

Minutes

RESIDENTS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

20 September 2012



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

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Susan O'Brien (Chairman) Lynne Allen Kuldeep Lakhmana Carol Melvin David Payne David Yarrow Judy Kelly</p> <p>Witnesses Dave, Corby, Green Spaces & Cemeteries Manager, LB Harrow Paul Richards, Green Spaces, Sports & Leisure Senior Manager, LB Hillingdon</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Nigel Dicker, Deputy Director, Public Safety & Environment John Purcell, Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar Mike Price, Civil Protection Manager Nadia Williams, Democratic Services</p>	
18.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillors Mary O'Connor and Michael White. Councillor Judy Kelly attended in place of Councillor White.</p>	
19.	<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>	
20.	<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>	
21.	<p>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JULY 2012 (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2012 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.</p>	

22.	<p>REVIEW 1: WITNESS SESSION 1 - REVIEW OF REGULATIONS AND BYELAWS RELATING TO CEMETERIES AND BURIAL GROUNDS WITHIN HILLINGDON (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed Paul Richards, the Council's Green Spaces, Sports & Leisure Senior Manager and Dave Corby, Green Spaces & Cemeteries Manager from Harrow Council to the Committee's first witness session.</p> <p>Officers advised that maintenance of the Council's cemeteries and burial grounds were carried out by ground maintenance contractors.</p> <p>In the North of the Borough this work was noted to be undertaken by Enterprise PLC and Connaught originally performed this task in the South of the Borough. However, due to financial difficulties, Connaught re-emerged as Fountain until January 2012 when it went into administration. Office Cleaning Company (OCS) now assisted with maintenance on an interim basis. It was explained that OCS struggled with their assistance and consequently standards were not as would be expected.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that Green Spaces provided grave digging for burying and maintained cemeteries on behalf of Bereavement Service. However, as it was found that this way of working was not working out successfully, changes had now been made so that Green Spaces managed anything that was green and growing and Bereavements Services now looked after the administrative aspects and Cemetery infrastructure.</p> <p>Members were advised that Green Spaces provided maintenance services to the four Council owned cemeteries which included Cherry Lane, Shepiston Lane, Harlington, Hayes; Hillingdon & Uxbridge, Hillingdon Hill, Hillingdon; Northwood, Chesnut Avenue, Northwood and West Drayton, Harmondsworth, West Drayton.</p> <p>Green spaces also provided maintenance services to the Councils four burial grounds at Harlington, St Peter's way, Harlington; Harmondsworth, Harmondsworth Village; Victoria lane, Harlington and Woodland, rear of West Drayton Cemetery.</p> <p>In addition, officers advised that the ground maintenance of St. Mary's Churchyard, Hayes was also carried out by the Council's ground maintenance contractors.</p> <p>Could the contract not have been taken away when OCS went into difficulties?</p> <p>Officers advised that it was imperative at the time to ensure business continuity and as cemetery maintenance was a 'business critical' function it was therefore important to keep the service running in the short term, giving time to look at the long term options.</p> <p>It was explained that when the company re-emerged as Enterprise, the service provided was acceptable and it only became an issue when</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>John Purcell Paul Richards</p>
-----	--	---

OCS took over, compounded by the very wet summer. Members were advised that the service provision had started to improve.

The Committee indicated that the same level of service provision that had been observed in the North of the Borough during the site visit should be provided also in the South of the Borough.

Who oversees/checks the work that had been completed by contractors?

Officers explained that the process that had been inherited was that Green Spaces provided a service for the Bereavement Service, as this was clearly not working; this process had now been reviewed and addressed. A winter work programme was now in place with the aim of working systematically area by area to clear off overgrown ivy and thick bushes.

It was reported that OCS had taken on the work and was currently being paid at cost basis.

There appeared to be 3 Contract areas for the North, Central (Uxbridge) and Hayes & Harlington – is this an indication that there is a shortage of contractors?

