
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

21 January 2019

Cabinet

Title:	Tackling Funeral Poverty: Developing a North Ayrshire Respectful Funeral Service
---------------	---

Purpose:	To outline a proposal to identify appropriate funeral directors with whom an agreement will be developed to facilitate the provision of a new affordable Respectful Funeral Service package for bereaved families to tackle funeral poverty in North Ayrshire.
-----------------	--

Recommendation:	That Cabinet approves the proposal to identify appropriate funeral directors with whom an agreement will be developed to facilitate the provision of a new Respectful Funeral Service package for bereaved families to tackle funeral poverty in North Ayrshire.
------------------------	--

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2016, a review of funeral poverty in Scotland was undertaken by the Citizens Advice Bureau. The review confirmed that funeral poverty is an increasing societal issue and set out various recommendations to address the matter. The proposed actions included a recommendation that local authorities give due attention to the impact of bereavement costs on funeral poverty and seek ways to reduce, or at least limit, these charges.
- 1.2 In North Ayrshire, a Bereavements Working Group was established in 2017 and has sought to improve partnership working between stakeholders and to better support grieving families through the funeral arrangement process. The Group oversaw the creation of a new Bereavements Charter and has continued to actively consider further potential improvements.
- 1.3 An opportunity has been identified through the Bereavements Working Group to further tackle funeral poverty through the creation of a new Respectful Funeral Service package. This initiative would identify appropriate funeral directors to provide low-cost, fixed fee, dignified funeral service packages for North Ayrshire residents. This model has been successfully introduced elsewhere, and represents direct action to reduce funeral poverty, alleviate the burden of unknown costs for grieving families, improve local choice, and provides the potential to indirectly influence the local funeral provider market to provide lower costs generally.

- 1.4 A specification for undertakers' services to be provided within the new Respectful Funeral Service will be developed by officers and published on the Public Contracts Scotland portal to attract appropriate funeral director proposals. It is anticipated proposals received will offer reductions in fees for bereaved families. The Council would then promote the Respectful Funeral Service and partners offering the service via information leaflets and other means to make bereaved families aware of the availability of the service. It is expected that local bereaved families would then make arrangements directly with their chosen funeral director as necessary.
- 1.5 Cabinet is requested to approve the proposal to identify appropriate funeral directors with whom an agreement will be developed to facilitate the provision of a new affordable Respectful Funeral Service package for bereaved families. The new service would help tackle funeral poverty in North Ayrshire. The services to be included in the package are outlined at paragraph 2.6. The Council's continuing role will be to promote the availability of the service.

2. Background

- 2.1 Funeral poverty is an increasing reality for many people throughout the UK who find themselves in a position where the cost of a funeral outweighs their ability to pay. The average cost of a funeral in Scotland is £3,500 (according to Citizen Advice Scotland) and meeting funeral costs brings added financial pressure to people on lower incomes at a particularly vulnerable time.
- 2.2 The North Ayrshire Bereavements Working Group was formed in 2017 to develop better partnership working and stronger relationships between all parties involved in the bereavement process. The group is chaired by the Depute Provost and meets quarterly with representatives from the Council's Bereavements and Registration Teams, as well as local funeral directors, local clergy and a representative from a local crematorium.
- 2.3 The Bereavements Working Group has assisted in the introduction of significant improvements to the bereavements process since its inception, including the development and implementation of the Bereavements Charter, a streamlined process for registration of deaths, and input to the abolition of child burial fees in North Ayrshire.
- 2.4 In North Ayrshire, a variety of steps have been taken to minimise funeral costs to date. These include consistently maintaining our interment charges below the Scottish average. In September 2018, we abolished our charge for a new lair for children under the age of 18 years and extended our policy not to charge for interments for under 16s to children under 18. We also removed charges for foundations for associated headstones.
- 2.5 There are further opportunities available for local authorities to lead action on tackling funeral poverty. The Bereavements Working Group has identified examples of good practice to address funeral poverty taking place within a number of local authorities who have partnered with local funeral directors to provide affordable, dignified funeral options that provide significant savings against the average cost of a funeral in Scotland.

