

# **Report of the Residents' and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee 2012/13**

## **Review of Regulations and Byelaws relating to Cemeteries and Burial Grounds within Hillingdon**



### **Members of the Committee**

Cllr Susan O'Brien (Chairman)  
Cllr Mary O'Connor (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr Carol Melvin  
Cllr David Payne  
Cllr Michael White  
Cllr David Yarrow  
Cllr Lynne Allen  
Cllr Kuldeep Lakhmana

# CONTENTS

<b>Chairman's Foreword</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Summary of Recommendations</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>About the Review</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>Background Information</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Fairer Usage by All</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
<b>Resident Engagement</b>	<b>Page 16</b>
<b>Good Maintenance</b>	<b>Page 18</b>



## Chairman's Foreword

*I am delighted to present this review on the Regulations and Byelaws relating to Cemeteries and Burial Grounds in Hillingdon. As a Borough, like London as a whole, we have a growing, ageing and increasingly diverse population requiring services that accommodate a vast range of cultural, religious and practical needs. Services provided by the Council's cemeteries and burial grounds are no exception.*

*This review looked at the Council's current Cemeteries Regulations and practices with a view to modernising and updating them so that they met the diverse needs of the Borough's communities as they paid their respects at the graveside. Of paramount importance, this review was ensuring that our recommendations would provide users of the Council's cemeteries with a safe, sensitive and fair environment in which the dignity of mourners was respected.*

*With only an estimated 15-20 years of burial capacity left in the Borough, the review also sought to redraft the Regulations to ensure that they led to sustainable and fair usage by all. This included reviewing the maintenance arrangements currently in place to ensure that cemeteries and burial grounds were kept to a high standard and that anti-social behaviour was acted upon swiftly and sensitively.*

*The review heard evidence on the issues relating to the Borough's own cemeteries and regulations as well as those of other London boroughs. Expert witnesses provided valuable information and offered their views on how to create a sustainable and culturally sensitive service for future generations.*

*I would like to thank the external witnesses and officers for participating in the review and ask that Cabinet kindly consider the recommendations contained in the report.*

*Councillor Susan O'Brien*

# Summary of Recommendations

On the Basis of the evidence received, the Committee made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Sustainability / Fairer Usage by All**

- 1) That Cabinet agree the revised set of Cemetery Regulations that have been updated to make the rules clearer and fairer for *all* residents and users of different religious beliefs. This includes the necessary promotion of the rules both to Funeral Directors and bereaved families in a suitable and sensitive manner.

### **Resident Engagement**

- 2) Support any 'friends' groups that may wish to be established in relation to local cemeteries; additionally, that the Council continues to work closely with the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) and ask officers to agree a local procedure on how to deal with anti-social behaviour, specifically within cemeteries.
- 3) Ask officers to investigate the reintroduction of leaflets and a pictorial booklet to summarise key elements of the regulations to be circulated to bereaved families via Funeral Directors.

### **Good Maintenance**

- 4) Considers the best way for officers to inspect memorials in cemeteries and how to best achieve this in line with health and safety objectives;
- 5) Welcome Cabinet's decision to bring cemetery grounds maintenance back 'in-house' as part of the award winning Green Spaces team.
- 6) That Cabinet agree to the creation of a long-term (5 year minimum) rolling strategy for the Council's cemeteries, which should be published on the Council's website and at the cemeteries office. This should include in particular a winter rolling programme of works to cemeteries be publicised to residents so they are clear when essential works are taking place.
- 7) Having reviewed the grounds and facilities across the Borough and following evidence received from witnesses, to note three particular service improvements, which Cabinet may wish to

**investigate further and consider as part of the service and budget planning process:**

- **To explore more cost effective options of using machinery to break down clay soil used for graves;**
- **The lack of toilet facilities and a shelters for families to congregate at any of the Borough's cemeteries with the exception of Hillingdon, noting that there is also a lack of places of prayer;**
- **The condition of the Grade I arch at the entrance of Hillingdon & Uxbridge cemetery.**

# About the Review

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this review was to modernise and update the Council's Cemeteries Regulations, which were no longer seen to be fit for the purposes of providing a sustainable and culturally sensitive service to the Borough's diverse communities. The regulations, first produced in 1994, required redrafting to accommodate some of the specific needs of different cultural and religious groups as well as to ensure that they provided an equitable and enforceable usage policy throughout the Borough.

