

## **AFFORDABLE FUNERALS**

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Wards affected: All Town Wards

### ***PROPOSED DECISION***

To agree to the addition of a page on the Council website setting out advice services for people seeking to have an affordable funeral. While the Cemetery already offers direct funerals, to agree to this being publicised.

### ***Reason for Decision***

The average cost of a burial funeral in England is £4,136 and £6,000 in London. It is possible for people to arrange their own burial and cremation services, without use of a funeral director. This is offered as an option on the website by the Chiltern Crematorium but at present Wycombe District Council does not publicise that it can also offer direct burial funerals.

### **Corporate Implications**

The Council's burial fees are not proposed to change and therefore there is no direct financial impact.

In England the disposal of human remains after death is contained in various pieces of legislation.

However, although culturally there is a tradition of engaging a funeral director to arrange for the legal formalities and funeral following a death, and many people will still wish to engage one at what is a sensitive time, there is no legal compulsion to do so, and as long as the general law is followed, the legal formalities and funeral arrangements may be dealt with by the executor or personal representatives of the deceased, without a funeral director involved.

### **Executive Summary**

Work is needed to ensure people seeking an affordable, self-managed funeral can readily find information on the WDC website to enable them to cost and organise a burial in the Cemetery.

### **Sustainable Community Strategy / Council Priorities - Implications**

People – the proposal seeks to offer more customer choice for town residents

Pounds – the proposal seeks to offer a more affordable funeral to fully serviced burials.

### **Background and Issues**

Each year Royal London prepares a National Funeral Cost Index report. The 2016 copy noted that costs of burial funerals have risen to an average of £4,136 across the country, with funerals in London costing an average of £6,069; the most expensive is Kensal Green at £9,679.

The urgent need to arrange a funeral and an understandable desire to arrange a fitting service often leaves families in debt. On average the debt taken on by customers is £1,601 per funeral.

Funeral costs have risen by an average of 6% per annum since 1980. In contrast typical foodstuffs have risen by 3% pa. As a consequence 5% of people are undertaking direct cremations or burials. This results in a greater degree of organisation needed by the family in return for the service of their choosing.

Additional information on what is involved in organising a direct funeral is attached at Appendix 1.

There is no intention to encourage people not to use funeral directors. The proposal simply enables those who wish to have a direct burial service to find out what the costs are and to enable them to book a service easily. The proposal aims to accommodate resident choice not to compete with the private sector.

The Crematorium at Amersham already offers a direct cremation service and the new Bierton Crematorium will offer a similar service. Further information is available at [http://www.chilternscrematorium.co.uk/self\\_arranged\\_funerals](http://www.chilternscrematorium.co.uk/self_arranged_funerals)

It is proposed that the WDC website has a similar page on self-arranged burial funerals.

## **Options**

The Cemetery can already accommodate direct burials if a family asks but there is no information to suggest this option is available and therefore no take up in recent years. The Committee could choose to continue to offer the service on a passive, request only basis.

## **Conclusions**

With rising interest in direct funerals as a way to deliver a fully tailored and affordable funeral the proposal seeks to provide information to residents who may wish to choose this option, whether planning for their own funeral or arranging a funeral for a relative or friend.

## **Next Steps**

To draft and upload a web page on self arranged funerals and to facilitate the provision of these with e-forms and price information.

## **Background Papers**

Royal London: Signs of Life – The Royal London National Funeral Cost Index Report 2016