

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

16 November 2020

Bereavement Services



**Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the work of Bereavement Services.

Executive summary

- 2 This report provides members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information and an update of tasks associated within Bereavement Services.
- 3 A presentation will be provided to the Committee by Ian Hoult, Neighbourhood Protection Manager and Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager which accompanies this report.
- 4 Bereavement Services' role is to coordinate specific areas (as set out in appendix 2) some of the individual elements of the service is delivered by different teams within the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Service Grouping.
- 5 The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977, provides regulations in respect of burials, including burial records, management of memorials and empowers authorities to manage, regulate and control cemeteries.
- 6 All crematoria must follow the legislation in the Cremation Acts 1902, Cremation Regulations (England and Wales 2008), regarding the disposal of the dead.

- 7 Durham County Council is responsible for 46 open cemeteries that carry out in excess of 700 burials per year and 98 closed churchyards. Additionally, the authority is also responsible for two crematoria within the county at Mountsett and South Road, Durham City, which are managed by joint committees working in partnership with other authorities. The service carries out in excess of 4000 cremations per year.
- 8 The COVID-19 pandemic has placed crematoria under immense pressure and required immediate changes in ways of working and adaption of new working practices. During this time our staff have continued to provide services to our communities at the most difficult times.

Recommendations

- 9 That Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive and note the report and comment on it accordingly.

Background

- 10 Local Government Reorganisation saw a new Unitary Authority established from 1st April 2009. In November 2010 a special members seminar helped introduced the range of services to provide a greater understanding. It also provided an opportunity to input into areas of harmonisation, policy development and key issues.
- 11 Our overall vision for all our cemeteries and crematoria is:
 - To provide a sensitive, respectful service fitting for the bereaved.
 - To ensure that sympathetic, supportive and confidential advice is given to the recently bereaved on funeral service arrangements and give assistance in co-ordinating the funeral process if required.
 - To provide consistent high-quality standards of maintenance in cemeteries and crematoria across County Durham, working to maximise value for money.
 - To ensure the proper respect of all Council cemeteries and crematoria with fair Rules and Regulations, which are explained to all visitors.

Statutory Requirements

- 12 Burial authorities are authorised, but not required, to provide burial grounds if they have available land. The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 regulates depth of burial, the need for grave and burial records and their storage, and the management of memorials (including their removal). The Order also empowers burial authorities to manage,

regulate and control cemeteries, to lay out, repair and provide access to the cemetery, apply for part of the cemetery to be consecrated or set apart for particular denominations, to provide chapels or mortuaries, to set certain fees and charges, and to maintain graves

- 13 Durham County Council is responsible for some 46 open cemeteries carrying out in excess of 706 burials per year. Durham County Council is also responsible for some 98 closed churchyards, there are also, several Parish Councils who are responsible for cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- 14 The service is responsible for running 2 crematoriums at Mountsett and Durham which are managed by the joint committees working in partnership with other authorities. At Mountsett this is with Gateshead Borough Council and at Durham this is with Spennymoor Town Council. Overall, the service carries out in excess of 4,000 cremations per year and 90% of services are held through crematoria.
- 15 The role of bereavement services overall is to coordinate all the areas identified in Appendix 2 and following a review individual elements are delivered by different teams from Clean and Green, Business Support and Bereavement Services.

Clean and Green

- 16 The Clean and Green Team deliver all the grounds maintenance operations associated with bereavement services i.e. grass cutting, flower and shrub bed maintenance, tree works, roads, walls, footpaths, fencing in cemeteries/closed churchyards
- 17 They also undertaking grave digging operations and have been trained and have all achieved the Health and Safety and the Burial process certificate. This ensures all graves are dug and maintained in accordance with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management 'Charter for the Bereaved'.
- 18 Within the Clean and Green Team there is a core dedicated memorial inspection team dealing with memorial inspections making safe etc, and other staff that are fully trained, there are currently in excess of 75,000 memorials to be tested.

