

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Life Events Fees and Charges for 2018 / 2019</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>25 January 2018</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Lead Officer for Strategy Governance &amp; Law</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Paul Holloway</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 01273 29-2005
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**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 2018 / 19 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 2018/19 save for the exceptions set out at 2.2 and 2.3 below.
- 2.2 Approves a proposal to maintain Bereavement Services adult cremation fees at their current levels.
- 2.3 Approves a re-alignment of Registration Services fees as set out in Appendix 2 which, overall, are anticipated to protect and possibly increase current business levels.

**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 and burial services, as well as assessed impact of a high percentage increase for the Local Land Charges property search fee, approved by Members for 2017/18.
- 4.2 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. 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.
- 4.3 Consultation with the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the General Register Office (GRO) has previously established there is no legal obligation to consult with members of the public about non-statutory fees, as the Local Authority should have its own policies for fee setting against services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Charges and Fees setting policy in 2008.
- 4.4 A further review of fees and charges may be carried out during the financial year 2018/19.

#### **Bereavement Services**

- 4.5 An annual fees and charges review at the privately owned Downs Crematorium has meant their adult cremation fees now match fees charged at Woodvale. This provides an opportunity to assess the impact of both the Downs Crematorium, and Woodvale cremation services charging exactly the same fee. It is therefore proposed to hold current Woodvale cremation fees at this time, and review the decision in 6 months. We anticipate the matching of fees for cremation services will be favourable to business levels. This, along with a recent service redesign, will strongly focus on customer services at Woodvale. This approach will allow and emphasise customer support during a period where it is anticipated that essential maintenance on our chapels, which are listed buildings, will need to be carried out during the coming year, 2018/19. This may result in the chapels at Woodvale being unavailable for small periods of time, and therefore may have some impact on income.
- 4.6 Holding cremation fees at current levels will result in a budget pressure of around £25,000 due to the standard 2% inflationary increase to income targets. However, by pricing at a competitive level, only 3 to 4 additional cremations per month would address this pressure, and any additional cremation no's would start to generate extra income against the target. By investing in improved

service delivery, whilst maintaining facilities, as well as having regard for stable fees, we are remaining mindful of the continuing concern around funeral poverty, which is a national issue.

- 4.7 Analysis of burial charges from benchmarking data, held for neighbouring local authorities and other service providers, suggests a sensible approach for burial fees is to propose the annual inflationary increase of 2% only, in line with the fees and charges policy.
- 4.8 Bereavement Services remain competitive with near neighbours and still offer services for a lower fee than most Local Authority neighbours. Please see Appendix 1 for Bereavement Services benchmarking information and proposed changes to fees where relevant.
- 4.9 As with last year's review of Bereavement Services fees and charges, there are no proposals to introduce charging policies in relation to children.
- 4.10 As well as a thorough benchmarking exercise, comprehensive unit costs analysis has established exactly what it costs Brighton & Hove City Council to provide the services offered to our customers. All charges ensure full cost recovery, apart from those provided for children under the age of 17.

### **Register Office**

- 4.11 This year it is recommended that the service increases fees and charges by an overall average of 3.5%, where increases are proposed. There are a few exceptions, as detailed in Appendix 2, where it is proposed to keep the existing charges or change them by a different percentage. The proposed fees involve a realignment to make them simpler to administer and easier for service users to understand
- 4.12 From information obtained by a comprehensive benchmarking exercise, it is apparent that fees charged by Brighton & Hove City Council Registration Service are similar to those offered by neighbouring local authorities at comparative venues
- 4.13 Diagnostic work has revealed the demand for the main ceremony rooms in Brighton Town Hall (Regency Room & Fitzherbert Room) has changed due to options of ceremony facilities available being extended. The Council Chamber was introduced as a ceremony venue in 2015/16 and has proved a very attractive large venue, rising in popularity since its availability, taking some business away from other ceremony rooms in the building.

The service aims to attract additional business, by offering competitive ceremony fees that are affordable. It is also proposed to freeze some fees to align them with nearest competitors. Weekend ceremony rates have been reviewed, to try to generate more business at what we know is a popular time of the week for couples to have ceremonies. Similarly, winter fees have also been reviewed to drive business towards weekend times. As part of the proposed re-alignment in other areas of the service, it is recommended to increase fees by a rate higher than inflation

- 4.14 The proposed new fees in Registration Services take into account analysis of times of the week when ceremonies are held, including weekends, as well as numbers of ceremonies booked, and the rooms the ceremonies are delivered in.
- 4.15 The most popular venues for ceremonies in the city of Brighton & Hove continue to be various ceremony rooms at Brighton Town Hall. These facilities are promoted equally with around 35 approved venues across the city.
- 4.16 It is interesting to note the demand for facilities at Brighton Town Hall which is higher in relation to other venues around the city. The Council Chamber (as previously mentioned) in particular has, since becoming a licensed ceremony venue in 2015/16, become a popular venue, offering a large capacity. Proposed fee increases will, it is hoped, maximise income opportunities from what is proving a very popular venue.
- 4.17 A combination of increases and freezing prices in other rooms at Brighton Town Hall looks to consolidate income at popular times, and attract new business with more competitive and attractive rates at less popular times.
- 4.18 Approved venues ceremony fees have been reviewed, with some changes proposed for Saturday ceremonies. Current fees will remain the same for ceremonies on Sundays at our approved venues across the city.
- 4.19 Additional income as a result of changes to re-align fees in the Registration Service, is likely to be £12,000. Details of proposed changes to fees are illustrated in Appendix 2. Benchmarking information is contained in Appendix 3.

### **Local Land Charges**

- 4.20 Members approved a high percentage increase for property searches when fees and charges were last reviewed in 2017/18. Whilst this has resulted in increased income, there has been an effect on business levels and the number of searches coming through to the service, increasing concerns that local solicitors may be choosing to use competitor private search companies. It is therefore recommended that the search fee charges are increased only in line with the corporate inflationary assumption (2%.)

## **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 ensure our fees and charges remain competitive. This approach looks to maximise income where possible, and increase business levels by making prices attractive, where it is felt there is opportunity to do so.

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The Life Events service currently has a budgetary pressure of between £0.2m and £0.3m relating to its income generation, which has been addressed as part of the budget setting process for 2018/19. With this in mind, the proposals outlined in the report, including a review of business practice, is expected to ensure the service achieves its income targets in the next financial year. This will also ensure appropriate recovery of costs and overheads in accordance with the corporate fees and charges policy.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis*

*Date: 03/01/2018*

### 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. Where the level of fee is discretionary, it is required by law to be set at a level to recover the cost of the service but not make profit.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 15/01/2018*

### 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 fees and charges change proposals and benchmarking information
2. Registration Services fees and charges change proposals
3. Registration Services benchmarking information

**Documents in Members' Rooms**

1. None

**Background Documents**

1. None