

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

28 FEBRUARY 2017

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

INTERMENT CHARGES FOR CHILDREN (UP TO AND INCLUDING THE AGE OF 16 YEARS)

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of Cabinet to amend the current pricing policy for the interment of children within our municipal cemeteries with a view to removing the interment charge for children up to and including the age of 16.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The proposal described contributes to the Council's goals under the Corporate Plan Priority Two being "helping people to be more self-reliant, taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services".
- 2.2 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. It requires public bodies to think more about the long term, working with people and communities, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach. This will create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals and the content of this report links into the third, namely "a more equal Wales, a prosperous Wales and a healthier Wales".

3. Background

- 3.1 Members may be aware of the recent campaign led by Carolyn Harris (MP for Swansea East) to abolish charges imposed by Local Authorities for the interment of children. This report sets out Bridgend County Borough Council's current policy along with those of other Local Authorities in Wales, Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The statutory arrangements for the management of municipal cemeteries are contained in the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO).
- 3.3 Article 15(1) of LACO permits local Authorities "to charge such fees as they think proper for or in connection with burials in a cemetery".
- 3.4 Bridgend County Borough Council currently does not charge for interments of children under the age of 12 years in its municipal cemeteries.

3.5 Coychurch Crematorium currently does not charge a cremation fee for children up to and including the age of 16 years.

4. Current Situation/Proposal

4.1 Bridgend County Borough Council provides a children's Garden of Remembrance at Laleston Cemetery in a specific area set aside from the main burial section and applies no charge for children under the age of 12. An Exclusive Right of Burial fee is also not charged. An interment charge of £558.00 is charged for children aged 12 years and above.

4.2 Interment's of children in the Council's additional ten cemeteries and three churchyards take place in a conventional section and no interment charge is applied for children under the age of 12 when the grave is opened to one depth, to accommodate only the deceased child. An Exclusive Right of Burial fee is charged at the standard fee of £1226.00. An interment charge of £558.00 is charged for children aged 12 years and above.

4.3 Should a bereaved family opt for an interment in a conventional section and wish to excavate the grave to a depth which would facilitate the interment of the parents in the grave at a future date, the normal pricing structure would apply for the number of depths dug to accommodate future adults but no charge would be applied for placing the child under 12 years of age below this depth.

4.4 The memorial permit fee is applied in all cases at the standard rate if a family wishes to erect a headstone.

4.5 The table below provides a summary of Bridgend County Borough Council's current policy on the charges for children in the municipal cemeteries and outlines the current proposal to remove the interment charge for children up to and including the age of 16.

| | Current Child Grave Options | Interment £ | EROB £ | Permit £ |
|-------|---|--|-------------------|----------------------------|
| (i) | Under the age of 12 yrs (i.e. up to & incl. 11 yrs) in Laleston children's section. | Free | N/A | £199 if headstone required |
| (ii) | Under the age of 12 yrs in a conventional section of BCBC's Cemeteries: 1 depth grave for the deceased child only. | Free | £1226 | £199 if headstone required |
| (iii) | Under the age of 12 yrs in a conventional section of BCBC's Cemeteries: Grave to accommodate 1 or 2 parents in future (grave is dug to the required depth for future use plus the additional depth to accommodate the child). | 1 adult depth £558 or 2 adult depth £738. Child step down free | £1226 | £199 if headstone required |
| (iv) | Child aged 12 yrs or above – same as adult fees. | 1 depth interment £558 or 2 depth interment £738 | £1226 | £199 if headstone required |
| | Proposal | | | |
| (v) | In options (i) to (iv) above, substitute "Under the age of 12 yrs (i.e., up to & incl. 11 yrs)" with "Under the age of 17 yrs (i.e. up to & incl. 16 yrs)". | | | |

- 4.6 The Authority is an active member of the Continuous Improvement Forum for Bereavement Services in Wales. The attached Appendix 1 provides a “straw poll” of charges levied by other Local Authorities in Wales. Members are asked to note that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Newport City Council and Conwy County Borough Council do not levy any charges for the interment of children under the age of 16 years.
- 4.7 Members should note that at the time of preparing this report (January 2017), the Leader of the City and County of Swansea Council announced that it would remove the charges for parents when it sets the budget in February stating “the small costs could be easily absorbed”.
- 4.8 Removing the interment charge for children up to and including the age of 16 would demonstrate the Authority’s empathy and understanding towards parents and the community when the terrible loss of a child occurs.
- 4.9 Many local Authorities in the South East Wales area are being asked to review their current policies in this regard. There is a general consensus of opinion within local Authorities that the interment fee could be removed (due to the low number of interments) and easily absorbed whilst the purchase of the Exclusive Rights of Burial (ERoB) should remain.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There are no effects.

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no potential equalities implications associated with this report for any specific groups or individuals therefore a full Equalities Impact Assessment has not been carried out

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The Council currently charges an interment fee of £558 for a one depth grave, when the deceased is aged 12 years or above
- 7.2 During the financial periods.2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 records suggest there are low number of interments of children between 12 – 16 years in Bridgend County Borough Council’s municipal cemeteries. This would suggest that a low number of interments of this age group are likely to occur in the future.
- 7.3 Increasing the age of free interments from under 12 years of age to 16 years of age and below should create a minimal financial loss to the service which will be met within existing budgets.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve:

- (i) To align the charges for Bridgend County Borough Council's Cemeteries and Coychurch Crematorium, so creating unified charges within the Bereavement Services, by increasing the age at which the interment fee for a child is not charged in the Council's Cemeteries from under 12 years to 16 years and below.

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Background Papers: None