

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/18

FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18th December 2017

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Agenda Item No. 4

Bereavement Fees & Charges for War Veterans and Service Men & Women

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 24th July 2017, consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme which included the following Notice of Motion considered by Council on the 30th November, 2016 :-

"As part of the Council's commitment to support the Armed Forces Community and as part of the review of fees and charges, this Council will in principle, adopt after a further report outlining details for the cessation of burial or cremation fees charged for the funerals of veterans and service men and women".

- 1.2 It was agreed at the Council Meeting (Minute No.80 (2016/17) refers) to adopt the Notice of Motion as amended (in bold) and that a Working Group be established to assist in drawing up the criteria to be used and for the findings there from be reported to a future meeting of the Council.
- 1.3 The Notice of Motion being placed on this committee's Work Programme as a result of the matter being referred to at the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 10th July 2017, when it was agreed that in view of the time period that has lapsed, the Notice of Motion be dealt with by Members of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.4 The Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the matter at its meeting on 23rd October 2017 and resolved that the Service Director, Public Health & Protection make further enquiries, report back to the next meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee with a proposal for Members of the Committee to consider and if appropriate, the Service Director, Public Health & Protection to report the recommendations of the Committee to Cabinet.

- 1.5 This report presents the outcome of those further enquiries and proposes a draft policy for consideration by the committee prior to any recommendation being made to Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Scrutiny Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise the contents of the report and the draft policy proposal, and
- 2.2 Consider whether any amendments are required to the draft policy, and
- 2.3 Subject to 2.2, determine whether the policy should be applied as a pilot and reviewed after 12 months, and
- 2.4 Subject to 2.2 and 2.3 request the Service Director, Public Health & Protection to report the recommendations of the Committee to Cabinet as part of the wider considerations around bereavement fees and charges.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Committee, at its meeting on 23rd October 2017, considered a report on the potential to waive bereavement fees and charges for veterans and former service men and women in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Members of the committee recognised that there would be a need to put in place eligibility criteria to ensure that any policy was fairly and appropriately applied. Members also recognised that the wishes of the family must be the primary consideration in the development of any policy.
- 3.2 Members requested that the Service Director, Public Health & Protection make some further enquiries with relevant agencies and report back to the Committee with a draft policy for consideration.
- 3.3 The following agencies have been approached and invited to comment on the Council's proposals;
- Naval Families Federation;
 - Army Families Federation;
 - Royal British Legion;
 - RAF Families Federation;
 - SSAFA – the Armed Forces charity;
 - Valleys Veterans;
 - Armed Forces Covenant Manager (Wales & West Midlands);
 - Senior Manager Armed Forces Community, WLGA.
- 3.4 The responses received to date have all been supportive of any proposal that would provide additional support for families of veterans and service personnel.
- 3.5 All agencies recognised the need to ensure that any policy affording assistance to the families of veterans and service men and women must include some kind of eligibility criteria to ensure that the benefit reached

the families of those who had served their country and risked their lives doing so.

- 3.6 Period of enlistment with the regular armed forces (Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force) vary, although all have minimum length of service requirement of 4 years. Recruits have a discharge, as of right, at certain points in their early days in the forces. This allows them to leave by giving fourteen days notice.
- 3.7 Those who join the Armed Forces Reserve (Army Reserve, Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Marines Reserve and Royal Air Forces Volunteer Reserve) make a commitment to support the regular forces at home and abroad. The period of enlistment varies, for example, the initial period of enlistment in the Army Reserve is up to 12 years, whereas in the RAF Reserve and Royal Naval Reserve the normal period of engagement is in 5 year blocks.
- 3.8 One consideration would be to set an eligibility criteria based on length of service, for example, completion of the minimum length of service. However, it was highlighted that any criteria specifying a minimum length of service may inadvertently exclude individuals that have left service early due to injury/trauma. It is recognised that any eligibility criteria must both recognise the commitment of the individual and active service.
- 3.9 It was recognised that to be eligible, it would be necessary for the families of the deceased to provide the burial authority (The Council) with proof of service. It was however accepted that this should be reasonable and that it would not be practical in every instance to verify service with the Ministry of Defence without creating administrative costs and potential delays. All agencies felt that reasonable proof of service, such a service number, discharge papers or pension entitlement could be easily provided by the family and that the Council should have some discretion in what it accepts as reasonable proof of service.
- 3.10 It was generally accepted that this policy should be applied to war veterans and/or service men and women that are resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Circumstances where a long term resident of the county borough has been forced to leave the area due to their care needs were considered and it was considered that in such circumstances it would be reasonable to also apply the policy.
- 3.11 Whether the policy should apply to all or some bereavement fees and charges were considered and this resulted in the most varied responses. It was recognised that the services provided would reflect the wishes of the family and will vary. Four options emerged from the discussion: waive all fees and charges, waive only the main fees and charges (cremation, interment), apply a reduction in the overall charge (for example 25%, 50% or 75%) for whatever services are required or set a maximum reduction that could be applied to the overall cost.
- 3.12 The agencies consistently held the view that the wishes of the families were the paramount consideration and that families should have discretion to decline the application of this policy if they wished to do so.