Officers advised that there were a number of Contractors providing this type of service and highlighted that the tender process was long winded and could take up to 9 months.

Could the tender process not have been started during the arrangement with OCS?

Members heard that there was currently a three months' rolling arrangement in place while consideration was being given to the options available. Dialogue had taken place with the Managing Director of OCS about various issues and OCS had provided additional resources to try and cope with the issues. New ways of working had been introduced to make things simpler for residents to be able to contact the Green Spaces.

It was reported that the Grounds maintenance was now within the remit of Green Spaces.

It appeared as though more effort was being given to parks than to cemeteries.

Officers acknowledged that cemeteries appeared to have been poorly maintained compared to parks in the past, but this was now being addressed by looking at ways of making improvements. Green Spaces would focus on looking at the 'greener' issues in the cemeteries. Officers suggested that some guidance on maintaining ivy bushes would be useful to get an idea of the desired standard required.

Has any savings that there may have been made between January 2012 and June 2012 been re-invested in improving the standard of

maintenance?

Officers advised that there had not been any savings and the contract with OCS was very limited, where only the basic maintenance was being undertaken. Other maintenance areas were now being addressed.

What contingency plans are now in place should OCS not wish to expand on other areas of maintenance?

Officers stated that there was a contingency plan of action in place in the event of this happening.

Dave Corby, Green Spaces & Cemeteries Manager stated that he managed 8 out of the 10 cemeteries in Harrow, whilst the other two cemeteries were managed by the Diocese. He suggested that many of the issues regarding maintenance being experienced by Hillingdon were mirrored in Harrow, with the exception of the maintenance of cemeteries, which was operated in-house rather than being outsourced.

Mr Corby advised that 2012 had been a very challenging year, due to the bad weather conditions experienced and as a result, had lead to grass cutting being ceased from May 2012 through to August 2012. This action had resulted in three complaints being received.

It was explained that winter maintenance work had always been a problem, which was why it was important to schedule-in a programme of winter works to ensure continuity; otherwise there was a danger of maintenance work slipping through the net.

Mr Corby reiterated that local authorities were responsible for the health and safety of their cemeteries and burial grounds, and were therefore duty bound to ensure memorials were stable. To this end therefore it was noted that Harrow Council had recently commissioned an inspection of memorials to identify any potential problem with unsafe memorials.

It was noted that that prior to the inspection, an extensive publicity campaign was undertaken to raise awareness of the proposed inspection, and to notify families of their responsibility to repair them (as ownership of memorials remained with the family of the deceased). Publicity was done through the local news papers, posted notices, as well as a limited number of mail shots, which ran for a year in an effort to capture as many people as possible to notify them of their responsibilities, as many owned their own graves. Inspection of every memorial took 3 years and was undertaken by contractors at a cost of approximately £80,000 to £90,000.

Mr Corby advised that a contact centre was set up and most complaints that went through reduced impact on the Borough. Members were informed that the biggest issue highlighted during the inspection, was the problem regarding the quality of masonry. The outcome subsequently led to some changes being made, one of which

was that masons and memorials were now required to be approved by a recognised professional body such as the National Association of Memorial Masons, to ensure that masonry and every memorial met the correct safety standards, to ensure they were safe and erected safely. Masons and memorials found not to be approved were asked to be removed.

The Committee noted that a charge of £120 was now levied to reinstate any memorials that were removed (to ensure memorials were reinstated correctly) in order to add an additional inscription. The charge was levied also to cover the cost of removing, checking and inspecting and ensuring it met with the required safety standards.

Mr Corby concluded that in order to ensure that the rules and regulations were adhered to, there needed to be commitment from Members as well as officers by being firm in supporting the rules and regulations and by carrying out sanctions when those rules were broken.

Maintenance is provided in-house in Harrow and sub-contracted in Hillingdon – What is the difference?

Mr Corby stated that funding was global and included areas such as street cleaning where there was the flexibility for 7/8 staff to often undertake mixed duties. There was therefore, no separate cost for maintaining cemeteries.

