

Birmingham City Council



Report to Cabinet

15th October 2024

Title:	BEREAVEMENT SERVICES – REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2024 (CREMATION AND GRAVE RESERVATION FEES)
Lead Cabinet Portfolio:	Councillor Nicky Brennan, Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Community Safety and Equalities
Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee:	Neighbourhoods
Report Author:	Bev Nash, Head of Bereavement and Registration Services City Operations Directorate 0121 303 0138 bev.nash@birmingham.gov.uk
Authorised by:	Sajeela Naseer, Director of Regulation and Enforcement Directorate
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes
If this is a Key Decision, is this decision listed on the Forward Plan?	No Forward Plan Reference

Reason(s) why not included on the Forward Plan: Submitted ahead of deadline but error in the process resulted in the decision form not being included on the Forward Plan.

Is this a Late Report? Yes

Reason(s) why Late: The report was submitted ahead of the deadlines but there was an error in the process.
The report is now being submitted late due to the need to set appropriate fees within a timescale to offer services to communities as soon as possible within this financial year and to mitigate against in year financial pressures within Bereavement Services
These reasons have been agreed by the Managing Director and the Leader. Agreement has also been provided from the Chair of OSC, Cllr Hussain.

Is this decision eligible for 'call in?' Yes
If yes, list reason.

If not eligible, please provide reason(s): Cabinet report

Wards: All wards

Does this report contain exempt or confidential information? No

Has this decision been included on the Notification of Intention to consider Matters in Private? Not Applicable

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report requests approval to increase the grave reservation fee and the adult cremation fees that are currently listed in the fees and charges for Bereavement Services that were approved and implemented in April 2024. This report is being brought forward ahead of the general fees and charges review due to the need to set appropriate fees within a timescale to offer services to communities as soon as possible within this financial year and to mitigate against in year financial pressures within Bereavement Services budget.

2. COMMISSIONERS' REVIEW

- 2.1 Commissioners support the recommendation and would like feedback to come back on the impact on demand and income after the fees have been in place for 6 months.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed increases in fees and charges for cremation fees shown in appendix B to take effect from 1 December 2024.
- 3.2 That Cabinet approves the increase in grave reservation fees from £300 to £450 to take effect from 1st November 2024.

4 KEY INFORMATION

4.1 Context

A review of the current cremation and grave reservation fees, as detailed below:

4.2 Cremation fees:

Some cremation service times are more popular than others, and certain time slots increase the cost of total service provision due to the requirement for longer working hours etc. Earlier cremation service times are rarely used, so opting for a lower charge may encourage higher usage.

A review of the current service times and fees has been completed, with a comparison against neighbouring authorities, and the introduction of differential charges is proposed.

The current standard adult cremation fee is £895, which is the lowest standard fee in comparison to all neighbouring authorities. It is proposed that the fee for a 9:15 am service will be reduced to £750. The fee for the services from 10:00am to 12:15 pm will remain at the current fee of £895. The fee for services from 1:00 pm to 3:15 pm will increase to £950 due to the popular demand of these timeslots. In addition, the service is considering the feasibility of offering a 4pm timeslot which, where provided will have an applicable fee of £995.

The price comparisons with neighbouring authorities are shown in appendix A and current fees and proposed fees are shown in appendix B.

- 4.3 If there is an approved change to the current cremation it is proposed to be introduced from 1st December 2024, due to the notice period that needs to be given. The April 2024 fee will be applied to any bookings already taken prior to the new fee being implemented, regardless of when the service will be taking place.

4.4 **Grave reservation fees:**

The current fee for reserving a grave where no burial is due to take place is £300, increased by 30% for a non-resident of the city.

Excavating reserved graves means that rather than excavating a new non reserved grave, i.e. with direct access and no obstacles, when a reserved grave is excavated, it usually requires the excavation to be carried out in an established section. This results in memorials creating obstructions and staging often must be erected to enable the soil to be placed without damaging neighbouring graves and the excavation will be carried out in a restricted area, usually taking longer and often requiring excavation by hand rather than machinery. Demand for reserving graves is increasing.

