



Provision of Bereavement Services

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The fees charged for burial within the Council's cemeteries do not reflect the true costs of the service and are disproportionately cheaper than the charges for cremation at Markeaton Crematorium.
- 1.2 This has resulted in the cremation service having to subsidise the burial service and the public having to make choices based on cost as opposed to personal preference. There is a need for a review of charges to bring burial fees into line with cremation fees.
- 1.3 The differences in current charges may discriminate against community groups whose religion dictates that the cremation service is used, in favour of the groups for whom interment or burial is a requirement. Community groups requiring the construction of a burial vault are further subsidised and the vaults also take up more space than traditional burials.
- 1.4 The differences in charges also encourage the greater use of cemeteries posing increased demands on the capacity of existing cemeteries. If not addressed this will require the Council to consider the acquisition of new sites for burial purposes.
- 1.5 Pressure on cemetery capacity will also be eased by proposed changes in legislation aimed at maximising capacity and sustainability. This will be done through the re-use of old abandoned graves where there has been no interment for over 100 years.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To increase burial fees in order to bring in line with cremation fees.
- 2.2 To withdraw any subsidies for vault interments that currently exists by April 2009.

2.3 Scrutiny Management Commission on 1 July 2008, made the following recommendations which officers can implement:-

1. That there is wide consultation on any proposals for the Council's Bereavement Services prior to implementation.
2. That any proposals take into account the comparative costs and charges of neighbouring and peer authorities.
3. Development of proposals for the Bereavement Services aims to recover the subsidies reported.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Item 2.1 enables the Council to provide a bereavement service that allows the public to make choices based on personal or religious preference. Additional income will also release funding for much needed improvements to the cremation service at Markeaton Crematorium.
- 3.2 Item 2.2 restores an equality of service provision to all user groups.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4.1 Bereavement Service Fees

Derby City Council has traditionally provided cemeteries at locations across the city to meet local needs. The cost to the public of burial within Council cemeteries has been kept artificially low and is being subsidised. The subsidy is met from income normally generated by the cremation service at Markeaton Crematorium. Any further shortfalls have to be met from Parks revenue budgets.

- 4.2 The City Council is committed to ensuring a consistent approach to how it charges individual customers and community groups for discretionary services and that any concessions are based upon the ability to pay. Under these principles the Council aims to maximise income from fees and charges by making sure that the charge reflects the full cost of provision unless covered by concessions.
- 4.3 The inconsistency in fees between burial and cremation means that bereaved families are forced into making a decision on which service to use based on price and ability to pay, rather than the personal preference of either themselves or the deceased person.
- 4.4 The inconsistency in fees means that community groups who do not use the burial facilities for cultural or religious reasons, may be disadvantaged in favour of those who predominantly use the burial vault service as opposed to cremation.

- 4.5 The use of Crematorium income to subsidise cemeteries in this way also restricts the ability of Markeaton Crematorium to reinvest in service provision, both in terms of staffing levels and facilities. It also restricts the Crematorium in offering a comparable service to that provided by neighbouring authorities at Bretby and Bramcote. This makes it less attractive to users, both bereaved families and funeral directors.
- 4.6 Both Bretby and Bramcote are managed as stand alone cremation facilities by individual Crematorium Boards, with representation from the supporting local Councils. Managers of the crematoria are able, with the agreement of the Board, to re-invest the surplus in the service provision and as a result are able to improve facilities without the need to compete for resources or subsidise other services.
- 4.7 Removal of the burial subsidy would contribute towards much needed maintenance and improvements at Markeaton Crematorium necessary to bring facilities up to the standard offered at Bretby and Bramcote. The improvements needed include: -
- A private interview room for bereaved families
 - An improved reception area
 - Improved access for disabled people
 - Improved toilet facilities
 - Re-surfacing of car parking areas
 - Improvements to the flower terrace
 - General decoration

4.8

Charges

In 2008/09, the average charge for interment in an existing or non-purchased adult burial is £305, plus a charge of £100 for the provision of concrete foundations on lawned grave areas. Prior to April 2008 the foundation charge was £52, however it was recognised that the foundations were not meeting new national standards and an improved foundation has been introduced involving the use of marine quality concrete.

- 4.9 The cost of cremation in 2008/09, including medical referee fee and abatement fee is £415. Assuming a 3% increase in charges for 2009/10, the cost of cremation by that time will be £428.
- 4.10 In order to bring burial fees into line cremation fees, it is proposed that average burial fees be increased from £305 to £366.50 in September 2008 and again to £428 in April 2009.
- 4.11 It is also proposed that the Council withdraw the facility for Public Graves except where a grave is required for Public Health interments. The increase in cost of interment fees to level with the cremation fee will also discourage hospitals from using burial as the 'cheaper option' rather than any nominated preference of the deceased.

4.12 Vault Interments

There is also currently an inconsistency in fees charged to communities preferring interment in vaults with subsidies again being applied for some community groups.

- 4.13 The specification for the construction of some of the vaults has changed in recent years thereby increasing the cost of provision. The full cost of this service is not being met by the service user and is being subsidised by the Council.
- 4.14 The cost of provision of a vault is currently around £1400 per vault, which is subsidised by the Council by approximately £1100. This does not include the fees for the burial and the granting of exclusive right of burial. This subsidy is not being applied to all communities and some communities pay the full fee for their vaults.
- 4.15 It is proposed that the full cost of interment in a burial vault be charged to all service users from April 2009.

For more information contact:	Name Ian Wheatley	Tel 01332 716530	e-mail ian.wheatley@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	None		
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications		

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 Increased income from cemetery burial charges will increase by £65 per grave x number of adult burials Sept to March 2009/10 this will increase to £135 x no burials pa, plus £1100 x 20/25 vault interments.

Legal

- 2.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report

Personnel

- 3.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report

Equalities impact

- 4.1 The revision of fees will help to remove inequalities that currently exist whereby community groups whose chosen or required bereavement service is burial benefit from subsidies not provided to community groups requiring a cremation service.

Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 Improving Council services at Markeaton Crematorium
- 5.2 Reducing inequalities in the provision of bereavement services.