Officers asked Members to note that Hillingdon had more square miles of burial grounds and advised that these were maintained by 10 members of staff with additional resources for the maintenance of church yards.

It was noted that the issue of cost was constantly under review to formulate the true cost against the contract cost.

Are we paying more by using contractors?

Officers advised that currently the costs were being met for the true cost of staff as well as the cost of machinery. It was reported that at some point in time, the tender process, due to procurement rules would have to be entered into.

How heavily does the Council rely on Blue Sky?

Officers explained that the maintenance was undertaken by Blue Sky at the two cemeteries, namely, St Mary's, Hayes and St Lawrence, Cowley/Harmondsworth. St Lawrence maintained its own cemetery and its allocated budget was not embraced within the contract, as this had always been separate. It was noted however, that arrangements were made in 2011 as a variation order with Fountains.

This arrangement must be costing the Council more.

Officers confirmed that the true cost for staff was now being paid to OCS. The contractor Connaught had previously subsidised the contract

and as a result they folded.

Given that true cost is being paid, how is this reflected with customer satisfaction?

It was suggested that this may be gauged by the number of complaints received and noted that in Harrow, based on pricing, approximately 150 complaints were received per year of which, between 30 and 40 complaints were related to grounds maintenance.

With respect to Hillingdon, the figures for complaints were yet to be provided following a request by Members at the meeting. It was noted however, that general complaints received related mostly to issues regarding cutting back rose bushes planted on graves and the removal of soft toys in order to cut grass areas.

Officers announced that Cherry Lane and West Drayton cemeteries were awarded Silver Awards in the London in Bloom competition in July 2012 for being well maintained.

Are there any checking mechanism in place – How is OCS reporting back?

Officers advised that Green Spaces provided the services but did not however hold the budget and work would only be undertaken on request by Bereavement Services. It was explained that formerly, an officer from Bereavements Services used to go around checking the cemeteries but this officer had now left. The contact with Enterprise had been self monitoring, which had worked very well. However, there were issues with OCS and Green Spaces was now moving forward to improve this.

Officers acknowledged that the Council needed to look at the standard of service that was being provided against costs that were being charged. It was highlighted also that a standard was needed to be set.

It was noted that Bereavement Services inherited the budget 3 years ago with the responsibility of co-ordinating the cemeteries, but did not however include the management of contractors. Contractors were managed by Green Spaces.

Members were informed that this issue was now being addressed with Green Spaces being responsible for everything that was green and growing and Bereavement services being responsible for the co-ordination and administration of cemeteries.

How much burial spaces are there remaining?

Mr Corby advised that there were 10 to 15 years burial spaces remaining in Harrow and graves were no longer leased for 100 years. The maximum was now 50 years. Families may ask for an extension if they were concerned about keeping their graves after 10 -20 years to carry exclusive rights. Families with graves that were over 100 years would be given a further 10 years, after which they would lose the

	exclusive rights, as it would have expired.	
23.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2012 (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Work Programme for 2012/13.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams</p>
24.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Forward Plan.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams</p>
25.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS (<i>Agenda Item</i>)</p> <p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>Cllr Judith Kelly, Champion for the Arts gave a brief update on recent developments related to the Committee's Review of Mitigating the Environmental Effects of Telecommunication Masts and Cabinets in the London Borough of Hillingdon and beyond. It was announced that following the closing date in July 2012 of a competition to decorated British Telecom (BT) cabinets (Green boxes), 3 designs had been chosen, in consultation with BT (Out of 50 entries) to decorate 3 BT boxes situated in Uxbridge High street.</p> <p>Cllr Kelly advised that there were intentions to liaise with Street Scene to see whether other designs could be placed on streets in other areas of the Borough.</p>	<p>Action by</p>
	The meeting, which commenced at 5.30 pm, closed at 7.20 pm.	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Nadia Williams on 01895 277655. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.