

Minutes

RESIDENTS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

30 July 2012

Meeting held at Committee Room 3a - Civic
Centre, High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Susan O'Brien (Chairman) Mary O'Connor (Vice-Chairman) Kuldeep Lakhmana Carol Melvin David Payne Michael White David Yarrow Jazz Dhillon</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: John Purcell, Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar Mike Price, Civil Protection Manager Andy Evans, Head of Finance Nadia Williams, Democratic Services</p>	
10.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillor Lynne Allen. Councillor Jazz Dhillon attended in her place.</p>	
11.	<p>DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interests notified.</p>	
12.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT ANY ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items on the agenda marked as Part 1 would be considered in public.</p>	
13.	<p>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 MAY 2012 (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2012 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman; subject to it being amended to note that Councillor David Payne had tendered his apologies.</p>	<p>Action by</p>

<p>14.</p>	<p>2012/13 REVIEW TOPIC DISCUSSION - SCOPING REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF REGULATIONS AND BYELAWS RELATING TO CEMETERIES & BURIAL GROUNDS WITHIN HILLINGDON (Agenda Item 5)</p> <p>The Chairman invited John Purcell and Mike Price to present the scoping report on 'A Review of the Regulations and Byelaws relating to Cemeteries and Burial Grounds within Hillingdon'.</p> <p>John Purcell advised that the review was timely, as this area had not been reviewed for some time. The current rules allowed for families to pre-purchase graves in block and families could purchase up to 5 plots at a time. Revision of this policy, with a view to limiting the number of plots that could be purchased in block would be encouraged. This could now be limited to 2 plots, as each plot could have up to 3 internments in each plot. The Committee was informed that this rule had been in place prior to 1994 when at that time, the aim was to encourage the generation of income.</p> <p>It was highlighted that in the last three years, there had been an increase of plots being purchased by people living outside of Hillingdon at very little extra cost than that to a resident of the Borough. The Committee heard that other local authorities levied a much higher charge for the purchase of plots by people living outside their boroughs.</p> <p>Mr Purcell advised that Hillingdon currently had a burial capacity for approximately 15 to 20 years. The Council owned 7 cemeteries within the borough, 3 of which were full to capacity and only available for reopening of existing graves, subject to the availability of space. The remaining 4 cemeteries, namely, Northwood, Cherry Lane, West Drayton and Harmondsworth had available grave spaces. It was noted that there remained a large capacity in Cherry Lane cemetery with various dedicated religious areas, which generated income and he indicated that non-Hillingdon residents should be required to pay a higher fee for burial grounds.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the issue of the way people grieved needed to be considered, as this area had changed considerably since the cemetery rules and byelaws were last updated. Clear rules and regulations were required to be better disseminated and made more easily available in order to raise awareness to families.</p> <p>Mr Purcell explained that officers did not deal directly with bereaved families, as funeral services performed this function. Funeral directors were also expected to alert bereaved families of the rules and regulations. A suggested way forward for addressing this area was to provide a simple leaflet that could be sent to bereaved families, so that they could be clear as to what was accepted and not accepted at the cemeteries. In addition, a signature should be required from the head of the bereaved family to confirm their understanding and acceptance of the rules. It should also be stated clearly in the leaflet, what actions would be taken if the rules and regulations were breached.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams John Purcell</p>
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The meeting heard that the issue of health and safety was a further area for concern in cemeteries, particularly with regard to memorial stability testing of headstones. A survey was instigated approximately 6 years ago but was never completed. Members were advised that an officer from a neighbouring local authority (that had recently undertaken an in depth review of its own cemeteries) was asked to comment on the condition of the Council's cemeteries and found that approximately 60 to 70 per cent of the memorial headstones inspected in a small sample were unsafe. Other boroughs had tried to tackle this issue which could take a number of years to complete and include a considerable lengthy consultation period (it took 2 years in one local authority).

In answer to a question about what the plan was to make the memorial headstones safe; officers advised that ideally, a full survey should be undertaken and that there should be a 2 to 3 year plan in place to deal with the memorial headstones, which had been categorised in order of urgency; dealing firstly with those that had been deemed to be highly unsafe. A general advertising campaign should also be undertaken and should indicate that families would be notified if their memorial headstones were found to require attention.

The Committee noted that with a 100 year lease, it was highly likely that issues regarding change of ownership multi-use of graves and issues with erection of memorials, with newly inherited owners not being made aware of the rules and regulations. Officers advised that the lease would usually be transferred over the generations and there was therefore a need to revise the rules and regulations to ensure new owners were made aware. With regard to new purchases, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that buyers were asked whether they planned to have 2 or 3 internments in the individual grave plot.

This highlighted 2 further areas that needed to be reviewed; firstly, the rule which allowed the leasing of graves for a period of 100 years to be revised. Other local authorities applied a period of between 50 to 70 years for a grave lease, and recently the issue of graves in perpetuity was set at 70 years. It was also noted that a survey of over 70 different local authorities found that most tended to lease plots in the range of 50 to 70 years. Secondly; the issue of maintenance (to make clear who was responsible for maintaining memorial headstones and where this was lacking, to have records of who to contact when necessary).

Mr Purcell advised that a 5 year strategy to thoroughly review cemeteries would allow for new income streams to be generated which could then be used to make improvements, as there had been a lack of investments in this area.

Members noted that Breakspear crematorium was one of the best in England and £6m had been spent refurbishing it over the past 5 years, therefore this area should be reviewed at a later date.

