

Report

Report to:	Community and Enterprises Resource Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 October 2018
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Child Burial and Cremation Charges and Development of a Respectful Funeral Package
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ propose that the Council implement the recommendations of COSLA and the Scottish Government with regard to the removal of fees for burial and cremation for children from 12 October 2018
- ♦ propose that the Council develop a respectful funeral package for approval at a future meeting of the Committee

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report be noted;
- (2) that the current age restrictions on charges for child burial internments and cremations are maintained and not aligned to the recommended age group of aged 17 and under;
- (3) that the current practice to charge for the purchase of lairs and headstone permits (including installation of the foundation) is removed for children aged 18 and under and that the Committee note the requirement to reimburse private contractors who undertake this function within the Council area; and
- (4) that a respectful funeral package be developed and submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for approval.

3. Background

3.1. On 25 May 2018, COSLA leaders agreed in principle that all child burial and cremation charges should be removed and that local authorities and the Scottish Government should work in partnership to achieve this. This was jointly announced with the Scottish Government on 30 May 2018.

3.2. The purpose of this was to ensure parents experiencing extremely difficult circumstances after the loss of a child did not face the additional financial burden of cremation or burial costs.

- 3.3. Based on the COLSA announcement, it was considered appropriate to propose that the Council adjust the age restrictions on charges for child burial and cremation to cover children aged 18 and under from 1 September 2018. This was agreed at the Community and Enterprise Resources Committee on 21 August 2018, which also highlighted that a further Committee report may be required if the finalised national guidelines require any further changes.

4. COSLA Guidance

- 4.1. Further guidance has now been received from COSLA which sets out the areas that councils should include when implementing the agreement to remove charges for child burials and cremations. It was also recommended that the agreement be implemented by 12 October 2018. The agreement is intended to provide consistency across Scotland.
- 4.2. To align South Lanarkshire Council's practices to the agreement would require a number of changes and these are outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1

Agreement	SLC Position	Change Required
Remove fees for children aged 17 and under.	Fees removed for children aged 18 and under.	No change
Remove fees for both residents and non-residents	Currently no separate charges in place	No change
For burials: Internment fee	Provided Free	No change
For burials: Lair purchase (exclusive right of burial)	Currently Charged (£1,153.60)	Require to provide free of charge, but where lair can accommodate further burials subsequent internment fees will be applicable for adults
For burials: Headstone permit including installation of foundation	Currently Charged (£148.32)	Require to provide free of charge
For cremations: Cremation fee	Provided Free	No change

- 4.3. The agreement is based on the principle that all bereaved parents should no longer have to pay burial and cremation fees therefore where private third parties provide this service they will be able to access funding to remove their charges. For that reason, the funding allocation to councils is based on all child deaths in Scotland, of which a proportion of cremations and burials will be carried out by private providers. Council Leaders have agreed that private providers should be given funding to support the removal of their charges with each local authority taking responsibility for distributing a part of their funding to private providers who remove their charges in their area, through local agreement between the local authority and private providers.
- 4.4. COSLA also requested that councils formally ratify these changes by 12 October 2018. Given the sensitivity on this issue, the short time period between 12 October and Committee sitting and to ensure the Council complies with the guidance in advance of gaining approval the service has taken a proportionate approach to this matter and implemented the proposal of removing charges for lair and headstone permit purchase in advance of Committee approval.

