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Place Directorate  
Bereavement Services  
Culture, Housing and Regulation Service  
**Phillip Spurr, Service Director**

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My Ref:  
Your Ref:  
Date: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2018  
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### **Re. Funeral Markey Study**

Please find below the Council's submission to the Funeral Markets Study 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018. I am happy to follow up any questions you may have and I can be contacted at the details above.

#### **Funeral Markey Study**

#### **Submission by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

#### **Bereavement Services**

#### **Crematoria Market Power**

#### **o) Do crematoria compete to serve funeral directors and their customers and if so, how?**

The Barnsley area is well served by crematoria both within and on the boundary of the Borough. Generally residents will go to the local crematorium as this is both convenient for themselves and for the local undertaker. In terms of competing, local crematoria do receive customers from neighbouring boroughs but mainly from the borders between. This will be influenced by not only price but also by ease of access, facilities on offer, the care of the grounds and the types of memorials that are provided. In short we, like any other business, want to provide value for money for our customers. In Barnsley we are considerably less expensive than neighbouring crematoria both on cremations and on after sales such as memorials. I think it is worth adding that bereaved families often choose the local crematorium because they have a strong local identity and that previous family members have used the facilities. Local authorities provide price lists for all their services including any memorials on offer at the crematorium. Private companies do not do this, only the price of cremation and associated services such as the scattering of ashes. If all crematoria were forced to publish all their prices including memorials the public would have the information to make an informed choice as to the total cost of the cremation.

**p) Do customers (or funeral directors on their behalf) actively consider alternative crematoria when arranging a funeral? What would encourage them to do so more?**

Bereaved families are asked by local funeral directors where they would like to go for the cremation. As outlined above bereaved families often choose the local facility as it is convenient for them in terms of travel arrangements or they have had previous cremations there or the facility offers good value for money. Travelling further to another crematorium could add cost to the price of a funeral.

**q) What are the main barriers to entry for new crematoria?**

The establishment of new crematoria where there is a demonstrable need is a valuable asset to any community. However development in greenbelt or near residential areas does provoke large outcry from local residents. The reason for this could be that a new crematorium is being developed to make money rather than serve a community need and therefore is in an inappropriate place. A demonstration of need at the planning stage would help planning authorities establish if a new crematorium was needed.

**r) Why have cremation fees generally increased and why do they differ across the UK?**

There are several factors why cremation fees have increased over the past few years. The introduction of mercury abatement equipment several years ago made existing crematoria upgrade their facilities, this often involved new cremators as well as the mercury equipment. The stock of local authority crematoria has been under invested in for many years and the expectations of the general public were not being met. The refurbishment of crematoria to a better standard and the maintaining of those standards has increased prices. In addition the opening of new crematoria in some areas can lead to price increases. This may seem odd as you would expect another facility would lead to competition. There is generally an even number of deaths within a given area year on year. There does not tend to be large fluctuations. If a new crematorium is opened near to an existing one they have to compete for that custom. The new crematorium will inevitably take some of the customers even though they charge a higher price. Their facilities are new and to a modern design. This loss of customers to the existing crematorium leaves a gap in their income. There are no more deaths in the area and therefore they cannot increase the numbers coming through the door. This leaves them little alternative but to raise prices to make up the shortfall in income. This relates to the previous question where the demonstration of need is a vital requirement when granting permission for new crematoria (there have been several cases recently where 2 rival planning applications have been granted for crematoria very close to each other which serve the same communities. Bassetlaw and Leicester are two.) Given that the majority of existing crematoria

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are local authority owned and new ones are private it is the private crematoria that are in some instances driving up prices.

Local authorities bereavement services departments often have large numbers of cemeteries that need to be maintained. Income is becoming less and less from cemeteries as people choose cremation. However the cemeteries must still be maintained to a decent standard. It is prudent to look at local authority bereavement services departments as a whole department and not separate cemeteries and crematoria. Indeed many crematoria have a surrounding cemetery. Maintenance costs for cemeteries have increased over the years as income has dwindled therefore putting a strain on the overall bereavement services budget.

Yours

  
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