The review also sought to assess the maintenance of existing facilities at the Borough's Cemeteries that had, at times, received a service level below the high standards that the Council aimed to achieve in this area. One of the Committee's priorities was to ensure the safety of the Borough's memorial headstones, 60-70% of which were estimated to be in need of repair.

With this in mind, the Committee aimed to contribute to the redrafting of the regulations and, in so doing, sought to strike a sensitive balance in the Council's accommodation of the needs of a diverse population. In order to achieve this, Members were presented with evidence and research on the different ways in which various groups paid their respects at the graveside, current maintenance arrangements, information on existing regulations and the practices of neighbouring authorities.

In undertaking this review the Committee also aimed to contribute to the Council's policies by ensuring that:

- The needs of the Borough's diverse communities are put first.
- The Council's cemeteries are inclusive by promoting equality and diversity.
- There is a continued improvement of the Council's green and open spaces for the benefit of residents.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference of the review were as follows:

- To look at the cemeteries and burial grounds within the Borough, and to examine how they are maintained to ensure they are at a good standard.
- To review the existing Council policies, rules, regulations and byelaws as they relate to cemeteries and to look at their application and enforcement.
- To look at the different religious and cultural requirements for burials and memorials within the Borough and how the Bereavement Service provides this.
- To investigate best practice and experiences of other local authorities in relation to their cemeteries and burial grounds.
- To examine the long-term capacity and space, which will be required at the Borough's cemeteries and burial grounds.

- To make recommendations to Cabinet on the outcome of this review.

## **WITNESSES**

This review was undertaken over 5 meetings from July to December 2012 and the following witnesses presented evidence:

- Council officers from Bereavement Services and the Civil Protection Service,
- The Council's Green Spaces, Sports and Leisure Senior Manager;
- Harrow Council's Green Spaces Sports and Leisure Manager;
- The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Service Manager;
- A representative from the Metropolitan Police;
- The Borough Solicitor;
- Service users of some of the Council's cemeteries; and
- Representatives from local Funeral Directors.

In addition to its formal evidence collection, the Committee also conducted a site visit to some of the Borough's cemeteries on 4 September 2012.

# Background Information

## HILLINGDON'S CEMETERIES AND BURIAL GROUNDS

The London Borough of Hillingdon is London's second largest borough by area and has an estimated population of roughly 274,000 people. For the purposes of this review it is worth noting that roughly 34,000 (12.9%) of the population are over 65 and that it has been estimated that this age group will increase by 7.1% between 2012 and 2017.<sup>1</sup> As well as having an ageing population, the Borough also has a growing proportion of ethnic minority communities with rises from 20% of the total population in 2001, to 32% in 2011, to a predicted 38% in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The significant changes to the demographics of the Borough have implications both on the sustainability of the Council's cemeteries and on the type of burials, graves and memorials that they are required to accommodate. The burial needs of this diverse population are partly met by the Council's 8 cemeteries and burial grounds which are detailed below:

<b>Cemeteries at capacity</b>	<b>Cemeteries with space remaining</b>
Harmondsworth Cemetery	Harlington Burial Ground
Hillingdon and Uxbridge Cemetery	Cherry Lane
Victoria Lane Cemetery	Northwood Cemetery
	West Drayton Cemetery
	Woodland Burial Ground <i>(Forming part of West Drayton Cemetery)</i>

With 3 of the Council's 8 cemeteries at capacity, the issue of sustainability is being considered and there are plans to expand the West Drayton Cemetery to provide more burial space. However, increases in the number of plots being purchased is leading to the overall capacity across the Borough rapidly diminishing. Taking this into consideration, it has been estimated that Hillingdon currently has burial capacity for only a further 15 to 20 years.