- 3.13 The Council has discretion to set its bereavement fees and charges. In the discussions held with agencies, there was no information to suggest that any policy to waive or reduce fees and charges for veterans or service men and women would affect any other entitlements that the family may receive.
- 3.14 All agencies recognised that this was a new policy and that it was impossible to determine how many families are likely to be eligible. The suggestion that the policy could be applied as a pilot for a period of twelve months and then subject to review was considered sensible.
- 3.15 The Council also operates Llwydcoed Crematorium on behalf of the Joint Management Committee. Any decision made by this Council in respect of bereavement fees and charges relating to veterans would also need to be considered and approved by the Joint Management Committee.

4 **PROPOSED POLICY FOR DISCUSSION**

4.1 Following further enquiries, the Committee is requested to scrutinise, challenge and if necessary amend the following policy proposal:

4.2 **Eligibility**

- Any veteran, resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf that has served with the Armed Forces (including National Service) for the minimum length of service required and/or seen active service;
- Any veteran, resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf that has enlisted with the Armed Forces Reserves and completed their period of enlistment and/or seen active service.

4.3 For the purposes of this policy “active service” will mean any service personnel that have been deployed to a war zone. The policy does however allow discretion to apply the policy to personnel that have left service due to trauma or injury or otherwise medically discharged whilst in operational service.

4.4 **Residence**

- The policy will apply to war veterans or former service men and women that are resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf at the time of death or to veterans that have left the County Borough due to health or care requirements during the three years prior to the time of death.

4.5 **Proof of Service & Discretionary Considerations**

- The family will provide reasonable evidence of service of the deceased in the Armed Forces or Reserve Forces. This may be service discharge papers, armed forces pension entitlement, service number or other evidence that the Council considers reasonable proof of service.
- The policy will only be applied by the Council with the explicit consent of the family.

4.6 Application

- Where the above requirements are met, the Council shall apply a reduction of 25% in the total costs of all bereavement services provided.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is no way of accurately determining the numbers of veterans of service men and women resident in the County Borough or the number of services the Council provides to veterans as this information is not collected. Therefore it is not possible to determine, with any accuracy, the financial implications should the Council decide to waive its fees for war veterans and service men and women.
- 5.2 The Council apply a range of fees and charges associated with burial and cremation. The main fees and charges are presented at Table I.

Table I - Bereavement Fees & Charges

Cremation fee	£670
Purchase of exclusive right of burial in a cremated remain plot	£256
Interment in a cremated remain plot	£256
For the exclusive right of burial in a grave for two interments	£519
For the exclusive right of burial in grave for 3 interments	£557
For the interment of a person who has attained their 16 th birthday	£519
To place a memorial headstone on an earthen grave or cremation plot	£256

- 5.3 It is proposed that should members wish to recommend to the Cabinet that they adopt this new policy in respect of fees and charges for veterans and service men and women that it is subject to review after a period of 12 months. This would enable the Council to accurately determine the level of demand and financial implications.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Council has given a commitment to support the Armed Forces community in Rhondda Cynon Taf through the Armed Forces Covenant. The Council can consider providing financial assistance to the families of veterans or service men and women by waiving or applying a reduction to the fees and charges it applies for bereavement services.
- 6.2 The National Assembly for Wales cross party group on the armed forces and cadets has recently published its inquiry into the impact of the Armed Forces Covenant in Wales. This includes the following recommendation:

*The Welsh Government should also encourage other public and private sector organisations to extend further privileges to service personnel and veterans in the future, such as discounts on goods and services, free entry into all military museums in Wales, **and waiving burial and cremation fees at local authority owned burial grounds and crematoria.***

- 6.3 In proposing any policy change to Cabinet, the committee may consider it prudent to recommend this as a pilot subject to review after 12 months. The implications of this policy are unknown. A pilot period would allow Members to review the policy once the impact on service delivery is fully understood. Members could then decide to amend/extend the policy in light of further evidence.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11th December 2017

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION &
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Background Paper:

Report of the Service Director, Public Health & Protection; Bereavement fees & Charges for War Veterans and Service Men & Women, Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee – 23rd October 2017

Cross Party Group on the Armed forces and Cadets; Inquiry into the impact of the armed forces covenant in Wales, National Assembly for Wales – 11th November 2017

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