Business Support

- 19 Currently within Business Support there are dedicated staff who deal with all aspects of burials such as.
 - Customer services

- i. Families (grave bookings, family searches etc)
 - ii. Funeral Directors (funeral arrangements)
 - iii. Memorial Masons - Memorial applications and permits
- Coordination of burials and memorials with
 - Paperwork
 - i. Cemetery registers and plans
 - ii. Financial aspects from invoices to reconciliation

Bereavement Services

- 20 Bereavement services have 2 members of staff who deal with Memorial inspections, Closed churchyard orders, infrastructure inspections, grave marking, faculty applications, complaints etc.
- 21 They carry out 'public health funerals' in response to our statutory duties. This is covered under the provision of section 46 (i) of the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984, "where the County Council of Durham must, cause to be buried or cremated the body of any person who has died or been found dead in their area, in any case where it appears to the Council that no suitable arrangements have been or are being made otherwise than by the Authority".
- 22 Over the years this type of service has increased dramatically due to Funeral Poverty which is having an affect across the UK. Royal London (2018) reported that the average funeral costs £3,757. They also highlight that families are in debt for £1744 on average for each funeral. The North East average cost is £3,623. Recent research also shows that Universal Credit is now having an effect also.
- 23 In most instances; we are notified of the death by the Coroner's Officer. The Coroner's Office is involved in the investigation of certain deaths (for example; where the cause of death is uncertain). In these cases; the Coroner's Officers will make attempts to trace any relatives of the deceased. If the Coroner's Office is unable to trace any relatives; or no person is willing or able to prepare and/or pay for a funeral; then the Coroner's Office notifies Bereavement Services of the death.
- 24 We may also receive notification from hospitals if a person has been found to be deceased upon arrival at hospital (and the Coroner's Office is not involved in the investigation of the death); and there are no persons or relatives to arrange and/or pay for the funeral. We may also be notified of a death by residential homes; hospices and nursing homes.

- 25 This involves carrying out house searches to identify if there is a valid will, any next of kin, assets etc. that may assist with the funding of the funeral arrangements. In carrying out this service we may also use genealogy companies to assist in finding next of kin.
- 26 Whenever the views of the deceased are known, the funeral is arranged accordingly. Most funerals are cremations unless the deceased person's wish to be buried has been expressed in a signed, written statement. A public health funeral arranged by Durham County Council includes the following:
- Appropriate advice and support
 - Liaison with third parties and personnel required to arrange a funeral
 - provide care and preparation of the deceased
 - carry out the local removal of the deceased from either their home or mortuary
 - provide a standard Windsor type coffin
 - provide a hearse to attend the service at crematorium/cemetery
 - provision of a minister/ celebrant.

Crematoriums

- 27 There are two crematoria in Durham, both are partnerships and managed through Durham County Council. Both have separate legal status, Central Durham is a partnership with Spennymoor Town Council and Mountsett in partnership with Gateshead Borough Council as Joint Committees. In Durham 90% of services are through a Crematoria.
- 28 All crematoria must follow the legislation in the Cremation Acts 1902, Cremation Regulations (England and Wales 2008), regarding the disposal of the dead.
- 29 There are a number of areas of change that have affected delivery of the service. The main challenge to the service was the requirement (from 1st January 2013) for 50% of all cremations to be mercury abated. Should this not be achievable, legislation would be introduced whereby all crematoria undertaking excess of 1970 cremations during 2003 would be required to install abatement equipment.
- 30 The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities felt that rather than the cost of Mercury Abatement being met by the busiest crematoria the cost should be shared around the industry and introduced the CAMEO

scheme (a burden sharing scheme where those who with abatement equipment would receive payment from those without, based on the number of cremations undertaken).

- 31 In 2003 Durham Crematorium carried out significantly more cremations than the threshold set out in the 2003 legislation (1,326) and was therefore compelled to install equipment in line with legislation. In consideration of this Members of the Joint Committee agreed to install abatement equipment.
- 32 In 2003 Mountsett Crematorium carried out significantly less cremations than the threshold set and was therefore not compelled to install equipment in line with legislation. In consideration of this Members of the Joint Committee agreed that Mountsett Crematorium should join the CAMEO scheme rather than install abatement equipment.
- 33 Whilst it was envisaged that the number of projected cremations would continue to be lower than the legislative threshold, there were strong environmental reasons why, the cremators were replaced in 2017 with Mercury Abatement equipment.
- 34 Due to the recent outbreak of Covid 19 and the issues with the current installed cremators a decision was made to install a temporary cremator in the summer of 2020 at Mountsett Crematorium to cope with demand.
- 35 The Joint Committee has now agreed to install new cremators, which when installed in 2021 will be fully compliant with the DEFRA guidelines.
- 36 There has been significant capital investment of over £3.8m at Durham Crematorium since Local Government Reorganisation in 2009, with further investments of nearly £800k planned for the coming years in line with the Service Asset Management Plan for the site. The three cremators at the crematorium were installed in 2012/13, with full mercury abatement equipment being installed at that time. They have a life expectancy of 20 years, so the next cremator replacement programme of £1.6 million, based upon today's market prices, is not scheduled until approximately 2032.