## EXISTING REGULATIONS

The Council's Cemeteries are currently subject to Cemeteries Regulations drafted in 1994. These Regulations contain detailed information on many aspects of burials of which the Committee looked at the following key, outdated areas:

- The Council allowed graves to be leased for exclusive rights of burial and exclusive right to a memorial for 100 years.
- Individuals were able to purchase up to 5 graves at any one time.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics

<sup>2</sup> Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2012



- The issues of enforcement, sanctions and prosecutions for non-compliance and/or anti-social behaviour were not explicit.
- Enforcement action on non-compliant headstones was difficult because there was no explicit information on the sizes and shapes allowed.
- There were aspects of the guidance provided that did not accommodate the needs of certain sections of the community.

Officers advised that these areas of the regulations were no longer fit for purpose and were contributing to some of the challenges that were faced at cemeteries by Bereavement Services and the Grounds Maintenance Team. It was also noted that work had to be undertaken on the Regulations document by consolidating information, reformatting, improving accessibility and simplifying the language used.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Due, in part, to ambiguities in the current Regulations and poor communication, there is currently a degree of confusion with grave owners and their families over where responsibility lies for the maintenance of graves and cemeteries. It is important to be clear that the maintenance of cemeteries themselves (which includes the roads, communal areas, facilities, etc.) is the Council's responsibility and has been undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Team as of 1 January 2013.

However, owners of graves or their families are responsible for the upkeep of the graves themselves in as much as they are required to ensure that nothing on the grave encroaches into communal areas.

Where this division of responsibility becomes more complex is in the maintenance of headstones and other memorials. Local Authorities are responsible for the health and safety of their cemeteries and, as such, have a vested interest in the safety of headstones and other memorials. However, importantly, ownership and maintenance of headstones and memorials lies with the owner of the grave or their families. This means that any action that the Council undertakes has to be done in conjunction with owners. This is an important area as unsafe headstones, caused by sub-standard masonry and memorials becoming unstable over time, is a major issues faced by the Council's cemeteries.

## **ENQUIRY**

Based on this background information and the evidence provided by expert witnesses, the Committee was able to develop findings and recommendations that aimed to produce a more sensitive, sustainable and high-quality service founded on a set of relevant and up-to-date Regulations. For ease of reference, evidence, findings and recommendations are set out below under the following sections:

1. Sustainability

2. Fairer Usage by All
3. Resident Engagement
4. Good Maintenance

## **APPENDICES**

Re-drafted Cemeteries and Burial Grounds Regulations

## **1. Sustainability**

This review highlighted 3 main sustainability issues with the current arrangements for Hillingdon's cemeteries, all of which centred on the purchasing of burial plots. These are set out in detail below.

### **PURCHASING MULTIPLE PLOTS**

The Committee heard that the existing Regulations, which had partly been drafted with a view to income generation in the early 1990s, allowed individuals to purchase up to 5 plots at any one time. This generous provision was noted to have serious implications on the long-term capacity of the Borough's Cemeteries and it was agreed that new regulations should be more sustainable and that there should be a reduction in the maximum purchase of plots from 5 to 2. Furthermore, the option to pre-purchase graves was to be removed in the redrafted Regulations in line with standard practice across London.

As each plot could have up to 3 interments and also the facility to have several cremated remains (ashes) interred within the plot, the Committee did not consider that this would have an unacceptable impact on residents when understood in the context of a diminishing burial capacity across the Borough. In fact, the Committee felt that this reduction would lead to more equitable usage and ensure that all residents, now and in the future, would have fair access to the Borough's cemeteries.

### **EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS OF BURIALS AND MEMORIALS**

Similarly, the existing Regulations stipulated that an Exclusive Right of Burial and an Exclusive Right to a Memorial should be granted for 100 years in the first instance. Expert witnesses both from Hillingdon's and Harrow Council's cemeteries informed the Committee that this was not in line with common practice in London. Harrow Council had a maximum lease of 50 years with possible extensions on family request. Furthermore, a recent survey of other local authorities showed that most offered burial rights from between 50 and 70 years. For the Council to continue offering 100-year Exclusive Rights was deemed by the Committee to threaten the sustainability of the service.

