


REPORT TO CABINET

22 January 2020

Subject:	Review of Fees and Charges for Registration Related Services
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services Councillor Wasim Ali
Director:	Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer Surjit Tour
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Yes
Director Approval:	Yes
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply to this proposal
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	This report affects the whole borough
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	This report has not been presented to scrutiny
Contact Officer(s):	Mark Satchwell Service Manager – Registration Mark_Satchwell@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees to the revise fees and charges for the Registration related services and the funding approach in relation to the construction of a new cemetery for Rowley Regis, as set out in Appendix 1.

And,

2. Recommends that the new Registration related fees and charges set out in this report are referred to Council for approval as part of the Council's Budget for 2020/2021, to take effect from 1 April 2020.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 In February 2018, Cabinet approved a reconciliation of fees and charges to fall in line with the Council's 3-year financial planning cycle.
- 1.2 Council also determined that where proposed increases are more than inflation or new fees are to be introduced, then further reports will be produced and presented to Cabinet for consideration and approval.
- 1.3 It is therefore the purpose of this report that Cabinet consider and agree to the proposals to implement the new and reviewed fees and charges for Registration related services as set out in **Appendix 1**. This also accounts for financial implications associated with the construction of a new cemetery for Rowley Regis.
- 1.4 The new and where appropriate, reviewed increase in fees and charges for Registration related services of 7% will be effective from 1st April 2020.

2 IMPLICATION FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 It will support our ambition for Sandwell to have a national reputation for getting things done and focusing on what matters in people's lives.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Setting the right level and structure of Registration related fees and charges is crucial. The proposals contained in this report reflect service views about the appropriateness of some of its existing fees and the opportunity to introduce fees for new additional services.
- 3.2 The proposed increase of 7% and introduction of new fees will offset the increasing inflationary costs of delivering Registration related services. These increases arise from both in-house and external suppliers, who provide services and products which contribute to the final offers to the public.
- 3.3 In addition, the costs associated with the construction of a new cemetery for Rowley Regis and future resources necessary to manage this site, will also be met.

- 3.4 There are however several fees which will remain unchanged. Those that are set nationally by the Registrar General and a suite of relatively new services associated with bereavement. This will help ensure that low income families will continue to have access to more affordable funeral related services.
- 3.5 A table of all fees for 2020/2021 can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 3.6 In order for the service to retain its commercial advantage over its competitors, the Registration Services Manager in applying fees will also need to take into account individual circumstances and make flexible commercial fee related decisions to ensure the charges are appropriate whilst also seeking opportunities to maximize income.
- 3.7 **The development of a new cemetery for Rowley Regis – financial implications.**
- 3.7.1 At the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 3rd October 2018, consideration was given to a planning application which sought approval for the construction of new cemetery including; site remediation, widening of existing access off Powke Lane; office building and operational yard, parking, CCTV, lighting, landscaping and other associated site improvement works on part of Powke Lane Open Space.
- 3.7.2 At this meeting, the Planning Committee approved the planning application.
- 3.7.3 It is estimated the construction of the new cemetery and other additional improvements to the remainder of the site will be £2,200,000. Further detail can be found in **Appendix 2**.
- 3.7.4 By locating the new cemetery near the existing cemetery site in Powke Lane, the allocation of resources such as vehicles and equipment etc. necessary to deliver services from the new cemetery will be much less had an alternative location been considered. However, it is recognised an increase in staff numbers from five to seven will be required to deliver burial and cremation services from two sites.
- 3.7.5 Therefore, the costs associated with this construction, future resources necessary to manage services provided from this site and routine inflationary increase will be funded by an increase of 7% which will be applied to discretionary fees and charges related to Registration Services.
- 3.7.6 This approach has been successful and approved previously for several developments in recent years to include; Thimblemill Cemetery, Sandwell Valley and Rowley Regis Crematoria.

3.8 **New fees and alternative inflationary adjustments.**

- 3.8.1 **Out of borough surcharge** – a report in respect of the impact on cemeteries in Sandwell and financial implications associated with the burial of non-Sandwell residents was presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board on 21st November 2019. Having considered several options in this regard, the board resolved that the existing surcharge of 15% should continue to be applied.
- 3.8.2 **Direct cremation** – in response to a change in approach of some bereaved families and following feedback from local funeral directors, a new fee of £628 is to be introduced for a direct cremation service. This service will benefit those bereaved families whose approach to a funeral service is somewhat different to more traditional funeral arrangements which normally involves the use of funeral cars, a chapel, music and minster. Those who chose this service will do so in the knowledge no one will attend at the time the cremation of their loved one.
- 3.8.3 **Ceremony and funeral services visual tributes** – to both enhance and expand services provided to families and couples, it is proposed a new fee of £20 will be introduced so that families who simply would like to have one photograph displayed at their ceremony or at their loved one's funeral service pay less than those who would like more.
- 3.8.4 **The EU Settlement Service** - this enables European citizens and dependent family members currently living and working in the UK the opportunity to safeguard their continued status post Brexit. Participating Local Authorities provide an identity verification service. Sandwell provides this service for £14 per applicant which is the guideline fee recommended by the Home Office.
- 3.8.5 **Low Cost Funeral Service, no change** – in response to what is known as funeral poverty, the Council in 2016 launched a low-cost alternative to a more traditional approach to funeral services. This has had a positive impact on a number of low income families who simply cannot afford the more traditional approach. The service is now well established, and the bereavement team have developed more efficient ways of delivering the service. The service has also influenced similar offers now provided by funeral directors locally. To ensure this service remains competitive and to reflect the more efficient approach to service delivery it is proposed to absorb the inflationary increases associated with the final delivery of this service.

