

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Life Events Fees and Charges for 2015/16 / 2016/17</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>3 December 2015</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Interim Executive Director of Finance and Resources and Head of Legal &amp; Democratic Services</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Paul Holloway</b>	<b>Tel: 29-2005</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed fees and charges for the final quarter of this financial year, 2015/16, and for the financial year 2016/17, for Bereavement Services and the Register Office within Life Events, which is now in Legal and Democratic Services.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Members are requested to approve a proposal to increase fees and charges for Life Events services as set out in the appendices, for the last quarter of the current financial year (2015/16) and for the financial year 2016/17.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy in 2008. The main aims of the policy were to ensure that:
- Fees and charges are reviewed at least annually including consideration of potential new sources of income;
  - Fees and charges are set after comparing with 'statistical nearest neighbours' (or other relevant comparator groups) and taking into account market, legal and other contextual information;
  - Unless set by a statute, fees and charges are set to recover full costs, including central overheads and capital financing, to ensure that services maximise potential for income generation from the services offered.
  - Subsidies and concessions are not applied unless approved by members;
  - The impact on financial inclusion is considered when setting fee levels.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 For Life Events this is another comprehensive review of fees and charges. As part of this, our charges have been benchmarked with neighbouring local authorities and service providers following previous in depth analysis last year. The exercise has been to review non – statutory fees and charges to demonstrate cost recovery, and where possible maximise income for the services offered. It is not within our power to increase statutory fees. Consultation with the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the General Register Office (GRO) has previously established there is not a legal obligation to consult with members of the public about non-statutory fees, as the Local Authority should have it's own policies for fee setting against services it provides. Brighton & Hove City Council adopted a Charges and Fees setting policy in 2008.
- 4.2 A further review of fees and charges may be carried out during the financial year 2016/17.
- 4.3 These proposals will potentially generate additional income of up to £37,000 in the remainder of the current financial year, 2015/16. Additional income potential for a full financial year (2016/17) would be up to £150.000, based on current service levels.

##### **Bereavement Services**

- 4.4 Fees and charges in Bereavement Services have been increased by inflation over the last three years and were subject to a comprehensive review last year. As part of the review, we have updated our benchmarking information and researched the fees currently charged for similar services in neighbouring districts including Worthing, Surrey, Eastbourne and the Downs Crematorium. This review has demonstrated that our fees are generally below other service providers and the proposal is therefore to bring our charges in line.
- 4.5 As well as a thorough benchmarking exercise, comprehensive unit costs analysis has established exactly what it costs B&HCC to provide the services offered to our customers
- 4.6 Appendices 1 to 4 contain changes to our fees and charges and indicate where there is a proposal to charge for new services that have not been charged for previously.  
For clarity;
- Appendix 1 details proposed fee increases in the Bereavement Services area.
  - Appendix 2 details new fees for services previously not charged for in Bereavement Services.
  - Appendix 3 details proposed fee increases in the Registration Services area.
  - Appendix 4 details new fees for services previously not charged for in the Registration Services area. Benchmarking details are provided in all appendices, where possible.

- 4.7 There are no proposals to charge for the burial of children under 16 years of age, but the purchase of the Exclusive Right of Burial will continue to apply.
- 4.8 As part of this review, we have identified new business development opportunities for Bereavement Services.
- 4.9 The additional income is estimated to be up to £30,000 for the last quarter of the current financial year (1 January to 31 March 2016) and will contribute to proposed savings. A further £123,632 additional income is potentially possible for the whole of 2016/17.

### **Register Office**

- 4.10 Fees and charges in Registration Services have been increased by inflation over the last three years. The same exercise has been carried out in this area, as detailed above with Bereavement Services. We have compared our current ceremony and non-statutory fees with those of our nearest neighbouring registration districts of West Sussex and East Sussex County Council plus other neighbouring districts such as Kent County Council, Hampshire County Council and Surrey County Council, This review has demonstrated that our fees are generally below other service providers and the proposal is therefore to bring our charges in line.
- 4.11 There is no increase to the minimum statutory charge of £46.00 for a basic Register Office marriage service.
- 4.12 Recent reviews of fees and charges have looked to simplify our pricing structure, so customers are clearer when different fees and charges will be applied. This has now been in place for the last 2 years and is embedded in the service and our fees and charges lists.
- 4.13 As part of this review, we have identified new business development opportunities for the Register Office.
- 4.14 The additional income is estimated as £6,500 for the last quarter of the current financial year (1 January to 31 March 2016) and will contribute to proposed savings. A further £26,000 additional income is potentially possible for the whole of 2016/17.

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Bereavement and Registration Services continue to work with customers and community groups, including multi-faith groups. Additional engagement with Funeral Directors and the General Register Office, alongside benchmarking information enables these realistic proposals to be put before members.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A full assessment of services provided, along with unit costings for every service and product, has ensured these proposals cover costs and bring our fees and charges in line with other service providers.

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### 7.1 Financial Implications:

An increase to fees and charges for Bereavement Services and Registration Services was previously approved by this committee in October 2014. The service had attempted to address significant income pressures by ensuring costs were covered and prices were raised but still remained competitive. Currently, income pressures still remain, due mostly to the welcome decline in the death rate nationally. The latest prediction is for a pressure of £0.070m in 2015/16 for the services covered in this report.

With the increases proposed, it is expected that up to £0.037m will be generated in the current financial year and £0.150m in 2016/17. With income targets due to increase by 2% next year and assuming income pressures remain at the same levels, this would reduce the expected surplus down to £0.032m for 2016/17.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis*

*Date: 23.11.15*

### 7.2 Legal Implications:

Where non statutory services are provided, the Council has power to charge for these services at a rate determined by the Council, having regard to any Corporate Charging Policy that is in place. S93 of the Local Government Act 2003 limits such charges to a model of full costs recovery.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date 061115*

### 7.3 Equalities Implications:

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out in both Bereavement and in Registration Services. Whilst there are proposed increases in both areas, consideration has been given, to ensure there is no specific impact on any one group, and low cost services remain available.

### 7.4 Sustainability Implications:

None

### 7.5 Any Other Significant Implications:

None

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Bereavement Services increase proposals with benchmarking
2. Bereavement Services new fees proposals for services not currently charged for
3. Registration Services increase proposals with benchmarking
4. Registration Services new fees proposals for services not currently charged for.

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

1.1 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

1.2 None

Public Health Implications:

1.3 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

1.4 None