

Subject:	Life Events Fees and Charges for 2017/2018		
Date of Meeting:	19 January 2017.		
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer for Strategy Governance & Law		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2017/18 for Bereavement Services, Registration Services and Local Land Charges within Life Events, in Strategy Governance & Law.(SGL)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Policy, Resources & Growth Committee

- 2.1 Approves a general inflationary increase of 2% on all Life Events fees and Charges for the financial year 2017/18 save for the exceptions set out at 2.2 below;.
- 2.2 Approves a proposal to increase Bereavement Services burial charges by 5%, Registration Services fees and charges by 5%, and a proposed increase of £5.00 on each Local Land Charges search fee for the financial year 2017/18 as detailed in Appendices 1 - 3.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy in 2008. The main aims of the policy were to ensure that:

- Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually including consideration of potential new sources of income;
- Fees and charges are set after comparing with 'statistical nearest neighbours' (or other relevant comparator groups) and taking into account market, legal and other contextual information;
- Unless set by a statute, fees and charges are set to recover full costs, including central overheads and capital financing, to ensure that services maximise potential for income generation from the services offered.
- Subsidies and concessions are not applied unless approved by members;

- The impact on financial inclusion is considered when setting fee levels.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 For Life Events, this year's proposals take account of knowledge of the local market in relation to current business levels, as well as projected future demand for services based on this current information. They are however influenced by local competition for cremation services, leading to a view to only propose increases for burial fees, and so not to propose an increase for the cremation charge element of our service.
- 4.2 Analysis does suggest there is an opportunity to increase burial charges, having reviewed current benchmarking information held for neighbouring local authorities and other service providers. Provision continues to be made for Welfare Funerals (Public Health Funerals) in cases where it can be established there are no financial means to pay for a funeral.
- 4.3 The exercise has been to review all non – statutory fees and charges to demonstrate cost recovery, and where possible maximise income for the services offered. This work has been included in the services budget savings proposals for 2017/18. It is not within our power to increase statutory fees in any Life Events services. All fees and charges have been set to ensure they cover the actual costs of service provision.
- 4.4 Consultation with the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the General Register Office (GRO) has previously established there is not a legal obligation to consult with members of the public about non-statutory fees, as the Local Authority should have it's own policies for fee setting against services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Charges and Fees setting policy in 2008.
- 4.5 A further review of fees and charges may be carried out during the financial year 2017/18.
- 4.6 These proposals will potentially generate additional income of up to £14,000 in the year 2017/18 for burial services. Additional income as a result of increase in Registration fees and charges is likely to be £40,000. An additional income of £23,000 is likely as a result of the increase Local Land Charges search fee.

Bereavement Services

- 4.7 Following a comprehensive review of fees and charges in Bereavement Services 3 years ago, and subsequent annual reviews thereafter, for 2017/18 we have updated our benchmarking information, and researched the fees currently charged for similar services in neighbouring districts including Worthing, Eastbourne and the Downs Crematorium. The review has demonstrated that Bereavement Services remain competitive with near neighbours and still offer services for a lower fee than most Local Authority neighbours. However, our cremation fee is higher than our closest competitor. For this reason we have decided not to request any increase in these fees, over and above the annual

inflationary increase.(2%). We have though decided to recommend a 5% increase in burial fees only.

- 4.8 As with previous reviews of Bereavement Services fees and charges, there are no proposals to introduce burial or cremation charging policies in relation to children.
- 4.9 As well as a thorough benchmarking exercise, comprehensive unit costs analysis has established exactly what it costs B&HCC to provide the services offered to our customers
- 4.10 Appendix 1 contains a table of the main changes to our burial fees and charges in Bereavement Services, with the new proposed fee.
- 4.11 The additional income is estimated of up to £14,000 if business levels remain consistent in 2017/18 to the demand for services during 2016/17.

Register Office

- 4.12 Fees and charges in Registration Services have been increased by inflation over the last few years, and were increased by 5% for the last quarter of 2015/16, as well as for the full financial year 2016/17. Having compared our current ceremony and non-statutory fees with those of our nearest neighbouring registration districts of West Sussex and East Sussex County Council plus other neighbouring districts such as Kent County Council, Hampshire County Council and Surrey County Council, there remains an opportunity to increase fees and charges for our quality services, whilst remaining extremely competitive with our neighbours.
- 4.13 There is no increase to the minimum statutory charge of £46.00 for a basic Register Office marriage service.
- 4.14 Recent reviews of fees and charges have looked to simplify our pricing structure, so customers are clearer when different fees and charges will be applied. This has now been in place for the last 3 years and is embedded in the service and our fees and charges lists.
- 4.15 The additional income anticipated as a result of the fees and charges proposals is £40,000 for the full financial year 2017/18.
- 4.16 Appendix 2 shows a summary of proposed fees and charges increase along with recent benchmarking information.

Local Land Charges

- 4.17 Local Land Charges fees and charges have not been increased since 2008, apart from by the standard inflationary amount each year. Continuing the theme around benchmarking, the service prides itself on rapid response times as well as being renowned for accuracy, and remains competitive with neighbouring Local Authority services and private search company service providers.

- 4.18 The proposed 5% increase on each search fee would generate £23,000 additional income for the full financial year 2017/18 if current business levels are maintained. This is detailed in Appendix 3.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Bereavement and Registration Services continue to work with customers and community groups, including multi-faith groups. Additional engagement with Funeral Directors and the General Register Office, alongside benchmarking information enables these realistic proposals to be put before members.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A full assessment of services provided, along with unit costings for every service and product, has ensured these proposals cover costs and bring our fees and charges in line with other service providers.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 It is expected that corporate inflation rate of 2% will be applied to income targets for 17/18, thus an increase in fees of this level would be required to keep pace with inflation and avoid a resulting income pressure. The increases over and above this level proposed in the recommendation section 2.2 are expected to generate a further £0.077m for the service (details broken down in section 4.6 of the report) and tie in with the latest savings proposals for 17/18.

Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis

Date: 22/12/16

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Where non statutory services are provided, the Council has power to charge for these services at a rate determined by the Council, having regard to any Corporate Charging Policy that is in place. S93 of the Local Government Act 2003 limits such charges to a model of full costs recovery.

Lawyer Consulted:

Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 20/12/16

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Life Events: an Equalities Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken. The screening has highlighted that no specific minority group is disproportionately affected by increases.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 None

Any Other Significant Implications:

7.5 None.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- 1) Bereavement Services proposed fees and charges changes
- 2) Registration Services proposed fees and charges changes
- 3) Local Land Charges proposed fees and charges changes