

Report To: Councillor Tony Thomas, Lead Member for Housing, and Communities

Date of Report: 5th August 2021

Lead Officer: Tony Ward, Head of Highways and Environmental Services

Report Author(s): Andy Clark, Works Unit and Streetscene Manager / Michael Bennion, Streetscene Manager (North)

Title: Revised regulations and fees for Denbighshire County Council Cemeteries

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report covers a proposed fee increase for all council controlled cemeteries to bring costs in line with neighbouring authorities.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To provide Members with an analysis of current fees within neighbouring authorities, along with a proposal to increase burial fees to bring Denbighshire's fees to a comparable level to other councils in North Wales. A summary of cemetery fees in North Wales is included as **Appendix I**.

2.2. Cemetery fees (like most DCC fees and charges) are generally increased annually to cover inflationary costs. However, this planned increase is higher than would be required to cover general inflation. Even though the Head of Service has the authority to increase such fees and charges, it was felt that a Lead Member Delegated Decision was appropriate due to the level of the increase. This level of increase is required for two reasons: i) to bring Denbighshire's fees to a comparable level to other councils in North Wales; and ii) to implement a proposal that was put forward by Highways & Environmental Services as part of the 2021/21 budget setting process. The additional income from this proposed rise therefore forms part of the budget set by DCC for 2021/22. An overview of the income and costs for the last 5 years is shown in **Appendix IV**.

2.3. The service would also like to introduce a new clause to the current Cemetery Regulations so that "Denbighshire resident rates" would still be charged if the deceased had been living outside Denbighshire for less than 2 years before their death for healthcare or social care purposes.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That approval be granted for the proposal to increase burial fees to bring Denbighshire's fees in line with neighbouring authorities. This will result in a 7.5% increase being applied from August/September 2021.

- 3.2. That approval be granted to amend the Cemetery Regulations so that the Denbighshire resident rates would be charged if the deceased had been living outside Denbighshire for less than 2 years before their death for healthcare or social care purposes.

4. Report details

- 4.1. The council's burial fees need to be reviewed to bring them in line with neighbouring authorities. It is important to ensure that Denbighshire's burial rates are comparable to those of neighbouring authorities in order to maintain income at a reasonable level. Proposals for new fees are outlined in **Appendix II**. Whilst it should be noted that the fees are comparable to neighbouring authorities, on account of a 7.5% increase, consideration should be given to how an above inflationary rise would be perceived by the public.
- 4.2. The proposed increase is higher than would be required to cover general inflation for two reasons: i) to bring Denbighshire's fees to a comparable level to other councils in North Wales; and ii) to implement a proposal that was put forward by Highways & Environmental Services as part of the 2021/21 budget setting process. The additional income from this proposed rise therefore forms part of the budget set by DCC for 2021/22.
- 4.3. Most other councils in North Wales have a clause on their regulations which provides an exception from the general rule that non-residents are charged double cemetery fees. We believe it is correct to introduce a similar exception where a resident has had to move outside of the county for healthcare or social care purposes, as long as this was less than two years prior to their death.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The management of cemeteries does not explicitly contribute towards the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. The report contains no proposals that would place an additional cost burden on the service budget. However, there is a potential to generate additional income through the suggested increase in burial fees.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. The proposals are positive in terms of two of the Wellbeing Goals (A Prosperous Denbighshire and A More Equal Denbighshire), and neutral in all other aspects. The Wellbeing Impact Assessment is attached at **Appendix III**.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. The principal of keeping DCC cemetery fees in line with those of other Local Authorities in North Wales was supported by Communities Scrutiny committee, who were consulted on the proposals on 12th July 2018. The papers and minutes can be found via the following link:
<https://moderngov.denbighshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=271&MIId=5550&LLL=0>

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 It is important that services regularly review fees and charges and where possible and appropriate, recover the full cost of service provision, in line with the council's corporate policy.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1. The main risk is for the authority to be unable to provide burial provision for its residents in the medium to long term. The authority may need to consider whether to continue to provide this as a service to non-Denbighshire residents as there is no statutory obligation to do so.

11. Power to make the Decision

- 11.1. The Head of Highways & Environmental Services has delegated powers to manage all cemeteries controlled by the Council, and the power to approve fees and charges in accordance with paragraphs 10.4 and 3.9 of Appendix 3 to Section 13 of the Council's Constitution. The Lead Member's powers are laid out in the Constitution in App 2(b) to Section 13 of the Members Scheme of Delegations.

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