Project	Cost £
New additional car parking	182,899
Crematorium extension	953,983
New cremators and mercury abatement plant	1,292,918
Improvement to office facilities	145,000

Alterations to book of remembrance room	171,463
Refurbishment of chapel	122,698
Refurbishment of internal waiting rooms	131,819
Replacement of copper roofing canopies	277,184

- 37 Since Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2009 there has also been significant investment in the Mountsett Crematorium totalling £1,975,578 with further investments of nearly £900k planned for the coming years in line with the Service Asset Management Plan for the site.

Project	Cost £
Installation of Memorial Towers	21,530
Road Widening	24,973
Tarmac Access to Car Park	62,200
Car Park Extension	88,398
Cremator Replacement and Extension	1,564,515

Re-cycling of Metals

- 38 The recycling of metals resulting from cremation is only carried out with the written consent of each bereaved family. Following a cremation of a deceased person the cremated remains contain metals such as items used in the construction of the coffin and on numerous occasions, orthopaedic implants such as hip and knee replacement joints. In the past this metal was removed from the cremated remains and buried within the grounds of the crematorium as the bereaved had never expressed any desire for its return to them. With the onset of modern waste management regulations, the Environment Agency indicated that once the metal is removed from the cremated remains it becomes waste albeit very sensitive material.
- 39 The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (I.C.C.M.) consulted with the Royal Dutch Cremation Federation, which has a metals recycling scheme currently in operation in the Netherlands and decided to model the UK scheme on its experiences. A specialist company called OrthoMetals has been contracted to provide special containers to UK scheme members and to carry out periodic collections.

- 40 The Dutch company then return a payment for the metals collected to the I.C.C.M. which is the distributed to those crematoriums who have nominated a death related charity.
- 41 So far £194,761 has been given to local death related charities by both crematoriums.

Memorialisation

- 42 Ancillary income is generated from the sale of large/small memorial plaques, vase blocks, niche units, seats, book of remembrance entries etc, the majority of these can be found at both crematoriums.

Woodland Burial Site

- 43 More recently an area of land to the bottom of the crematorium which is owned by Durham County Council was established as a community owned woodland burial site which was created by the Woodland Burial Trust by way of a lease agreement, however this went into administration and Durham County Council have now taken this over and are currently working with a friend's group on this site.

Fees and Charges

Cremation

- 44 The fees and charges at both Crematoriums have been harmonised since LGR. A £20 (2.9%) increase was applied in 2020/21 and the current budgeted cremation fee (inclusive of medical referee's fees) is £720.
- 45 The current cremation fees for crematoria across the region, shown in the table below, indicates a current average cremation fee of £823 (inclusive of medical referee's fees and environmental surcharge where appropriate) across the region:

Crematorium	Cremation Fee
Gateshead	£739
North Tyneside	£765
Stockton	£765
Middlesbrough	£790
South Tyneside	£816
Northumberland	£820

Newcastle	£842
Sunderland	£865
Hartlepool	£872
Coundon	£884
Darlington	£900
Average	£823

Burial

46 Burial fees and charges are considered each year, these increases relate to interment and exclusive right of burial charges by varying amounts, ranging from £5 to £50 (1.52% to 2.22%) and increase charges for memorials, miscellaneous fees by varying amounts. The interment of children up to 18 years old remains free. In 2020/21 new charges were introduced for service cancellations (less than 48 hours' notice), overrun exceeding 10 minutes, late attendance at the graveside (more than 20 minutes) and right of burial extensions from 20 to 40 years. Full details of all these charges are shown in Appendix 3.