3.8.6 **Catering services no change** – in a similar way the Council launched a catering service to supplement other bereavement related services it provides at Sandwell Valley Crematorium. The service again is now well established, however in a competitive market and to help our ambitions to increase market share for these type of services, no increase in the fees and charges for these services will be introduced.

3.9 **Fees and charges – No longer to be applied**

3.9.1 **Burial and cremation fees for under 18's** - following the introduction by government of the Children's Funeral Fund and approval by cabinet on 28th August 2019 to waive other fees for burial and cremation for under 18's, amendments to account for these changes and to reflect the true costs for this type of service which had previously been subsidised have now been included within **Appendix 1**. Whilst these fees are no longer passed onto bereaved families, it is necessary to amend and retain the true costs associated with these services in order claims against the fund can be made by the Council.

4 **THE CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 In February 2018 Cabinet approved a reconciliation of fees and charges to fall in line with the Council's 3-year financial planning cycle.

4.2 Where proposed increases are more than inflation or new fees are to be introduced, then further reports will be produced and presented to Cabinet for consideration and approval as part of the Councils Budget for 2020/2021

4.3 Existing fees and those proposed for 2020/2021 for all of Registration related services can be found in **Appendix 1**.

5 **CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

5.1 The level of fees is the subject of regular discussion at the West Midlands Regional Registration Group and Funeral Directors Liaison meetings.

5.2 Local benchmarking with neighbouring authorities suggest the increase in Registration related fees and charges will continue to see key burial and cremation fees overall continue to remain lower when compared to those across Birmingham and the Black Country.

5.3 Comparative key burial and cremation fees benchmarking table:

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Authority	Sandwell Current 2019	Sandwell Proposed 2020	Dudley Current 2019	Dudley Anticipated 2020	Wolv' Current 2019	Wolv' Anticipated 2020	Walsall Current 2019	Walsall Anticipated 2020	B'ham Current 2019	B'ham Anticipated 2020
Adult Cremation Fee	£724	£775	£895	£913	£802	£842	£886	£886	£875	£893
Excl Rights of Burial Fee	£1929	£2064	£2213	£2257	£1922	£2018	£2291	£2291	£3059	£3120
Interment Fee	£995	£1065	£1210	£1234	£1190	£1250	£1288	£1288	£1054	£1075
Anticipated Increase	7%		2%		5%		No change		2%	

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 Setting the right level and structure of Registration related fees and charges is crucial. The proposals contained in this report reflect service views about the appropriateness of some of its existing fees and the necessary funding approach for the new cemetery in Rowley Regis.

6.2 The introduction of new fees and those unchanged also support opportunities to increase market share.

6.3 Fees could remain unchanged however, this would adversely impact on cost recovery and the Councils ability to fund the construction of a new cemetery in Rowley Regis.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 It is estimated an increase in Registration related fees and charges of where appropriate of 7% will generate £303,541 of additional income. This additional income will ensure the increased costs to deliver the service and the costs associated with the construction cost and operation of the new cemetery for Rowley Regis can be met.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council is permitted to charge fees relating to Registration Services by virtue of the Cremation Act 1902, the Cremation Regulations 2016, the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 and the Local Government Act 2003. Whilst the Council has discretion over many of the fees, a number relating to the registration of births, marriages and deaths are set by statute.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 EIA has not been undertaken as fees apply to all groups.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 There are no data protection implications associated with this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 There are no crime and disorder risks arising from the proposals.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

12.1 The delivery of cost effective and sustainable services needs to be at a price which meets local needs and demands and is affordable. Potential under or over recovery of income can be attributed to a number of factors, such as elasticity of demand, changing economic circumstances and emergence of competition.

12.2 The proposals within this report will help to ensure income targets for Registration Services can realistically be achieved and an approach to fund the investment necessary for a new cemetery in Rowley Regis is appropriate.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications associated within this report.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 The construction of a new cemetery on part of Powke Lane Open Space will use up less than 30% of the whole site.

14.2 Whilst it is anticipated that during the construction phase some access points may have to be temporarily closed, on completion local residents will continue to have access to a much-improved open space.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 The Council recognises the profound impact, in particular bereavement, has on families and the importance other Registration related services to its residents.
- 15.2 Through its Registration Service, the Council provides a suite of services for the residents of the borough and those organisations and families who choose to use its excellent facilities.
- 15.3 It is felt that this recommendation ensures the Council is able to recover both the costs associated with the delivery of these services and effectively delivers the necessary funding to develop a new cemetery for Rowley Regis.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 **None**

17 APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Registration fees and charges table for 2020/2021.

Appendix 2 - Construction estimates for new cemetery

Surjit Tour

Director - Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer