

To: EXECUTIVE  
17 DECEMBER 2019

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**DIRECT CREMATIONS**  
**Executive Director: Delivery**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To outline how Bracknell Forest Council could generate additional income by offering direct cremations at Easthampstead Park Cemetery and Crematorium (EPC&C).

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 **Direct cremations are offered as an additional service at Easthampstead Park Cemetery and Crematorium at an individual price of £285.00.**
- 2.2 **The Council Constitution allows the Director to fix charges for any new service, provided that such charges are reported to the next meeting of the Council's Executive Committee. It is therefore recommended that this service is introduced within the current financial year.**
- 2.3 **If the Executive approves this new service, then it will be included in the 2020/21 fees and charges for approval at full Council in February 2020.**

**3 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The number of additional funeral services that were expected to take place following the opening of the second chapel at EPC&C in 2018/19 has not been realised. The service is therefore underperforming against its 2019/20 income target and at the end of September the income pressure totalled £180k. Direct cremations offer an opportunity to supplement existing services and generate additional income that may help to bridge some of this gap.

**4 Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 The current offer at EPC&C could remain as it is, without direct cremations. This option is not recommended given the current budget circumstances of the service and the council.
- 4.2 In response to the income pressure, plans have been put in place to further promote EPC&C and attract additional custom - these include creating a vanity URL, contacting Funeral Directors that are in the local area but not currently using the site, exploring joint marketing options with Registrars and updating both printed and electronic marketing materials to better promote the service as a whole. Given these efforts, the current offer at EPC&C could remain the same, without direct cremations. However, it is uncertain that marketing, alone, could account for an additional £180k (or more) of custom.

## 5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 EPC&C currently carries out an average of 40 cremations per week (2,000 per annum). In order to meet the 2019/20 income target, that figure needed to have been 48 per week from the start of the financial year (2,400 per annum), an increase of 20% from 2018/19. Services have so far been up by only 2.5% from last year and it is therefore clear that new income generating ideas are required.
- 5.2 Direct cremations represent a new and increasingly popular national service offer. They involve the cremation of a body without a funeral service. Bodies brought to EPC&C for direct cremation would arrive at an allocated, early morning time slot to avoid disruption to daytime services. Funeral Directors would arrive, deliver their coffin(s) to crematorium staff then drive away again.
- 5.3 The cremators have the capacity to cremate 10 to 12 bodies per day. Under present operations, the cremators run from 8am to 5pm on weekdays, and on Saturdays when required. Crematorium technicians are already on site from 8am to 5pm, seven days a week, and so there would be no additional staffing requirements to support any increase in the number of cremations being carried out each week. Given the current average of 40 cremations per week, there is additional cremation capacity for between 20 and 32 bodies a week if a six-day operational model was in use at all times.
- 5.4 Chapel service bookings are typically made seven to ten days in advance. Direct cremations would be scheduled one to three days in advance and so would only take up cremator slots that are not already occupied by chapel service cremations.

Given points 5.3 and 5.4, the introduction of direct cremations would support EPC&C to utilise available cremation slots without disrupting the current service offer. Figure 1, below, is an example schedule of services and the coloured slots demonstrate opportunity for direct cremations to fit around funeral service cremations.

*Figure 1: Example schedule of services at Easthampstead Park*

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
	Chapel 1	Chapel 2	Chapel 1	Chapel 2	Chapel 1	Chapel 2	Chapel 1	Chapel 2	Chapel 1	Chapel 2
09.00										
09.30										
10.00									Booked	
10.30				Booked		Booked		Booked		
11.00	Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked			
11.30		Booked				Booked		Booked		Booked
12.00	Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked	
12.30		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked
13.00	Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked	
13.30		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked		Booked
14.00	Booked		Booked							
14.30				Booked					Booked	
15.00					Booked		Booked			
15.30				Booked						Booked
16.00										

- 5.5 The proposed price of a direct cremation would be set at £285.00, to both cover the and costs of running the cemetery and crematorium facilities and to encourage use of the council's service.

- 5.6 Direct cremations are currently only offered at a select few South East crematoria and Table 2, below, lists those crematoria deemed to present local competition. Funeral Directors are cost sensitive and will inevitably choose to use the crematorium which offers them the best value. The choice of where to take a body for a direct cremation is purely driven by the combined costs of the funeral director's travel and our charge for providing the service. By setting prices competitively, it is hoped that EPC&C will attract custom from those who are in closer proximity to the sites listed below. Funeral Directors have the option / ability to transport and deliver several coffins at a time, so lower fees at Easthampstead Park would be a competitive choice for them.

*Table 2: Proposed direct crematorium charge compared to current charges at other sites*

<b>Site</b>	<b>Charge</b>
The Oaks, Havant	£320
Putney Vale, Wandsworth	£310
Kingston Crematorium	£305
Woking Crematorium	£300
<i>Easthampstead Park</i>	<i>£285 Proposed</i>

- 5.7 The direct cremation offer will be targeted at all funeral directors who are known to be offering the service. This will ultimately be extended to all funeral directors that use EPC&C.
- 5.8 Seven funeral directors that have been contacted about the potential offer of direct cremations at Easthampstead Park have expressed interest in it, subject to competitive rates being set. The likely demand on the service is not yet clear as the market is still developing, but between those seven funeral directors, 10 to 12 direct cremations are currently carried out per week. It is expected that more funeral directors will be likely to offer direct cremations if there is evidence that a local crematorium can manage the demand.

## **6 Consultation and Other Considerations**

### Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report

### Financial Advice

- 6.2 The proposal in the report offers the opportunity to generate additional income at the facility utilising current surplus capacity, which would help alleviate the current income shortfall being experienced.

### Other Consultation Responses

6.3 N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.4 There are no equalities impacts as this broadens the offer for service users.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 A potential risk is that bereaved families may view direct cremation as a cheaper alternative to a traditional cremation (which includes a chapel service) and so may not purchase a full funeral service from their Funeral Director. However, it is thought that this is a relatively low risk as current cultural trends in the UK mean that the majority of families prefer a chapel service as part of a cremation package.

Contact for further information

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