

Minutes

RESIDENTS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

18 October 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) Lynne Allen Kuldeep Lakhmana Carol Melvin Michael White David Yarrow</p> <p>Witnesses Present: Mr & Mrs Murphy Mrs Giles Mr Thurling Ms La Mothe</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: John Purcell, Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar Mike Price, Civil Protection Manager Nadia Williams, Democratic Services</p>	
26.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillor David Payne.</p>	
27.	<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>	
28.	<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>	
29.	<p>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 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>	

30.	<p>REVIEW 1: WITNESS SESSION 2 - REVIEW OF REGULATIONS AND BYELAWS RELATING TO CEMETERIES AND BURIAL GROUNDS WITHIN HILLINGDON (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed five service users-stakeholders who had attended the meeting as witnesses.</p> <p>To help Members with their review were two representatives who gave their views about issues relating to Cherry Lane Cemetery (CLC) and three about issues regarding West Drayton Cemetery (WDC).</p> <p>Issues raised included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether breaches against the required size of headstones and installation of private benches would be enforced and suggested that benches could be numbered so that the owners could be traced. • From the experience of a witness at WDC, currently it took a great deal of fuss and time to have broken benches removed • Concerns about consistency in requiring the removal of inappropriate surrounds on gravestones, as at present some people had complied where they had been requested to remove certain surroundings, and those who had not, had not been challenged • Would like confirmation that policies and rules in place would be firmly applied, and to know that action or enforcement would be taken when they are breached – as this was currently not happening • Requested some form of Working Group or Committee that would ensure that work undertaken at cemeteries were done continuously • Would like to set up a 'Friends of West Drayton Cemetery, to ensure that on-going required works were not abandoned – as at present, no money was being spent on the cemetery and individuals had had to repeatedly make request for things to be done • Initially, checks were regularly made at WDC but this was not thoroughly undertaken – there was a need for more than one man to dig graves as well as maintain WDC, particularly when machinery was used • Concerns about drains at WDC being covered up by grass and puddles freezing up in the winter, which may lead to health and safety issues to visitors • Road sweeping undertaken at WDC only 4 times a year and the road was in need of resurfacing • Suggested that the toilets at WDC, which had been closed should be refurbished and re-opened for at least a trial period • Concerns about the drive-in area outside WDC which was being used by drivers as a lay-by and regularly strewn with rubbish • Concerns about lorries constantly driving into the front of the cemetery and damaging the grass verge • Concerns that maintenance equipment was not properly stored in the allocated area at WDC 	<p>Action by</p> <p>John Purcell Mike Price Paul Richards</p>
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- Concerns about the different types of kerb stones at CLC
- That although a footpath had now been installed in the top part of CLC, the area was regularly flooded
- Questioned how it was that the soil was used to top-up graves at CLC and not used to top-up the footpaths
- Concerns about planted trees being allowed to grow out of control and disrupt adjacent graves
- Concerns about safety issues as potholes were covered by grass
- From the experience of a witness at CLC, the first impression on arrival was one of pot holes within drive ways, uneven land and grass scattered around
- Expressed particular concerns about maintenance issues in CLC, such as taps being inaccessible and not regularly maintained
- Suggested that when lawn was mowed, debris should not be blown onto headstones and other memorials, and advised that they were having to avoid walking on other people's graves in order to get to their relative's graves
- Suggested that some investments should be made in installing narrow paths to make clear division in the paths for safety reasons
- Advised that in order to prevent their loved one's grave from sinking over the years, the family had had to fill up the grave themselves
- Suggested that more benches should be placed at the cemeteries and toilets facilities should be made available at CLC
- Suggested that Friends Group should be established and asked to report issues of concerns back to the Council
- Suggested that there should be clear and consistent guidance to ensure all communities were treated fairly.

In response to a Member's comment about queries and concerns raised, officers advised that setting up a user or a friendship group would be a way forward, as concerns could be raised through the group and then be passed on to the Council to ensure issues were dealt with.

A Member asked whether the maintenance of cemeteries could be managed in-house in the same way as was the case with Breakspear Crematorium. Officers advised that was something that could be considered.

It was noted that bringing maintenance in-house would allow for staff to be utilised more easily and be deployed to undertake other jobs as required, where as in a contractual situation, as was currently the case, that flexibility was not available.

