

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Committee

15th December 2015

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES – REVIEW OF CREMATION FEES AND CHARGES AND PROPOSED CAPITAL WORKS

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Debbie Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Guy Revans
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report proposes that Cremation fees are increased by 8% per annum for the next 4 years, to ensure that we are placed nearer the average in the national league table of fees and charges, whilst spreading the impact to service users.
- 1.2 It also recommends that the fee structure is altered so that all cremations and burials for residents and non- residents under the age of 18 are free to assist bereaved families who have suffered the loss of a child.
- 1.3 In recognition of the potential issues around funeral poverty, the lower fee for the 8.30am and 9.00am time slots is retained and the existing fee for the 9.30am and 10.15am slots is reduced by 6% in 2016/17 and subsequently has the 8% increase applied.
- 1.4 A programme of capital works is carried out to ensure that the facilities, which were constructed 40 years ago, can continue to operate effectively, can accommodate increased demand and are fit for modern day needs and purpose. And some of the additional income is used to supplement the ongoing cost of these facility improvements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that:

- 2.1 The cremation fees for 18 years + are increased as per the table at 3.7;
- 2.2 The fees previously applied to 17 year olds are amended to start at 18 years old for both residents and non-residents for both cremations and burials;
- 2.3 Facility and heating improvements are approved as per the list at paragraph 4.10 and appendices;
- 2.4 A sum of £200K in capital funding be added to the existing £144K making a total of £344K to enable a programme of capital works to take place in 2016.
- 2.5 A proportion of the increased income from amended fees is used towards repayment of the capital borrowing costs.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Authority's current position in the national league table of cremation fees and charges shows that in:-

2000: Redditch were 85th out of a total of 241 crematoria (35% down the list), with a fee of £250. The basic average fee for the year was £251.72.

2005: Redditch was 144th out of a total of 247 crematoria (58% down the list) with a fee of £330. The basic average fee for the year was £336.02.

2010: Redditch was 206th out of a total of 256 crematoria (80% down the list) with a fee of £450. The basic average fee for the year was £496.83.

2015: Redditch was 264th out of a total of 276 crematoria (96% down the list) with a fee of £540. The average fee for the year was £646.31.

- 3.2 The current average fee of £540 is therefore £106 lower than the average national fee. If an 8% increase is added in the first year the average cost will be £583 which is still significantly lower than the current national average and, would place us at 238th in the current league table. It should be noted however that this is likely to change as other authorities will be increasing their fees annually.
- 3.3 If we had remained at 85th in the table of cremation fees (as we were in 2000) the projected average cost would now be £735 instead of £540.
- 3.4 For the purpose of comparison the nearby authorities are as follows for 2015:-
- Stourport (Wyre Forest) - £762
 - Worcester - £750
 - Stourbridge - £696
 - Dudley - £696
 - Birmingham Yardley - £685
 - Wolverhampton - £684
 - Solihull - £660
 - Walsall - £657
 - Birmingham Lodge Hill - £628
- 3.5 This authority has not increased fees in line with the general increases applied by others over a period of years. It can reasonably be proposed that the fees are brought in to line with comparable authorities and that the potential additional income can be used to support the Council's budgets.

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3.6 To date in 2015 the 8.30am and 9.30am slots with the considerably reduced fee have proved popular for certain customers and funeral directors and have had over 50% take up. The 9.30am and 10.15am take up rate is only 35%.

3.7 Tabulated existing and proposed fees as per Recommendation 2.1

	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
Time slots	As per current fees and charges for 17+	18 years+ (FOC for under 18 as per 1.2)	18 years+ (FOC for under 18 as per 1.2)	18 years+ (FOC for under 18 as per 1.2)	18 years+ (FOC for under 18 as per 1.2)
8.30am 9.00am	£410	£440	£480	£520	£560
9.30am 10.15am	£530	£500	£540	£580	£630
11.00am onwards	£540	£580	£630	£680	£730

3.8 There has been very significant investment within the crematorium resulting in the installation of state of the art technology and associated plant and equipment. This has put the facility at the forefront of the industry and has generated worldwide interest and plaudits in what has been achieved especially with regard to the use of waste heat as part of the mercury abatement process.

3.9 There has however been limited investment in what is a well maintained but ageing structural facility. It has been identified that this may lead to potential unforeseen maintenance issues, possible facility failures and ultimately enforced closures. In the event of such situations occurring it will impact on people in several ways, the detail of which is given below. There will also be a financial impact in terms of loss of income, costly and unplanned repairs, enforced closures, reduction in CAMEO payments (mercury abatement off set payments based on the number of cremations we carry out) as well as the potential for having to make available temporary facilities if necessary. There is therefore a need to invest and support what is a well-known, and highly recommended technical facility and to ensure that the investment so far is not adversely affected by the aging structure and buildings.

3.10 If the recommendations are implemented, it is estimated that additional income in year one will be approximately £52K.

3.11 £16K of the increased income will be used to offset the borrowing costs.

Legal Implications

- 3.11 As we provide a cremation service we are legally obliged to meet the requirements of the Cremation Regulations 2008 (in particular Part 2)
- 3.12 We have a Duty of Care to all site users to ensure that both the internal and external facilities are safe which includes understanding the risks and removing or reducing those risks where possible.

4. Service / Operational Implications

- 4.1 The crematorium building and office facility were completed in the 1970s and the main building has not seen any major improvements or upgrades in terms of the basic infrastructure and facilities that they provide ie the toilets and visitor waiting area.
- 4.2 The crematorium has seen a major investment of approximately £1 million in terms of the installation of two new cremators, one of which is for oversize coffins, as well as the installation of mercury abatement equipment which has resulted in us being able to transfer waste heat to the Abbey Stadium leisure facility to supplement the existing heating system for the swimming pool.
- 4.3 This major investment did not however include improvements to the catafalque which is not large enough to accommodate the oversize coffins and, when necessary we have to make special arrangements with the relatives of the deceased as we cannot lower the coffin at the end of a service. As a result we believe that some customers are using other authorities who have the necessary facilities to enable a full chapel service including the lowering of the catafalque along with the use of an oversized cremator.
- 4.4 Improvements to the catafalque will require considerable time and expense to cut out the existing supporting wall that forms the catafalque surround and, to then replace the mechanism with an oversized and safe operating system.
- 4.5 The scissor lift that operates the catafalque needs to be replaced and has been highlighted as an issue by Zurich, who are the Councils insurers, in their annual inspection. This issue needs to be addressed and would ideally be done at the same time as the catafalque improvements. To enable this work to take place the wall adjacent to the scissor lift needs to be removed. However the main electrical circuits and the mains cable that feeds the cremators is fixed to the wall. When the work is carried out all the electrical systems will need to be removed and so operation of the building will not be feasible. *(Place Partnership to pay for catafalque works out of existing public buildings capital budgets – estimated £40K+)*

- 4.6 The majority of electrical supply costs for the site are attributed to the main crematorium and it can therefore be assumed that the cremators and heating are the main consumers of that supply. The under floor heating for the chapel, which is a grid system of wires, has been in-situ since the building was installed and operates on an off peak night time tariff. The efficiency of this system, in term of heat provided against supply consumption, is unknown however its future effectiveness and ability to remain functional is questionable if the catafalque and building works take place.
- 4.7 From the investigation work carried out so far it would appear that the grid wiring for the heating system goes up to and abuts the existing catafalque so, when the works take place to remove the supporting wall, and therefore the immediate flooring that the wall supports, it is highly likely that the heating system will be disturbed/damaged or even potentially made unusable.
- 4.8 Based on the likelihood that the expensive existing system will be damaged there is an opportunity to consider the alternative options. Worcester County Council (now Place Partnership) architects and engineers are therefore examining different ways of heating the building more efficiently and it would appear that there are three options for consideration. Firstly there is a basic electrical heating system, secondly there is a “wet” system which has radiators running from a boiler and thirdly we investigate the possibility of utilising more of the waste heat generated from the cremators.
- 4.9 As a result of consultation events, using external consultants to look at our facilities and functionality as well as talking with the site users and staff, we have identified several issues regarding the current design and condition of the facilities. It is acknowledged that the site and in particular the chapel and main window feature are a positive asset that encourages customers and partners to recommend us to others. It is also acknowledged that we have a state of the art technical facility. We do however accept that even though we have a facility to be proud of it would benefit from some work to bring it more up to modern day expectations. This relates to the general facilities for bereaved families and their mourners which are felt to be no longer sufficient to meet current customer requirements. There are also other operational issues that have been raised such as the unintended mixture and crossing over of those waiting to attend a funeral with those attending a funeral and those leaving a funeral. It is also known that there is a need to provide a more suitable facility and method of accessing and exiting the building more discreetly for the Funeral Directors, clergy and celebrants etc. as current arrangements are insufficient.
- 4.10 We have therefore engaged with the Worcester County Council (Place Partnership) architect and engineers to look at a raft of ideas on facility improvements. Their proposals are:-

- Improve the toilet facilities
- Creating a large public waiting area
- Creating a suitable vestry to include a viewing facility i.e. cctv
- Creating a Funeral Directors room
- Look at building access and disabled access i.e. dropped kerbs, toilets
- Look at safety issues with regard to surfacing i.e. displaced setts on path edges
- Improve the porte cochere to give mourners improved bad weather protection
- Provide a covered walkway to give bad weather protection to those waiting outside
- Replace the window in the Book of Remembrance room
- Review noisy air con units – can they be improved
- Improved disabled access
- Improved and clear signage throughout the site
- Resurfacing of poor footpaths
- Improvements to the lectern i.e. make adjustable, drinks table and catafalque emergency STOP button
- Improvement to the operational staff facilities i.e. drying room, mess room, heating improvements
- Redecoration throughout all facilities
- Review fixtures and fittings i.e. carpets, curtains window frames, blinds, lights, door mechanisms on outer doors
- Bench and bin replacements
- New noticeboards
- Improve and extend the storage and security of the operational compound
- Improved lighting
- Defined and clearly signed smoking areas
- Improved viewing facility from operational room
- Refurbish the main office

5. Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 The most notable impact on our customers is the requirement to close the facility to allow the works to take place. This requires careful project management to minimise the closure period, investigation in to what services may still be feasible during the period of the works, detailed consultation and information programme to include all interested parties and, consideration of what alternatives facilities may be possible on the site i.e. a temporary chapel.
- 5.2 We must ensure that the facilities and access to the Crematorium site are in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There are various potential liability and operational business risks associated with the provision of the service and the appropriateness and integrity of the structural facilities.
- 6.2 These risks may arise through the inability to provide a service or as a result of claims against the authority for loss of business, personal injury and distress.
- 6.3 There is a potential risk of alienating customers and partners if the closure is not planned for the most appropriate time i.e. the summer when generally less funerals take place or, the closure is not communicated effectively and the project timetable is not adhered to.
- 6.4 There is also a risk that we may undo some of the work that has been done with the different faith groups who have defined religious/funeral requirements. We will need to ensure that we discuss the proposed works with them so that we can understand their needs and make suitable arrangements where possible.
- 6.5 There is a need to plan the closures to minimise impact on customers but also to limit the amount of revenue that will be lost as a result in the short term. This plan will need to identify periods of total site closure, and when cremations are possible even if the chapel is out of use.
- 6.6 The long term operational risk may result in potential unplanned repair costs, loss of income due to enforced and unplanned closure, distress to families of the bereaved, impact on local businesses and long term reputational damage to the Council if:-
- The catafalque/scissor lift fails
 - The under floor heating fails
 - We cannot honour commitments/funeral services due to enforced closure
 - Health and Safety issues result in being able to use some or all of the site
 - We do not look to utilise potential savings from excess heat as this will negate the savings made by the transfer of heat to the Leisure Centre and from what is being created via the PV panels

7. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - WCC Architects Report on Alterations and Refurbishment- inc Heating Options Report
- Appendix 2 - National league tables for cremation fees and charges

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9. KEY

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