

Subject:	Bereavement charges	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet Council	Date:	29 th November 2017 13 th December 2017
Report of:	Director of Communities	Portfolio Holder:	Operations
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
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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.

FULL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Name of Policy, Decision, Strategy, Service or Function, Other: (please indicate)	Increase in Bereavement services charges	
Lead Officer Name(s) & Job Title(s) :	Paul McHenry, Head of Operations	
Department/Service Area:	Communities Department – Operations Unit	
Telephone & E-mail Contact:	01706 252519 -- paulmchenry@rossendalebc.gov.uk	
Date Assessment:	Commenced:	Completed:

We carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to analyse the effects of our decisions, policies or practices. The EIA should be undertaken/started at the beginning of the policy development process – before any decisions are made.

1. OVERVIEW

The main aims/objectives of this policy¹ are:
To increase charges for bereavement services to place Rossendale’s charges in line with those of other neighbouring authorities.

(Refer to “**EIA Guidance**” for details)

Is the policy or decision under review (please tick)

New/proposed

Modified/adapted

Existing

The main intended people or groups that will be most affected by this policy are:
Bereaved families and Funeral Directors will be most affected by the proposed raising of charges for use of the service.

(Refer to “**EIA Guidance**” for details)

¹ Policy refers to any policy, strategy, project, procedure, function, decision or delivery of service.

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2. FINDINGS / EVIDENCE

FINDINGS/EVIDENCE: The following information/data has been considered in developing this policy/decision (including any consultation or engagement):	
Information/data obtained and/or Consultation/engagement carried out (please state who with)	What does this tell us? / What does it say?
Information collated from each neighbouring District Councils.	Information provided tells us that charges for similar services offered by neighbouring councils are higher than those currently offered by the Council.
Detailed discussions have been held by the Head of Operations with the Portfolio Member for Operations and the Director of Communities.	Members considered information from other neighbouring councils and the levels of charges and service provided by each council.
Officers have discussed the issue with officers of other councils.	The Head of Operations and the Bereavement Services Officer have spoken to neighbouring council officers to ascertain their charges and their levels of service.
Review of charges	Neighbouring councils regularly review and benchmark charges for bereavement services as part of annual review of other authority fees and charges.

Add more/delete rows as required - See **EIA Guidance**

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3. EQUALITY IMPACT

Using the table below please indicate whether the policy/strategy/decision has a positive, negative or no impact from an equalities perspective on any of the protected equality groups listed below. **Please also give consideration to wider equality of opportunity and community cohesion impacts within and between the groups identified.** See EIA Guidance

Equality		Positive Impact (It could benefit)	Negative Impact (It could disadvantage)	Reason and any mitigating actions already in place (to reduce any adverse /negative impacts <u>or</u> reasons why it will be of positive benefit or contribution)	No Impact
Age	Older people	<input type="checkbox"/>	√	May be affected if increases in charges proves difficult to afford.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Younger people and children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Disability	Physical/learning/mental health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Gender Reassignment	Transsexual people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Pregnancy and Maternity		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Race (Ethnicity or Nationality)	Asian or Asian British people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Black or black British people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Irish people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	White British	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Chinese people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Gypsies & Travellers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Other minority communities not listed above (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Belief or Religion		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Sex	Women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
	Men	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Sexual Orientation	gay men, gay women / lesbians, and bisexual people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Marriage and Civil Partnership (employment only)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Contribution to equality of opportunity		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Contribution to fostering good relations between different groups (people getting on well together – valuing one another, respect and understanding)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√
Human Rights http://intranet/site/scripts/documents_info.php?categoryID=86&documentID=251		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		√

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4. OUTCOME OF EIA – COURSE OF ACTION TO BE TAKEN

What course of action does this EIA suggest you take? More than one of the following may apply	Please indicate
Outcome 1: No major change required. The EIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.	√
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy to remove barriers identified by the EIA or better promote equality. Are you satisfied that the proposed adjustments will remove the barriers identified? If there is a negative impact identified, you must consider (and evidence/record) what mitigating actions you have or will put in place to reduce the negative impact where/if possible, and to enhance the positive impact. This might include any partnership discussions/working that needs to be undertaken. Complete EIA Action Plan as appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 3: Continue the policy despite potential for negative impact or missed opportunities to promote equality identified. You will need to ensure that the EIA clearly sets out the justifications for continuing with it. You should consider whether there are sufficient plans to reduce the negative impact and/or plans to monitor the actual impact. This might include any partnership discussions/working that needs to be undertaken. Complete EIA Action Plan as appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 4: Stop and rethink the policy when the EIA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination or significant negative impact that can not be justified or mitigated against. <u>You must speak to the People and Policy Team immediately.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If a negative impact as been identified and there are no sufficient mitigating actions in place or planned. Please see the guidance and you must speak to/ see advice from your Head of Service or the People and Policy Team.

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5. EIA ACTION PLAN & REVIEW

Based on the impact assessment, findings/evidence and outcomes identified above, please complete the Action Plan below – these should be actions arising as a result of undertaking the EIA.

The Action Plan should address (not exhaustively):-

- Any gaps in findings/evidence research including any consultation or engagement regarding the policy and its actual/potential affects.
- How you will address any gaps.
- What practical changes/action will help reduce any negative impacts that you have identified.
- What practical changes/action will help enhance any positive contributions to equality.

Further Actions Required: Yes No

EIA Action Plan

Issue	Action required	Lead officer	Timescale

Please add more rows if required.

Actions arising from the Impact assessment should form part of the business planning process for service areas.

Monitoring & Reviewing the Effect of the Policy

Please state how you will monitor the impact and effect of this policy and where this will be reported:

Officers will review any comments made on the increase in charges, though it must be noted that the proposed increase in charges bring the service in Rossendale in line with those charges made by neighbouring councils.

Officers will monitor the rate of use of the service to see if increased charges have affected the use of our bereavement service [i.e. number of funerals].

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INTERNAL ONLY

MANAGEMENT ACTION REQUIRED (to be completed by the relevant Head of Service following Management Team / Programme Board review)

- Outcome of EIA agreed/approved by Management Team / Programme Board :
Yes No

- Referred back to Assessor/Author for amendment : (date)

- Published/made publicly available on: (date)

Signed:..... (Head of Service / Director) Date:

Date of Review²:

[To be completed by the lead officer]

² This date will be set on an annual basis as default for review unless otherwise specified by you.

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