A Member added that there appeared to be some inconsistency in the contract where maintenance at WDC was carried out by one person, and carried out by 3 people at Hillingdon Cemetery. Officers advised that current interim arrangements were being reviewed.

Officers explained that with regard to the issue of topping up graves (where families were asked not to put up memorial for a least a year after burial), this had now been revised and medium type compost was now being used, which did not require waiting for the graves to drop before installing memorials.

With regard to putting benches at cemeteries, officers reported that it had been proposed as part of the review for benches to be placed at cemeteries at every 200 yards. These would be strictly monitored by officers and families would be told where the benches should be placed and how they should be maintained. Families would also be given simple pictorial leaflets (as well as a full copy) and asked to sign to confirm their understanding/agreement of the rules and regulations. It was noted that in the past, due to bereavement, many families had not be told about the rules and regulations.

In respect of installing paths, officers advised that this issue would be looked at in the future.

The Chairman asked for clarification regarding the lawn and traditional graves, as it was noted that there were paths running through the lawn section. Officers explained that the current layout of graves was not designed to install paths and this issue was currently being looked at to see where possible, small footpaths could be installed.

Members indicated that signs should be posted to encourage visitors to be respectful of not walking on other people's graves. Officers advised that this issue was being looked at as part of the review, and signs such as those currently posted at Breakspear Crematorium would be install at cemeteries too.

The Committee accepted that the way forward was the introduction of a cemeteries strategy of at least 5 years duration, which officers confirmed would commence with the winter works programme.

Members raised the issue of late openings at cemeteries and asked what part the Metropolitan Police service played in this area. Officers advised that it was an offence for anyone to be in a cemetery after closing time and that the main issues were related to enforcement and the difficulties in waiting to lock the gates when people refused to leave and anti-social behaviour, which were seen as a clear breach of peace.

It was noted that part of the review of the regulations was to ensure that enforcement was consistent and that much work was needed to be done to ensure that people understood the rules and regulation - that the key was through communication.

Officers advised that weekends were more of an issue as there were no officers about and pointed out that this would need to be addressed in the specification with the contractors by making it a condition for them to monitor the situation/occurrences.

Members pointed out that it would not be appropriate to expect Park Wardens to disperse people form cemeteries. Officers advised that it

	<p>would be up to the Council to build in weekend employees.</p> <p>In response to a question raised as to whether all cemeteries opened and closed at the same times, officers advised that this was not currently the case, but that opening and closing times were presently being reviewed with a view to applying the same summer and winter times to all Council owned cemeteries.</p> <p>Members raised the issue about the re-use of soil extracted from graves (rather than disposing of soil and having to pay tipping charges), and indicated that soil could be re-cycled by being broken down by machine and re-used.</p> <p>It was suggested that costing for the use of contractors against costing for bringing maintenance in-house should be drawn up and put forward to Cabinet. It was noted that the grounds maintenance contract for the South of the borough was due to expire in November 2012 with a view to the Council making a decision by April 2013.</p> <p>The Chairman thank the witnesses for putting their interesting points of views to the Committee and reassured them that a number of the points that had been mentioned already formed part of the 5 year plan mentioned by officers.</p> <p>It was agreed to invite an officer from the Council's Community Safety team and from the Metropolitan Police as witnesses at the next session.</p>	
31.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2012 (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Work Programme for 2012/13.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams</p>
32.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>The Committee agreed the Forward Plan.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p>Nadia Williams</p>
33.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS (<i>Agenda Item</i>)</p> <p>At the RESPOC meeting held on 30 July 2012, the Committee request officers to provide figures for complaints received in respect of the Council's cemeteries and burial grounds within Hillingdon. A summary of the complaints figures were subsequently circulated separately to Members prior to the meeting.</p> <p>During discussion, it was noted that the largest number of complaints received were regarding issues relating to Cherry Lane cemetery.</p> <p>Officers advised that complaints were now being recorded through the Council's Onyx system. In addition, it was noted that two separate numbers were now being publicised to separate queries relating to Green Spaces "green and grows" and issues relating to "burial". It was anticipated that this separation would make it easier for residents reporting complaints and easier to follow-up queries.</p>	<p>Action by</p>

	The meeting, which commenced at 5.30 pm, closed at 7.35 pm.
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These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Nadia Williams on 01895 277 655. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.