2.6 These schemes involve funeral directors providing a tailored package, at a fixed price, consisting of:

- Collection of the deceased
- Care and preparation of the deceased
- A choice of coffin, including an environmental option
- A place of rest with viewing facilities
- A hearse and one family car
- Arrangements on the day of the funeral, including the actual burial or cremation

Additional options can be selected at additional cost, for example provision of a minister, priest or celebrant, or additional transportation.

2.7 Research has indicated that where an affordable funeral package is made available through such Respectful Funeral Service schemes, savings of between 30-60% based on the average cost for funeral director services can be achieved for families.

2.8 It is therefore proposed to develop and implement a similar partnership arrangement within North Ayrshire whereby funeral directors will provide a Respectful Funeral Service package for local families. A specification for undertakers' services to be provided will be finalised and published on the Public Contracts Scotland portal to attract appropriate funeral directors' proposals. It is anticipated proposals received will offer reductions in fees for bereaved families. The package would include fixed fees for the services listed at paragraph 2.6, with potential for further services to be included at additional cost. The Council would then promote the Respectful Funeral Service and details of the identified partners offering the service via information leaflets and other means to make bereaved families aware of the availability of the service. It is expected that local bereaved families will then make arrangements with their chosen funeral director as necessary. The objectives of the scheme are to:

- Reduce funeral poverty by providing a lower cost yet dignified funeral package
- Provide support to bereaved families by reducing the burden involved with arranging a funeral through up-front information on costs
- Emphasise local choice for bereaved families when selecting a funeral provider
- Influence the local funeral provider market to provide best value

2.9 The key steps and proposed timescales for the creation of the Respectful Funeral Service package are as follows:

- Early Spring 2020: Finalise specification of the Respectful Funeral Service package
- Summer 2020: Identify funeral director partners via the Public Contracts Scotland portal to obtain proposals from providers who will deliver the Funeral Service package
- Late Summer 2020: Launch the Respectful Funeral Service package, including a local advertising campaign and promotional materials to raise awareness of the services and funeral directors participating in it.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 The proposed introduction of a Respectful Funeral Service package, promoted by the Council, will help tackle funeral poverty, reduce the burden on bereaved families, and provide local choice.
- 3.2 A specification for undertakers' services to be provided within the new Respectful Funeral Service will be developed by officers and published on the Public Contracts Scotland portal to attract appropriate funeral director proposals and a selection of partner providers will be identified through the portal during Spring/Summer 2020. The agreements will then be established, and the package will then be launched in late Summer 2020, including through extensive advertising to ensure residents are aware of the package and its benefits.
- 3.3 Cabinet is requested to approve the proposal to identify appropriate funeral directors with whom an agreement will be developed to facilitate the provision of a new Respectful Funeral Service package for bereaved families to tackle funeral poverty in North Ayrshire.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the report.

Human Resources

- 4.2 There are no human resource implications arising from the report.

Legal

- 4.3 The proposal aligns with the power contained in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 which allows a local authority to promote or improve the well-being of its area and or/ the persons within that area.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 The provision of a Respectful Funeral Service package will contribute directly to the Council's equality and socio-economic duties by facilitating the provision of a low-cost, fixed fee funeral package. This will help tackle funeral poverty and reduce the financial burden for those on lower incomes.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 Not applicable.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 The Council Plan 2019-2024 sets out a vision for a North Ayrshire that is 'Fair for All'. The Respectful Funeral Service package contributes to this vision by reducing funeral poverty.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 The proposal to develop and introduce a Respectful Funeral Service package for North Ayrshire residents will align to the 5 pillars of Community Wealth Building where appropriate.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with the membership of the North Ayrshire Bereavements Working Group.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **David Hammond, Interim Head of Commercial Services** on **01294 324570**.

Background Papers

0