To address this, the Committee suggested that the maximum period for Exclusive Right of Burial and the Exclusive Right to a Memorial were to be set at 30 years in the redrafted Regulations. The option to extend these Rights in 10-year blocks for up to 100 years from the date of grant was also provided for in the appended redraft. This timeframe would be in line with the introduction of Memorial Masons being required to agree to a Guarantee of Conformity for 30 years. More information on the Guarantee of Conformity is set out in the Good Maintenance section below and in the redrafted regulations themselves.

## RESIDENTS AND NON-RESIDENTS

Unlike in many other boroughs, residents and non-residents of Hillingdon were able to purchase plots at the same price. Officers advised that new fees and charges had been introduced both to deal with the increasing number of non-residents buying up plots in the cemeteries and to bring the charges for non-residents in line with those charged by other local authorities. Since the introduction of these arrangements there has been a significant decrease in the number of non-residents buying plots in Hillingdon. In addition, it is important to note that, when compared to other local authorities, the Council still charges its own residents low fees and charges.

However, an issue that the Committee were keen to address was the definition of the term 'resident'. It was noted that there were many reasons why people who had lived in the Borough for most of their lives might leave towards the ends of their lives and still wish to be buried in Hillingdon's cemeteries. The redrafted Regulations therefore included the following qualification to the term, "resident":

*The only exception being if the deceased person was a resident of the Borough prior to death, who was transferred outside the Borough due to ill health to reside in a hospice, nursing home or with relatives, or, in the case of a stillborn child, at least one parent was living in the Borough at the time of death.*<sup>3</sup>

Given Members' concerns, the Committee welcomed the Cabinet's recent decision to amend cemetery fees and charges for non-residents to align them better with those of neighbouring local authorities.

### Findings and Recommendations

In summary, the Committee found that:

1. The Cemeteries Regulations should be redrafted to reduce the number of plots an individual can purchase from 5 to 2.
2. The Cemeteries Regulations should be redrafted to amend the Exclusive Rights of Burial and the Exclusive Rights to a Memorial from 100 to 30 years.
3. That the Cabinet's decision to amend cemetery fees and charges for non-residents should be welcomed.

### Recommendation 1

**That Cabinet agree the revised set of Cemetery Regulations that have been updated to make the rules clearer and fairer for *all* residents and users of different religious beliefs. This includes the necessary promotion of the rules both to funeral directors and bereaved families in a suitable and sensitive manner.**

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<sup>3 3</sup> Excerpt taken from the Hillingdon – Cemetery Regulations 2012

## 2. Fairer Usage by All

### **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: FINES, ENFORCEMENT AND SANCTIONS**

Throughout the review the Committee was reminded that one of the major issues with the current Cemeteries Regulations was that they were difficult to enforce and, throughout almost 20 years in operation, had not led to a single prosecution. This was of concern to the Committee given the rise in complaints received by the Council regarding anti-social behaviour at cemeteries. However, it should be noted that increasing prosecutions was not an aim of the review and that this would only be used as a means to improve services for residents.

The Council saw 3 categories of anti-social behaviour in cemeteries and burial grounds:

- Those relating to the building/erection of non-compliant headstones and other related structures;
- Acts of vandalism on the sites; and
- Issues with public order that were, at times, related to funeral ceremonies.

Witnesses provided information and examples on all of these types of Anti-Social Behaviour.

The Committee's approach to this issue was simple; Members requested that the redrafted regulations be made more explicit both in terms of what constituted a breach and how breaches were enforced. The redrafted Regulations therefore contain clear and explicit information on the "Behaviour of visitors", on the "Enforcement of the Regulations and associated penalties" and the details on what was allowed and was not allowed to be erected as a memorial. This was designed specifically to ensure that, when breaches do occur, appropriate and enforceable penalties could be incurred.

Specifically, the redrafted regulations make it clear that breaches of the expected behaviour of visitors would, as a last resort, be dealt with by a prosecution. If offences did not lead to prosecution they would attract a maximum fine of £100 and, in the case of a continuing offence, a fine not exceeding £10 per day during which the offence continued. The Regulations also made provisions for anti-social behaviour being dealt with by the Council and the Police under the relevant legislation should the need arise. Furthermore, the Regulations provide clear dimensions for acceptable memorials, the need to receive permission before erecting a memorial and the enforcement route the council will take for any breaches.

