

**REPORT TO:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 21 April 2015

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Community Services

**SUBJECT:** Charging Policy – Memorial Headstone Maintenance Fee

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 That Council approves the introduction of a Maintenance and Management Fee payable on approval of an application to erect a memorial headstone within a Council-managed burial ground.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council approves the introduction of a Management and Maintenance Fee of £100 plus VAT, to commence with immediate effect.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 10 March 2015 Cabinet agreed to adopt the Burial Ground Strategy, which included a recommendation to introduce a management and maintenance fee for headstones within a Council-managed burial ground. The Recommendation concerning the charge was remitted to Council for approval.
- 3.2 The Council, as owners of the land are legally responsible for ensuring the health and safety of visitors and employees within the burial grounds. A significant risk to safety exists from the current condition of approximately 8,000 memorial headstones, the owners of which are generally absent and cannot be pursued to contribute towards the cost of these essential repairs

- 3.3 The Council recently adopted an approach of installing foundations for new headstones and requires that monumental sculptors erect stones in accordance with current industry practice. Therefore, the likelihood of recently erected memorial headstones presenting risk in the future is greatly reduced.
- 3.4 The fee charged by the Council for construction of foundations is cheaper than that traditionally applied by monumental sculptors and therefore represents good value to the customer.
- 3.5 However, there remains a requirement for the Council to inspect all headstones on a minimum 3-yearly cycle and undertake repairs to any stone found to present a danger of collapse. In order to minimise the long-term financial burden to the Council of undertaking these inspections and repairs, it is proposed to introduce a Management and Maintenance Fee, payable on approval of an application to erect a memorial headstone, of £100 over and above the current foundation fee of £133.
- 3.6 On a rolling financial year basis, income from these fees will assist with the cost of stabilising the existing stock of memorial headstones and cover the cost of inspecting, recording and undertaking preventative repairs to the whole stock in perpetuity
- 3.7 Introduction of the Management and Maintenance Fee, combined with the Foundation Fee, would generate income of £233 per application which sits within a range of £61 - £339, an average of £168 for the 16 local authorities who provided benchmark figures although the local authorities at the lower end of the fee scale also charge for permits for additional inscriptions, cleaning, secondary vases and plaques at an average of £42 per application

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The introduction of the Management and Maintenance Fee is in line with the adopted Burial Ground Strategy and the Council Charging Policy 2015 in so much as it lessens the need for Council Tax payers to subsidise the cost of memorial headstone maintenance.

#### **5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial – This proposal reduces the overall revenue cost to the Council of maintaining its statutory burial service
- 6.2 Personnel - None
- 6.3 Other - None

## **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Minutes of Cabinet 13 March 2015

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