

Bereavement Services - Service review and Charges

Decision maker: Assistant Director of Economy and Place

Decision date: Tuesday, 6 April 2021

Report by: Direct Services Manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To consider and approve new service charges and changes to service times for Bereavement Services.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Charges are amended for Bereavement Services, as shown in appendix 1, to take effect on 1st May 2021 are approved; and**
- b) The cremation service times are increased to reflect the need of the bereaved to have sufficient time to pay their respects, as shown in appendix 2 are approved; and**
- c) Pre-purchasing of burial plots in Hereford, Kington and Wigmore Cemeteries is no longer offered.**

Alternative options

1. A general increase. This is not being recommended as this will not deliver on the service improvements detailed in this report.
2. Do nothing. This is not recommended as this will not deliver on the service improvements detailed in this report.

Key considerations

3. The service is responsible for Hereford Crematorium, cemeteries in Hereford, Leominster, Kington and Wigmore as well as three closed churchyards within Herefordshire. Working directly with funeral directors and members of the public to facilitate funeral services (burials and cremations) as well as providing memorial options for both the cemetery and crematorium
4. A study carried out by a private operator found that that the bereaved value having sufficient time at the crematorium more than they do cost, In particular, that price per minute paid for a cremation is a better measure of value for most Bereaved families than price alone.
5. Services times at the crematorium will be amended to reflect a need for those attending a service to have more time to pay their final respects. An overview is provided in appendix 1.
6. Benchmarking has been undertaken to ensure that the proposed charges are in line with charges applied elsewhere. This benchmarking has been undertaken against comparable services within the region.
7. It is important to note that charges are not a straight competitive exercise between other facilities. Benchmarking only allows for considered review of current and proposed charges. There are many other factors which determine how charges are set locally such as the size of each establishment, staffing levels.
8. Bereavement services has been awarded Gold standard status for services to the bereaved. Working with the Wildlife Trust, the service is progressing new initiatives such as wild flower sections, bird, bat, owl boxes and insect houses across all grounds. This work will enhance the importance of the natural habitat with the grounds but does require additional resource.
9. Available land for future burials within Council managed cemeteries is at a premium with the exception of Leominster Cemetery. At present, the public are able to pre-purchase a grave space as part of funeral planning however this puts pressure on space for at-need burials. By no longer permitting the option to pre-purchase burial plots, pre-need at Hereford, Kington and Wigmore will ensure space is maintained for at-need burials.

Community impact

10. The proposal is in line with crematorium and cemeteries of neighbouring authorities. Whilst this proposal will enhance and provide value, it could impact on those families with limited means and who don't qualify for financial assistance.

Environmental Impact

11. This proposal does not impact on the environment.

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. Any increase on charges/fees can affect those in society that are less able and who do not qualify for financial assistance. The service will continue to offer a direct cremation (no service) at 08:30 as well as 30 minute service slot at 08:45, 09:30 and 16:15 at a reduced charge.
14. Bereavement Services will continue to offer assistance to anyone who wishes to arrange a funeral without the services of a funeral director. This in the first instance will include signposting to those organisations who offer assistance. It can also include advice on the provision of a simple coffin, advice on who best to transport the deceased to the crematorium and help with completing the necessary forms. It does not include services normally associated with a funeral director.

Resource implications

| Revenue budget implications | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | Future Years | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|--|
| Crematorium Income | 193 | 193 | 193 | 193 | |
| Cemetery Income | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 | |
| Ancillary Income | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 | |
| TOTAL | 240 | 240 | 240 | 240 | |

Legal implications

15. The council is a burial authority by virtue of section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972. This definition also extends to the Cremation Act 1902 (“the 1902 Act”). The council has the power to charge fees for services in connection with burials under article 15 of the Local Authorities’ Cemeteries Order 1977 (“the 1977 Order”) and for

cremations under section 9 of the 1902 Act. Such fees are to be open for public inspection. Under article 3 of the 1977 Order and section 4 of the 1902 Act the council has general powers of management over its cemeteries and crematoria respectively. Therefore, the proposals in this report are in accordance with the council's statutory powers in relation to these services.

Risk management

16.

| Risk / opportunity | Mitigation |
|---|--|
| <p>Could result in some funeral directors on the fringe of the county using the faculties provided by other local authority or private operators. Any increase will potentially bring other factors into play when funeral directors/families choose which crematorium to attend. For example, travel distance.</p> | <p>Initial queries from the public and funeral directors will be handled at service level. The continued investment in the service facilities will be highlighted.</p> |
| <p>There could be public disquiet at the increases; this could lead to unwelcome publicity.</p> | <p>Initial queries from the public and funeral directors will be handled at service level. The continued investment in the service facilities will be highlighted. Adverse publicity in the local press will require a press release highlighting the above.</p> |
| <p>There could be an increase in the number of people turning to the Public Health Funeral as a last resort.</p> | <p>Bereavement Services will continue to offer assistance / advice on all possible options in arranging a funeral. This, in the first instance, will include signposting to those organisations who offer assistance.</p> |

Consultees

17. None

Appendices

Appendix A - Revised charges.

Appendix B – Proposed changes to service times at the crematorium

Background papers

None identified.