fees and charges from 1st April 2021.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- The Best Council Plan 2020 – 2025 – a strong economy and compassionate city, by providing greater access to greenspaces including our cemeteries and crematoria.

3. Resource Implications

- The 5% inflationary increase in bereavement charges is in line with the Council's agreed budget that was given approval at the Council meeting held in February 2021.

Recommendations

- a) The Chief Parks and Countryside Officer is recommended to approve the schedule of charges set out in Appendix 1 in line with the contents of this report from 1st April 2021.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to implement the revised charges applicable to Bereavement Services from 1st April 2021, as set out in Appendix 1.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The Council is responsible for the management of 26 cemeteries including a number of closed church yards and 3 crematoria and is one of the busiest burial and cremation authorities outside of London.
- 2.2 In recent 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.
- 2.3 New audio and visual equipment is about to be installed across each of the three Council managed Crematoria, so that within this financial year, the service will be able to offer the live streaming of funeral chapel services.
- 2.4 Work also continues in preparation for the procurement of a new online booking system together with plans to extend Cottingley Cemetery which is near to capacity.
- 2.5 The Council remains committed to improving our cemeteries and crematoria and is mindful of the important role our cemeteries have, not just for the purposes of burial, but for providing high quality green space for places of quiet reflection.
- 2.6 A report to council on 10th February 2021 on the budget for 2021/22 assumed the need for a 5% inflationary increase in bereavement charges which included a figure of £367K.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 For 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.
- 3.2 A comparison of fees and charges was undertaken, but it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions, as each local authority will set its fees and charges differently as part of their own budget setting process.

- 3.3 Concerns amongst a few funeral directors have been raised that an above inflation price rise cannot be justified when there is no online booking system and no live streaming of chapel services.
- 3.4 Whilst these are genuine concerns that have been raised, as stated previously, both areas are being addressed with new audio and visual equipment being installed across each of the three Council's managed crematoria and a new service provider is being sort for the provision of on line bookings.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 An online public consultation was undertaken before the Council's Executive Board made the decision to approve the Council's revenue budget for 2021/22 which included the 5% increase in bereavement service charges from 1st April 2021.
- 4.1.2 As a follow up to this meeting, a further three week information and consultation process was carried out where some funeral directors raised their concerns that there was no justification for such a price rise, especially in the current economic climate and the ability of people being able to pay.
- 4.1.3 Other comments were along similar lines that an above inflation price rise could not be justified when there was no online booking availability, no live streaming of chapel funeral services and nearby authorities were only increasing their fees by 2.5%.
- 4.1.4 The Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles has also been consulted.

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 the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030 is to be the best city in the UK by 2030. It has specific aims that the economy will be prosperous and sustainable and that all Leeds' communities will be successful, where there are high quality buildings, places and green spaces, which are clean, looked after and respect the City's heritage.
- 4.3.2 Leeds has one of the oldest municipal cemeteries in the UK and cemeteries are recognised by Historic England as being conceived and designed both as gardens of the deceased and as a memorial. The inscription on memorials, the design of monuments, the choice of stones, the architecture of building and landscape design shed light on past social customs and events and combine to make a cemetery an irreplaceable historical resource that we see today.
- 4.3.3 The Best Council Plan 2020 – 2025 –a strong economy and compassionate city, by providing greater access to greenspaces including our cemeteries and crematoria.

Climate Emergency

4.3.4 The Council's managed cemeteries and crematoria contribute towards a sustainable infrastructure to help tackle climate change by providing good quality greenspaces and places to plant new trees in appropriate places to aid temperature amelioration. The planting of new trees and providing quality greenspace will also contribute towards the Council meeting its objective to become carbon neutral by 2030.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 The increase in relation to Bereavement services charges is in line with the Council's budget meeting that was held on the 10th February 2021.

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

4.5.1 This is a significant service decision which is not subject to call in.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The risk associated with this decision is considered to be low as this relates to a 5% increase as agreed at the Council meeting that was held in February 2021.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Council remains committed to improving the quality of the Council's managed cemeteries and crematoria and over recent years has re-invested over £5m into the service.

5.2 As part of the consultation process, respondents were invited to put forward their views on where they would like to see improvements being made across the Council's managed cemeteries and crematoria which help to inform future development plans.

6. Recommendations

The Chief Parks and Countryside Officer is recommended to approve the schedule of charges set out in Appendix 1 in line with the contents of this report from 1st April 2021.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 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.