

Subject:	Bereavement charges		Status:	For Publication	
Report to:	Cabinet		Date:	29 th November 2017	
Report of:	Director of Communities		Portfolio Holder:	Operations	
Key Decision:	X	Forward Plan	X	General Exception	Special Urgency
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:		Yes	Attached:	Yes
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:		No	Attached:	No
Contact Officer:	Paul McHenry		Telephone:	01706 252519	
Email:	paulmchenry@rossendalebc.gov.uk				

1.	RECOMMENDATION(S)
1.1	That Council agree and approve the recommendations included in this report, for increased charges for Bereavement services, from 1 st January 2018.
1.2	That Council agree to introduce an annual appraisal of the bereavement charges made by the authority, to allow investment required by the service and to inform fees and charges made by the authority for bereavement services in future years.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The report outlines proposals to increase Bereavement charges levied by the authority to allow investment in the service.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **A clean and green Rossendale:** our priority is to keep Rossendale clean and green for all of Rossendale's residents and visitors, and to take available opportunities to recycle and use energy from renewable sources more efficiently.
 - **A proud, healthy and vibrant Rossendale:** our priority is to ensure that we are creating and maintaining a healthy and vibrant place for people to live and visit.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Continuation of the current fee structure will place further strain on Council finances.
- 4.2 Adverse impact on the reputation of the Council; mitigated by development of a communications plan to ensure that the increased service charges are clearly explained, including on-line advice for bereaved families on reducing overall bereavement costs.
- 4.3 Impact of increased charges; we will seek to review service charges of the service, with a full review at the end of the first year.

5. BACKGROUND AND SERVICE COSTS

- 5.1 The authority provides Bereavement services at its four cemeteries, located in Bacup, Haslingden, Rawtenstall and Whitworth. Bacup is the oldest site, having been in operation since 1862. The sites are maintained by the Operations Unit.
- 5.2 The four cemeteries provide facilities for burials and the interment of ashes. On average a little over 200 interments occur each year, including those for stillborn babies and children. Unlike some Councils no charges are made for the interment of the remains of stillborn babies or children under 14 years of age.

- 5.3 The authority employs a Bereavement Services officer and a team of three Cemetery Operatives; the operatives dig graves and maintain the sites. During busy periods for the service further resources are devoted to cemetery sites. A number of other services are available on request, such as provision of memorial benches and supply of memorial trees/plaques.
- 5.4 Estimated income from the service for 2017/18 is £146,000. The Bereavement service has fixed costs, including the salary costs of the Bereavement Services officer and the three Cemetery Operatives, totalling £118,000 per annum. In addition there is a range of equipment, replaced as required, used to maintain the sites with estimated capital costs of £95,000.
- 5.5 In addition to the above the authority provides a number of public health funerals each year [three to four each year]. Under Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 Local Authorities must 'cause to be buried or cremated the body of any person who has died or been found dead in their area, in any case where it appears to the authority that no suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body have been or are being made otherwise than by the authority.' In other words Local Authorities are legally responsible for the disposal of a body. Each public funeral has a cost of approximately £1500: the authority is entitled to recover the costs involved out of the deceased's estate. On average we recover approximately 20% of associated costs.
- 5.6 Two of the cemetery sites in the borough [Rawtenstall and Haslingden] will require works to extend the sites onto land owned by the authority to take account of required future provision. Although no costs have yet been calculated for such works they are each likely to be five figure sums for each site.
- 5.7 Funeral poverty has been an issue of concern and subject to national media coverage over recent years. In a recent report by Royal London [National Funeral Cost Index] the average cost of a funeral increased by 3% in 2017. This compares to the average increase in the Consumer Price Index of 2.6% for the same period. However, it must be noted that by far the largest component cost of a burial is that for the services of a funeral director [on average 53% of total funeral cost]. The report suggests that consumers are becoming more aware of cost differences, although most bereaved families opt to use the first funeral director they contact.
- 5.8 The average cost of a burial in the UK is £4,257, with 597,000 reported deaths in the UK per annum. The average cost in Lancashire is £4,008 [Source - Royal London [National Funeral Cost Index].

6. KEY ISSUES AND PROPOSALS

- 6.1 Appendix A provides information on the charges made for Bereavement services made by the authority and compares them to costs of other neighbouring local Councils. As can be seen, charges in Rossendale are far lower than elsewhere.
- 6.2 In recent years Bereavement services charges in Rossendale have been increased by a small percentage, in line with the other fees and charges. However, with further financial pressure to be faced by Council beyond 2017/18 [e.g. the impact of the reduction in the value of New Homes Bonus comes into effect alongside the loss of the Lancashire Waste Cost Share revenue], it is important that the authority's Bereavement service charges raise sufficient income to allow continued investment in the service, allowing standards to be maintained and for the service to be future-proofed, including the extension of cemetery sites as outlined in

para 5.6 above.

- 6.3 The proposal raises Bereavement charges to a level comparable to neighbouring Councils. Current charges made by the authority (as shown in Appendix A) are low compared to neighbouring Councils. However, there are no proposals to reduce service provision or the number of cemeteries, nor to introduce charges for the interment of the remains of stillborn babies or children under 14 years of age.
- 6.4 The proposed level of increase in charges is estimated to raise a further £91,000 per annum.
- 6.5 It is also recommended that fees and charges for the Bereavement services be reviewed each year to ensure that our charges keep pace with the requirements of the service and the level of investment needed.
- 6.6 As part of any increases in charges it is proposed that the Council use its web pages and other social media outlets to promote ways in which bereaved families can keep funeral costs down.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

7. SECTION 151 OFFICER

7.1 Financial matters are noted within the report.

8. MONITORING OFFICER

8.1 All implications are covered within the body of the report.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

9.1 There are no policy implications contained within the report and its recommendations.

9.2 Full communication will be undertaken with local funeral directors prior to the implementation of the increase to charges.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The proposals bring charges for the authority's Bereavement service in line with required levels of investment and with charges made by neighbouring Councils, allowing sustained levels of investment. Use of our cemeteries has remained at a steady level over recent years, including burials of deceased persons from outside the borough.

10.2 There are no proposals to reduce cemetery provision or to introduce charges for the interment of the remains of stillborn babies or children under 14 years of age.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
A False Dawn - Funeral costs rise again after a one year respite (Royal London)	One Stop Shop, Futures Park.