Awards

- 47 In July 2009 Durham County Council were awarded The Charter for the Bereaved. The Charter is recognised across England as one of the top standards in Cemetery and Crematoria Services provision and related aspects of bereavement.
- 48 Overall the service provided is a valued one that has achieved a Gold standard through the ICCM (Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management). In August 2020, Bereavement Services was rated by ICCM as the Thirteenth best performing service in the country.
- 49 Castleside Cemetery was awarded Cemetery of Year Honourable Mention 2008 and Cemetery of Year Runner-Up in 2009, 2019 and again in 2020.
- 50 There are also six green flags awarded to Council cemeteries and crematoriums, in recognition of their maintenance standards and community involvement. This is the most awards for bereavement services anywhere in the whole country
- Castleside Cemetery since 2011
 - Ropery Lane Cemetery since 2008

- Moorside Cemetery since 2011
- Sacriston Cemetery since 2010
- Mountsett Crematorium since 2012
- South Road Cemetery and Crematorium since 2011

51 As well as these awards we also take part in the Association of Public Service Excellence (A.P.S.E.) benchmarking. In 2016 the service was a finalist in the best and most improved performer category in Cemetery and Crematorium services. Again in 2018 we were again a finalist in this category.

The Impact of COVID-19

52 As Members may be aware, the COVID 19 pandemic placed both crematoriums under immense pressure due to the increase in death rates and the fact that the majority services are carried out in Durham.

53 Normal ways of doing things were immediately stopped and changes in government regulation meant that we had to quickly adapt to a new way of working, this involved changes in paperwork, death registration etc.

54 This also involved us having to reduce the number of staff working within the building in order maintain operationally if those members of staff became effected who were working onsite.

55 Unfortunately, one of our permanent members of staff had to go into self-isolation as he was classed as vulnerable, which in turn placed the remaining staff in a difficult situation.

56 To accommodate the additional workload extra staff were brought in from other Durham County Council services including neighbourhood wardens, sport and leisure, assets, road safety, libraries etc to cope with the demand. This meant that existing staff carried out their normal duties whilst training other staff in the roles, ensuring that we could then have a bank of trained staff in order to operate a shift system and be able to operate 7 days a week. This shift system was in place for 2 months with staff working 10-hour days 4 days on and 4 days off, which also included myself and the staff working bank holidays to cope with the demand.

57 At Mountsett crematorium the equipment was not fully functional and with the demand increasing, the decision to install a temporary cremator at Mountsett was made to ensure that the potential peak could be met.

58 During this extraordinary period both crematoria saw a dramatic increase in excess deaths resulting in an extra 548 cremations being undertaken during this 2-month period (April and May) compared to previous years.

- 59 The seating within the chapels had to be removed and replaced with 15 individual seats which allowed us to sanitise between each service ensuring that a safe distance of 2 metres can be maintained at all times. We continue to remain at this capacity until such times as Government advice changes.
- 60 Both Joint Committees also agreed to freeze prices and allow free webcasts during the worst period, however as from 1st November these will revert to our current charges. During this time both book of remembrance remains closed, however they can be viewed online.
- 61 During this time the staff have been a real asset, continue to provide services to our communities at the most difficult times.
- 62 We continue to monitor current death trends and are ready in case of a second wave.

Key issues

Sensitivity of the service

- 63 This service is provided at one of the most difficult times in families lives having lost a loved one. This can be a difficult task and good liaison with funeral directors and families is important and it is done with understanding and sensitivity. This task should not be underestimated.

Regulation

- 64 There are few laws of general application to burial grounds. Most burial law is directed at particular types of burial grounds, such as those operated by local authorities (the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO), as amended) or the Church of England (various ecclesiastical Measures, although the law relating to churchyards is mostly common law). However, all crematoriums must follow The Cremation (England and Wales) Regulations 2008. During Covid updated regulation has changed at pace and frequently.

Funeral Poverty

- 65 Funeral Poverty is having an affect across the UK. Royal London (2018) reported that the average funeral costs £3757. They also highlight that families are in debt for £1744 on average for each funeral. The North East average cost is £3623. Recent research also shows that Universal Credit is now having an effect also. The current market has a lack of transparency making it difficult to compare products and there are significant differentials between suppliers. To help we direct families to the financial help that is available and provide a range of available options for families to take when considering services. For example, at the

crematoria some slots are priced differently and there is a direct cremation option.

Burial space

- 66 Unlike the Crematoria which has a fixed asset base, burial space continues to be used up and maintenance of these community spaces will continue ad infinitum.
- 67 Therefore, we continue to look at areas in which we can suitably extend or create new burial grounds where possible, however this is subject to Environment Agency approval regarding groundwater pollution.

The Future

- 68 The cremator replacement work at Mountsett is due to commence in 2021.
- 69 The next cremator replacement works at Durham crematorium are not scheduled until 2032.