5. Respectful Funeral package

- 5.1. Recent activity in the Bereavement Services' industry has seen a number of local authorities, including East Ayrshire Council, either become directly involved in a form of partnership working with local funeral directors in setting up a Respectful Funeral Package scheme, or starting the process to implement a similar scheme.
- 5.2. A Respectful Funeral Package scheme would take the form of local funeral directors providing an affordable basic package that covers the minimum requirements at an agreed price whilst maintaining the key component that the bereavement process is carried out in a dignified and respectful manner. This includes:-
 - ◆ collection of the deceased
 - ◆ storage, care and preparation of the deceased
 - ◆ provision of coffin including all fittings
 - ◆ dressing of the deceased
 - ◆ provision of place of rest and viewing facilities
 - ◆ provision of Hearse and driver
 - ◆ provision of family car and driver
 - ◆ funeral arrangements on day of funeral
 - ◆ any additional items requested by the family will be charged on discussion between the family of the bereaved and the funeral director
- 5.3. A Respectful Funeral Package scheme should not be considered as a substitute for a Public Health funeral which will continue to be the sole responsibility, in terms of costs, of the local authority.
- 5.4. It is proposed that an exercise is commenced that will gauge the levels of interest in South Lanarkshire from our local Funeral Directors. Given the diversity of South Lanarkshire in geographical terms, it would be our intention to engage with a number of Funeral Directors providing a broad range of services across both the urban and rural areas.
- 5.5. It is our intention to work in partnership with the successful Funeral Directors by promoting the scheme Council wide through website, social media and in print via local newspapers and leaflets in Council Offices as well as requiring the Funeral Director to advertise at their own facilities. The only criteria to accessing the package would be that the deceased was resident in South Lanarkshire at the time of death.
- 5.6. A variety of reviews have been carried out, including a review on the impact of funeral poverty in Scotland which was completed in February 2016 by John Birrell, Chair of Scottish Working Group on Funeral Poverty and Fraser Sutherland, Citizens' Advice Scotland (CAS). The Funeral Poverty in Scotland Report has led to the compilation of a Funeral Costs Plan report which sets out the Scottish Government's 10 actions to help tackle funeral poverty in Scotland as outlined below:-
 1. we will launch the new Funeral Expense Assistance benefit by summer 2019
 2. we will publish guidance on funeral costs by December 2018
 3. we will support provision of more consistent advice on planning for a funeral, support at the point of bereavement and support after a funeral
 4. we will publish and promote Planning Your Own Funeral to help people think about and record plans for their funeral

5. we will seek to strengthen consumer protection in relation to pre-paid funeral plans
6. we will support greater public and personal discussion of bereavement, death, dying and care at the end of life
7. we will make more people aware of the products credit unions offer, including those specifically for funerals
8. we will deliver a Social Innovation Fund to help social enterprises tackle poverty and disadvantage, including funeral poverty
9. we will provide more options to help people save for their funeral by piloting a Scottish funeral bond
10. we will improve the evidence base relating to funeral poverty to help us assess the effectiveness of our actions

5.7. Whilst this does not directly relate to the provision of a Respectful Burial Package, there is clearly a responsibility on local authorities to provide support in terms of affordable options which a South Lanarkshire Respectful Funeral Package would provide.

6. Employee Implications

6.1. There are no employee implications associated with this proposal

7. Financial Implications

7.1. COSLA Leaders have agreed to provide financial support of £310,000 per annum to Scottish local authorities. The distribution will be determined by the population of 0-18-year olds in each local authority area with pro-rata funding to implement the agreement within the current financial year being included as an adjustment to the 2018/2019 Local Government Finance Order in early 2019.

7.2 The Council is also required to reimburse third party providers who provide this function within the Council area to ensure all bereaved families receive this service free of charge no matter who provides this function.

7.3 There would be no financial implications for the Council in developing and implementing a Respectful Funeral Package but South Lanarkshire Council residents would be provided with access to a more affordable option.

8. Other Implications

8.1. There are no risk or sustainability implications in terms of the proposals contained within this report if the Council aligns its charging policy to the agreement outlined by COSLA.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.

9.2. There is no requirement to undertake any consultation at this time in terms of the information contained in this report.

Michael McGlynn
Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

8 October 2018

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ♦ Fair, Open and Sustainable

Previous References

- ♦ Child Burial and Cremation Charges - Community and Enterprise Resources Committee 21 August 2018

List of Background Papers

- ♦ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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