

<b>MAYOR AND CABINET</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Bereavement Services – Proposed Increase In Cemeteries and Crematorium Fees and Charges	
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes	Item No. 7
<b>Ward</b>	All	
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Customer Services	
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date: 19 January 2011

## **1. Summary & Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Mayor and Cabinet's approval to increases in the current fees and charges for Lewisham Cemeteries and Hither Green Crematorium which are proposed as follows:
- Cemeteries fees and charges by 10%;
  - The introduction of a fee of £25 for levelling a grave;
  - Crematorium memorial fees by an increase of 2.5%; and
  - To increase Cremation fees by £60 to £535

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1 A priority of the Community Strategy is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of local public services. This is underpinned by the Council's commitment to deliver Value for Money services. The fees and charges levied in Lewisham are slightly higher than the London average for cemeteries though the crematorium fees are comparable with services across South East London for crematorium services (Appendix A).

## **3. Recommendations**

The Mayor is recommended to agree:

- 3.1 An increase of £60 to the current Cremation fee;
- 3.2 An increase of 2.5% for crematorium memorials,
- 3.3 An increase of 10% for all cemetery fees and charges;
- 3.4 The introduction of a fee of £25 for the levelling of a grave;

All to take effect from Monday 28 February 2011.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 Cemeteries and Crematorium fees and charges were last increased in January 2010. At that time it was agreed to increase cemeteries fees and charges and crematorium memorial fees by inflation only at 2.5%, and to increase the fees for a cremation service

by £50 to enable us to maintain the level of service and to meet agreed cuts to the annual budget.

- 4.2 A comparison of the cemeteries and crematorium fees currently charged by other surrounding Local Authority and Private providers' shows fees across the area vary considerably (please see Appendix A).
- 4.3 The proposed increase of £60 for Crematorium fees should not affect the level of demand for services held at Hither Green Crematorium, however, other Local Authority Crematoria increase their fees in April, so it is difficult to anticipate what they might be increased to. Currently, those LA Crematoria local to us charge £446 (Southwark) and £530 (Eltham, including organist) and the local private Crematorium charges £670 (Beckenham, fee increased in October, includes organist). The proposed increase will enable us to meet agreed cuts to the annual budget and any inflationary increase and will reflect the cost of providing the service. However, it should be noted that Eltham and Beckenham Crematorium have already included an environmental surcharge in their crematorium fees and Lewisham has not yet made a decision on Mercury Abatement and what the environmental surcharge should be.
- 4.4 Hither Green Cemetery has limited available burial space. Unused spaces are still available between graves but we urgently need to convert areas in the cemetery for burial use. Grove Park Cemetery has more available space but new areas are required. Both cemeteries have areas within them that can be converted for burial use. However, the cost of converting these areas is quite substantial (approximately £100,000) The 10% increase is therefore proposed to cover the cost of inflation and to provide additional funds to convert the available land for burial.
- 4.5 Currently there is no set fee for a stonemason to level a grave. However, when stonemason come into the cemetery there is a small element of damage to roads and paths caused by heavy lorries and it is therefore appropriate to charge a small fee. As there is no fee within the structure the only fee that could be charged at present is that for an additional inscription, which is currently £61, which is rather expensive for the work to be undertaken. It is therefore proposed to introduce a fee of £25 for this work. The introduction of this fee will generate very little income as most stonemasons carry out levelling when undertaking other works and is solely for the purpose of having a fee within the fee structure.
- 4.6 The fees and charges levied in the Cemeteries and Crematorium reflect the cost of providing the service, but do not cover Central recharges.

## **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Council as a Local Authority, by virtue of section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972 is a burial authority.
- 5.2 Further, by virtue of the provisions of the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977, the functions with respect to cremation were added to the functions of burial authorities.
- 5.3 Paragraph 15 of the said 1977 Order provides burial authorities with the power to charge such fees as they think are proper – "(a) for or in connection with burials in a cemetery;

(b) for any grant of a right to place and maintain a tombstone or other memorial in a cemetery... (c) for any grant of a right to put an additional inscription on such a tombstone or other memorial”.

- 5.4 By section 9 of the Cremation Act 1902 a burial authority may demand payment of charges or fees for the burning of human remains in any crematorium provided by them. It is further provided that such charges or fees, and any other expenses properly incurred in or in connection with the cremation of a deceased person, shall be deemed to be part of the funeral expenses of the deceased.
- 5.5 In accordance with the provisions of the said paragraph, a burial authority is obliged to keep a table showing the matters in respect of which fees or other charges are payable to them, and the amount of each such fee or charge, and the table shall be available for inspection by the public at all reasonable times.

## 6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Bereavement Services total income budget for 2010/11 is £1.8m. In a full year, the proposed increases in fees could achieve:

Cremations (£60 increase)	£ 90,000
10% increase in Cemeteries fees and charges	<u>£ 91,600</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>£ 181,600</u></b>

- 6.2 The proposed increases in fees and charges would generate approximately £181,600 income in a full financial year and represents an increase of approximately 10%. £11 of the increase in Cremation fees forms a part of the 2011/14 budget strategy considered by Mayor and Cabinet on 17 November 2010.
- 6.3 The increases proposed could have an impact on the number of services requested at Hither Green Crematorium as the fees could be more than nearby Local Authority Crematoria, only one other LA Crematoria fees could be lower than Lewisham's but as they do not increase their fees in until April it is difficult to establish at this stage whether our fees will remain above/below or at the same level as their fees.

## 7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The fees and charges for this service are set with due regard to the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. Increasing fees and charges will disproportionately affect lower income groups, but as previously stated the costs are comparable with other London Local Authorities. The Department of Works and Pensions do provide financial assistance to clients eligible for support to the full value of a burial in a lawn section grave or cremation, plus £700 towards fees charged by funeral directors.

## 8. Environmental Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific Environmental Implications attached to this report.

## **9. Crime and Disorder Implications**

9.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications attached to this report.

## **10. Conclusions**

10.1 Agreement to the proposed increase in Cemeteries and Cremation fees would be higher than the cost of inflation, but are necessary to meet budget pressures and to enable the current level of service provision to continue.

10.2 Agreement to the proposed increases in Memorial fees would be in line with inflation.

## **11. Background Papers and report originator**

11.1 There are no background papers to this report.

11.2 If you would like more information about this report, please contact Shirley Bishop, Head of Bereavement Services, telephone no. 020 8314 9640.