Conclusion

- 70 Bereavement services continues to provide services to our communities at a time in life when they are at their most vulnerable.

Background papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

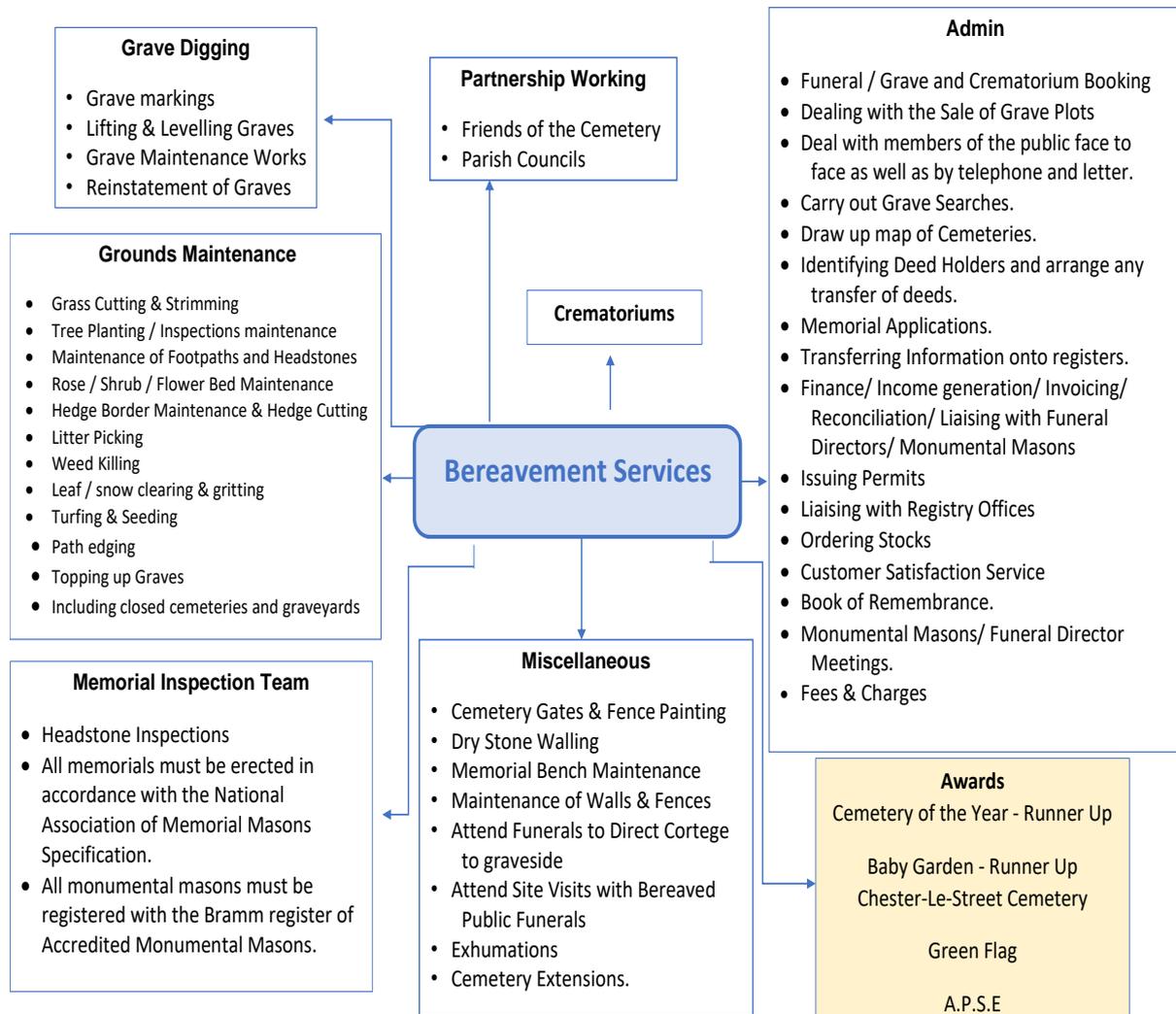
Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable

Appendix 2: Bereavement Functions



Appendix 3: Burial charges

Neighbourhood Protection							
Proposed fees and charges 2020/21							
Product Group	Product Description	2020/21 Method of Charging	2019/20 Charge (£) (inc VAT)	2020/21 Charge (£) (inc VAT)	Actual Increase (£)	Actual %'age Increase	VAT Code
Burial Fees							
	Exclusive right of burial (inc headstone fees) - resident	Per Burial	1,185.00	1,210.00	25.00	2.11%	E
	Exclusive right of burial ½ plot (inc headstone fees) - resident	Per Burial	710.00	725.00	15.00	2.11%	E
	Exclusive right of burial (inc headstone fees) - non resident	Per Burial	2,350.00	2,400.00	50.00	2.13%	E
	Exclusive right of burial ½ plot (inc headstone fees) - non resident	Per Burial	1,390.00	1,420.00	30.00	2.16%	E
	Interment of Stillborn child, or a child up to (but not including) 18 years (at time of death)	Per Burial	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Interment of a person aged 18 years or over at time of death - resident	Per Burial	835.00	850.00	15.00	1.80%	E
	Interment of person aged 18 years or over at time of death - non resident	Per Burial	1,650.00	1,685.00	35.00	2.12%	E
	Interment of person aged 18 years or over at time of death- Saturday resident	Per Burial	1,250.00	1,275.00	25.00	2.00%	E
	Interment of cremated remains - resident	Per Burial	225.00	230.00	5.00	2.22%	E
	Interment of cremated remains - non resident	Per Burial	450.00	460.00	10.00	2.22%	E
	Interment of cremated remains - Saturday resident	Per Burial	330.00	335.00	5.00	1.52%	E
Memorial fees							
	Erection of headstone fee	Per Item	260.00	265.00	5.00	1.92%	E
	Tablets, Plaques, Flat Stones on memorial walls	Per Item	130.00	133.00	3.00	2.31%	E
	Vases (permanent)	Per Item	85.00	87.00	2.00	2.35%	E
	Additional inscriptions	Per Item	70.00	70.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Replacement headstones	Per Item	75.00	76.00	1.00	1.33%	E
	Kerbs (in certain cemeteries)	Per Item	365.00	375.00	10.00	2.74%	E
	Kerbs ½ grave plot (in certain cemeteries)	Per Item	180.00	185.00	5.00	2.78%	E
	Erection of headstone where no exclusive right purchased (50+ years old)	Per Item	260.00	265.00	5.00	1.92%	E
	Erection of headstone where no exclusive of right purchased (25-50 years old)	Per Item	810.00	820.00	10.00	1.23%	E
Miscellaneous Cemetery Fees							
	Cemetery searches	Per Item	25.00	25.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Grave selection fee	Per Item	60.00	60.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Transfer of ownership (change deed holders)	Per Item	80.00	80.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Copy of deed	Per Item	25.00	25.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Service cancellation (less than 48 hrs notice)	Per Item	0.00	250.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Overrun exceeding 10 minutes	Per Item	0.00	50.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Late attendance at graveside (more than 20 minutes)	Per Item	0.00	50.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Full grave - 20 year extension	Per Item	0.00	282.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Full grave - 30 year extension	Per Item	0.00	423.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Full grave - 40 year extension	Per Item	0.00	564.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Cremated remains section – 20 year extension	Per Item	0.00	164.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Cremated remains section – 30 year extension	Per Item	0.00	247.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Cremated remains section – 40 year extension	Per Item	0.00	329.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Children's section grave – 20 year extension	Per Item	0.00	164.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Children's section grave – 30 year extension	Per Item	0.00	247.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Children's section grave – 40 year extension	Per Item	0.00	329.00	new charge	new charge	E
	Chapel of Rest per day (Chester-le-Street only)	Per Item	150.00	150.00	0.00	0.00%	E
Cemetery Columbarium Fees							
	Columbarium Unit for maximum of 2 interments (20y lease)	Per Item	1,120.00	1,120.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Plaque inclusive of 80 letters inclusive of VAT	Plaque & 80 Letters	120.00	120.00	0.00	0.00%	S
	Additional letter at £1.38 each plus VAT	Per Letter	1.65	1.65	0.00	0.00%	S
	Re-opening for second interment (re:Columbarium)	Per Item	55.00	55.00	0.00	0.00%	E
	Plus second inscription at £1.38 per letter plus VAT	Per Letter	1.65	1.65	0.00	0.00%	S
	Removal and replacement of tablet inclusive of VAT (re:Columbarium)	Per Item	32.00	32.00	0.00	0.00%	S

Note: VAT is not included in the above costs unless otherwise stated as burials and associated expenses are exempt.