

Subject:	Removal of Child Burial Fees		
Date of Meeting:	4 May 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 The death of one's child is the most distressing experience in a parent's life. The cost of burials can add significant additional distress especially among less well off families. There has been a call to remove fees for burials at national level. The Government has recently confirmed that the level of fees charged for child burials rests with local authorities and it is for each authority to decide.
- 1.2 The Government for Wales has announced that burial charges for children will no longer apply, and a number of Local Authorities in England have confirmed they will no longer charge fees for child burials.
- 1.3 This report proposes the removal some remaining fees associated with child burials.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members agree to remove permit fee for headstones and the fee for exclusive rights of burial for children aged 17 or younger.
- 2.2 That the changes come into force with immediate effect.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council recognises the sensitivity of losing a baby or child and, under the bereavement services fees scheme, the Council makes no charge for cremations or interment (physical burial) of children aged 17 years and younger.
- 3.2 There are however other fees and charges which still apply, including the fees for headstone permit, fees for exclusive rights or burial (see **Appendix 1**) and other fees (such as use of the Crematorium Chapel, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday burials, turfing etc. (shown in **Appendix 2**.)

3.3 Given the national debate and following the announcement at budget Council, a review of the current fees was undertaken. As a result, it is proposed that the fees for permits for headstones and exclusive rights of burial be removed.

3.4 It is proposed to keep the fees and charges set out in **Appendix 2**. Members should note that:

- When a child's body is cremated, the use of the crematorium chapel is free for the normal 30 minutes. If a child is buried, then the use of the Extra Mural Chapel at Woodvale and the Chapel at Hove Cemetery are free. The Charge would apply only if they want to use the crematorium chapel, which would affect the availability of the venue for others and have an impact on the ability of the service to meet its income target.
- Saturday, Sunday and bank holiday burials require the Council to hire extra staff at a cost. It is therefore considered difficult to justify removing the fee for burials on these dates when a free service is available Monday to Friday.
- Turfing of graves is not something that happens very often and as the soil needs to settle any turfing has to be redone. The Council sows grass seeds in all cases, which would make turfing not essential.
- Memorialisation is an optional extra and, given the range of available options, some of which may be expensive, it is not considered appropriate to remove these fees,

3.5 By removing the fees for exclusive rights of burial and fees for headstone permits, in addition to free burials (interment) and cremation, as well as setting the age limit at 17, the Council will have gone further than other authorities that have taken similar steps.

3.6 The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) supports those Local Authorities who are considering the removal of burial fees for children aged 17 years and younger. The ICCM provides policy and best practice guidance to Burial and Cremation authorities. It represents its Corporate members at government level.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 The option of keeping the existing arrangement was considered. However, given the Council's desire to minimise the financial impact on families at a time of distress and given the relatively small financial cost to the Council, this is not recommended. The Council could abolish all fees, including those listed in appendix 2, but that would have significant financial implications and those fees relate to optional extras rather than the core essential burial service.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There has been no consultation undertaken on this matter. However, there have been a number of national campaigns and on-line petitions supporting the cause to be adopted throughout the country.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The loss of a child is possibly one of the most distressing circumstances for any family to have to endure, and costs can for some mean of stress and anxiety.
- 6.2 It is hoped that the policy of not charging for burials / cremations will be widely adopted by Local Authorities across the country.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The expectation is that the waiving of fees for child burials would have a small impact of about £0.006m for Bereavement Services. This shortfall is expected to be met from other corporate resources.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Peter Francis Date:12/04/17

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The proposals are within the legal powers of the Council.

Lawyer Consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis Date:24/04/2017

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no adverse equalities implications arising from the proposals in the report. The introduction of the changes will assist families with low incomes by reducing the costs associated with funerals.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 Not applicable

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.5 Not applicable

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Proposed fees and charges for burials and cremations
2. Optional services available (that it is proposed are still charged for)

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None.