A recent comparison with other burial authorities has demonstrated that some are applying significant additional charges for families to reserve graves where no immediate burial is taking place, in recognition of the additional time and cost to excavate a grave 'out of sequence'. In addition, the land usage increases where

grave reservations are provided, requiring earlier development of additional burial areas at a cost to the city council.

A price comparison with other burial authorities that apply a fee for reservation of graves is shown in appendix C.

It is proposed that the current grave reservation fee is increased from £300 to £450 effective from 1st November 2024.

- 4.5 The grave reservation fee will be applied from 1st November 2024, as the fees are provided at the point of sale to enable an informed choice to be made, so advance notice is not necessary.

Proposal and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.6 The proposal is for the fees and charges to be increased as detailed above in this report. The recommendation is that the proposed increases are approved for implementation in November and December 2024.

Other Options Considered

- 4.7 The other option is to reject the proposed increases in fees and charges.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 There is a risk that service users will opt to use the cremation service of other service providers, although this risk is minimised as the fees remain competitive in comparison to others.
- 5.2 There is also a risk that service users will opt not to reserve graves, although anecdotal feedback from service users and the high number of enquiries regarding the reservation of graves suggest that the risk is minimal.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 There is no statutory requirement to consult.
- 6.2 Funeral Directors will be provided with advance notice of the new fees and charges, which will also be published at least 15 working days ahead of implementation, which is accordance with the Funerals Market Investigation Order 2021. Where cremation services have already been booked, the old fee will apply.

7 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Ward Councillors

7.1 Not applicable

Overview and Scrutiny

7.2 Cllr Shabana Hussain, Chair of Neighbourhoods Overview & Scrutiny Committee, has been consulted regarding this report and has highlighted the risks in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 and queried whether the fees could be lowered if needed and the risks were realised.

In response Bereavement Services have confirmed that a report can be brought to Cabinet for their consideration at any time if it is considered that fees should be reviewed in year.

Other

7.2.1 Not applicable

8 IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Finance

8.1 Analysis of the last three months of cremation appointments indicates that the differential cremation fee proposal could generate an additional £77k over a 12 month period in a like for like comparison. An increase from 1st December 2024, could potentially generate an additional £25k in 2024/25, dependent upon usage. Should 25% of users choose to switch to the morning time bands due to the increase fee increases this would reduce the 12 month forecast to an additional £52k, or £17k in 2024/25.

The increase of an additional £150 per grave reservation would deliver an additional £15,000 per 100 reserved graves.

Legal

8.2 Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council the power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions. The general power of competence includes the power to do something for the benefit of the authority, its area, or persons resident or present in its area. In addition, section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003

authorises the Council to charge a person for a providing a service if the Council is authorised, but not required, by an enactment to provide the service.

The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 provides that a burial authority may do all such things as they consider necessary or desirable for the proper management, regulation and control of a cemetery and that a burial authority may charge such fees as they think proper for, or in connection with burials in a cemetery.

Equalities

- 8.2 The provision of cremation services is predominantly utilised by a wide range of faiths except Muslims and Jews. Whilst differential pricing will impact on these faiths there is also the opportunity for a lower priced cremation at a different time. The purchase of reserved graves is an optional service which is at the discretion of the purchaser and other burial plots, without reservation, are offered at the time of burial.

EIA attached at appendix D

Procurement

- 8.3 Not applicable.

People Services

- 8.4 There are no staffing implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Climate Change, Nature and Net Zero

- 8.5 There are no identified climate change, nature or net zero implications of this report.

ESA attached at Appendix E

Corporate Parenting

- 8.6 There are no identified corporate parenting implications of this report.

Other

- 8.7 There are no identified additional implications of this report.

9 APPENDICES

Appendix A - Fee comparison with neighbouring cremation authorities August 2024

Appendix B - Time slots and prices BCC Crematoria – Current and proposed

Appendix C - Price comparisons of reservation fees for other burial authorities.

Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix E – Environment and Sustainability Assessment

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no additional background papers for this report.