However, in order to enforce, the Council also needed to collect information on those who offended at cemeteries. Witnesses informed the Committee that most anti-social behaviour took place over the weekend and, as no officers were present, it was therefore difficult to find the perpetrators. As a way of combating this problem, the Committee suggested that a series of signs be put up around cemeteries providing information on who to notify if visitors experienced anti-social behaviour. This would provide the Contact Centre number to call. Officers in the Green Spaces Team would then be contacted to deal with any problems in conjunction with the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT).

It was felt that such revisions to the Regulations and the introduction of practical steps to enforce them would help to ensure that all users of the Council's cemeteries were provided with a sensitive environment in which the dignity of mourners was respected.

## **ACCOMMODATING OUR DIVERSE POPULATION**

A variety of witnesses provided information on the different ways in which sections of the Borough's communities memorialise and mourn their dead. The existing Regulations did not accommodate these specific needs and there were certain issues that officers felt needed to be addressed to ensure that all religions and cultures were provided for fairly.

Although this report will not go into any great detail as to the different burial practices of sections of the community, it should be noted that over the past 20 years, Hillingdon, like many local authorities, has moved away from providing traditional graves and towards providing lawn graves. This decision was made, in part, due to the reduced costs involved and in the ease of maintaining a lawn grave. This reflected a national trend and has led to the vast majority of the Borough's burial areas not accommodating traditional graves. However, there are significant sections of the community who, for religious and cultural reasons, tend towards burials in traditional graves. This is currently only provided for in the Muslim Section of the Cherry Lane Cemetery.

The Committee felt that the predominance of lawn graves did not promote equality and fair usage for all of the Borough's residents as it was not sensitive towards the needs of minority groups. Consequently, it was recommended that all of the Borough's cemeteries and burial grounds have areas set aside for traditional graves.

To avoid any unnecessary segregation of different groups in cemeteries, the Committee suggested three further revisions to the Regulations as follows:

1. It should be possible for individual graves to be consecrated rather than whole sections of a cemetery.
2. Everyone should have the right to be buried in a shroud rather than only Muslims as is the current arrangement.
3. Greater flexibility for burials on a Saturday should be introduced. In particular this would accommodate the needs of Muslims who are required to bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death.

## **Findings and recommendations**

In summary, the Committee found that:

1. Cemeteries Regulations needed to be redrafted in order to make more clear and explicit the expected behaviour of visitors to the cemeteries and the penalties that would be incurred should these expectations not be met.
2. Information should be collected from the grave owners and their families to ensure that, if and when breaches of Regulations occur, the Council is able to ensure swiftly and sensitively. This is currently only the case for grant holders.

3. The Regulations should explicitly state that all cemeteries should have areas set aside for use as traditional graves.

**The recommendation to achieve the above is set out in Recommendation 1 under, Sustainability.**

### **3. Resident Engagement**

The Committee strongly believed that successful, well-maintained and sustainable cemeteries and burial grounds would only be fully realised with resident engagement. In the Committee's view this could be facilitated in three main ways; firstly, by raising awareness of the regulations amongst residents, secondly, by encouraging and supporting any local Friends' Groups that emerge and, thirdly, by the Council continuing to work closely with the Metropolitan Police's Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT) to combat anti-social behaviour.

#### **DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION**

One of the ways in which the Committee felt that residents could be engaged in the ongoing improvement of cemeteries was through the clear communication of the Council's redrafted Regulations. Witnesses from local Funeral Directors highlighted a perception amongst users of the cemeteries that the rules and regulations that were in place were not enforced consistently or fairly. It was felt that, alongside the introduction of more explicit penalties for breaching the regulations, awareness should be raised amongst residents of what was expected of them and what they could expect of the Council. In making clear to residents that they are expected to behave in a certain manner and that the Council has begun to enforce regulations more strictly, it was hoped that there would be an increased level of compliance as well as renewed resident confidence, ownership and pride in the cemeteries.