Mike Price added that the aim was to look long term and consider the cemeteries service as a whole entity making amendments to the rules

and regulations and advise a long-term strategy, especially when considering long-term capacity and availability of grave spaces. Members indicated that it would be useful to know the level of complaints received and which cemeteries the complaints related to. Officers advised that this information could be provided, as through the Council's complaints procedure, a complaints report was produced on a quarterly basis and this would be made available to Members.

Members queried why the byelaws and rules relating to the permitted sizes of memorials were not being adhered to by all, and asked what role Green Spaces played in this area. Officers advised that administration and maintenance were dealt with separately and maintenance was managed by Green Spaces.

Officers added that it would be prudent to keep administration and maintenance together, rather than have maintenance of the cemeteries and burial grounds being dealt with separately by Green Spaces. Having both aspects together would ensure that standards were maintained, as standards were currently not being met with many complaints being reported to the Bereavement services.

The Committee indicated that Bereavement Service and Green Spaces would need to work more closely.

The Chairman asked how policy issues were being managed and enforced. Officers advised that they had attended a meeting with Green Spaces to discuss the issue of roles. It was noted that Park Officers formerly policed the cemeteries but they were no longer in place. Situations needed to be risk assessed, as rules relating to memorials were not always adhered to and the dispersal of large gatherings, particularly at the weekends sometimes lead to sensitive situations. It was noted that there were gaps in security which needed to be addressed, particularly on how to clear cemeteries in order to lock up, taking into consideration; the safety/welfare of staff.

Members indicated that rules and regulations needed to be applied consistently, in order to encourage all visitors to be respectful and sensitive to each other. Officers were asked what could be done to ensure that funeral services disseminated the rules and regulations to families and to make them liable/be held to account if they did not. Officers advised that the aim now was ensure that families confirm they had received the rules and regulations by getting them to sign a form.

Members sought clarification from officers in Green Spaces as to whether the Council was under any obligation to manage cemeteries in church yards. It was agreed that officers from Green Spaces should be invited to attend the first witness session for further discussion.

Members asked whether there were any cemeteries for pets. Officers advised that there were currently none and added that having a pet cemetery could generate income.

Members suggested that a leaflet summarising the 'dos' and 'don'ts'

	<p>should be provided for funeral services to give to bereaved families. Officers advised that currently, the rules and regulations were not being provided, as printing of the document ceased 8 years ago. Therefore, the rules and regulations would not have been passed on where there had been any change in ownership of plots/graves.</p> <p>It was noted that dialogue had taken place with some grave owners to make them aware of the rules and regulations, and some had indicated that they had never been made aware of the rules and regulations.</p> <p>The Chairman commented that it was clear that this area needed to be addressed to ensure that all grave owners/members of the public were made aware of the rules and regulation and to also be made aware that action would be taken where rules were broken.</p> <p>Members raised the issue of West Drayton cemetery reaching capacity in the next year or two. Officers advised that a piece of new land had been sourced, which would hold a further 800 to 1,000 graves. It was explained that this area would be retained as a lawn burial section, which was easier to maintain.</p> <p>The Committee noted that there was an issue with communication and that there was a clear need to publicise the rules and regulations (preferably an edited version) on display in all cemeteries. Officers advised that a meeting was being arranged with sign writers regarding creating signs to display the main byelaws at the entrances of each of the Council's cemeteries and burial grounds.</p> <p>In answer to a question about demography, officers advised that any part of long term development would need to consider the demographics of the Borough.</p> <p>Members agreed to make a site visit to several cemeteries prior to the meeting on 20 September 2012.</p> <p>Resolved that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The scoping report for the review of Regulations and Byelaws relating to Cemeteries & Burial Grounds within Hillingdon be agreed. 2. Officers arrange a site visit to several Hillingdon cemeteries prior to the meeting on 20 September 2012. 3. Officers from Green Spaces be requested to attend the first witness session. 4. An officer from a neighbouring authority be Invited to also attend the first witness session. 	
15.	<p>CONSIDERATION OF 2013/14 BUDGET PLANNING REPORT <i>(Agenda Item 6)</i></p> <p>The Chairman invited Andy Evans, Head of Finance for Planning, Environment, Education & Community Services to present the Budget Planning Report for Planning, Environment & Community Services. It was explained that this report gave a brief introduction into the early</p>	Action by

	<p>stages of the budget planning cycle for 2013/14 and that the second report in January 2013 would provide more details in the corporate context.</p> <p>Mr Evans stated that the report set out the major issues that had been identified through the service and financial planning process. It was noted that the 2010 spending assumptions had not come into fruition and it was highly likely that the period of austerity would continue for a significant period. Coupled with the consequences of new legislations, such as the change in the way Government financed local government funding through the business rates retention scheme, added to the uncertainty within the budget for next year.</p> <p>It was noted however, that the Council had a good track record of being in or under budget and had accumulated balances of £23.3m by the end of 2011/2012. This had been established through the HIP programme which had steered the Council into having a healthy balance and the BID programme, which is the main vehicle for delivering the changes in the Council structure and ways of working.</p> <p>Members were directed to note the key date in the timetable as October 2012, the Joint CMT and Cabinet Away day where the budget would be finalised with the draft MTFP being reported to Cabinet in December 2012.</p> <p>Resolved: That the Committee noted the Budget Planning Report for Planning, Environment & Community Services</p>	
16.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Work Programme for 2012/13.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams</p>
17.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Forward Plan.</p>	<p>Action by</p>
<p>The meeting, which commenced at 5.30 pm, closed at 6.55 pm.</p>		

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Nadia Williams on 01895 277 488. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.