One of the simplest ways to achieve that was felt to be through the reformatting and simplification of the Regulations to ensure that they could be accessed by all. It was suggested that the following revisions be made to the document itself:

- It should be brought in line with corporate branding.
- An improved contents page should be introduced for ease of navigation.
- The overall content should be reordered to improve accessibility.
- Language should be simplified as much as possible whilst ensuring that the Regulations were still clear and enforceable.
- Any text which did not add value should be removed.
- There should be an extended and clearer set of definitions, including greater clarity on the term 'Resident'.

Furthermore, witnesses had noted that, in 2000, the Council stopped producing and circulating a booklet with extracts from the Regulations to funeral directors and families due to reasons that were unknown to current officers. The Committee agreed that officers should be asked to investigate the reintroduction of this information to be circulated to funeral directors and, through them, to bereaved families. This would be a pictorial booklet that depicted information on the changes to the regulations set out in this report, including details of the new 30-year Exclusive Burial Rights / Right to a Memorial and the introduction of a 2 grave purchase limit.

#### **DEALING WITH ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

As set out above, the Committee has put forward a redrafted set of Regulations that are aimed to ensure that anti-social behaviour and breaches are taken seriously and



result in penalties and prosecutions. Yet this cannot simply be achieved by introducing Regulations and must also be dealt with by continuing to work with SNTs in the Borough to combat persistent problems with anti-social behaviour. SNTs are themselves local and seek to engage residents and deal with the concerns that they have in their local communities.

With this in mind, the Committee encouraged officers to continue to work closely with SNTs to develop a local procedure on how to deal with anti-social behaviour with a particular focus on cemeteries.

Furthermore, it was felt that the Council should seek to support actively any cemetery Friends' Groups that might emerge to reassure residents that their voices are heard and that the Council will take action on any areas that fall below the high standards that they expect.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

In summary, the Committee found that:

1. The printing and dissemination of leaflets to funeral directors concerning expectations and a summary of what was and was not allowed should be explored.
2. These leaflets should be kept well stocked at all times to ensure that they are always made available to residents and funeral directors.
3. Resident engagement with cemeteries or burial grounds should be encouraged and the Council should support any local Friends' Groups that emerge.
4. All funeral directors should receive a full re-drafted version of the Cemeteries Regulations to ensure that they comply and pass such information on to bereaved families.
5. The excellent work that is already undertaken by the Council and the Metropolitan Police's Safer Neighbourhoods Team should continue.
6. Officers should agree a local procedure on how to deal with anti-social behaviour, especially in cemeteries.

### **Recommendation 2**

**Support any 'friends' groups that may wish to be established in relation to local cemeteries; additionally, that the Council continues to work closely with the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) and ask officers to agree a local procedure on how to deal with anti-social behaviour, specifically within cemeteries.**

### **Recommendation 3**

**Ask officers to investigate the reintroduction of leaflets and a pictorial booklet to summarise key elements of the regulations to be circulated to bereaved families via Funeral Directors.**

## **4. Good Maintenance**

### **CEMETERY MAINTENANCE**

Until recently cemeteries in the Borough were maintained by a variety of contractors and, through the witness sessions, it was noted that a number of the maintenance issues at cemeteries were due to poor service from these contractors. However, following the Cabinet's decision to bring maintenance in house as of 01 January 2013, cemeteries will be maintained by the Green Spaces Team. It is believed that this will improve the level of service provided by the cemeteries and will deliver savings to residents.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman has noted that *"the Committee welcomes Cabinet's confirmation that cemetery grounds maintenance has come back to an 'in-house' team and will be part of the award winning Green Spaces team. I believe that residents will welcome this too."*

### **LONG-TERM PLANNING**

Currently, much of the work undertaken at the Council's cemeteries is done reactively. This leads to irregular investment and upkeep, with a focus on those cemeteries that have spare capacity. As a result, sometimes complaints are received from residents who attend graves at 'closed' cemeteries. Much of the maintenance work is seasonal and the overall scale of the work means it must be spread over a number of years.

To ensure investment, income, maintenance, safety inspections and general upkeep and improvements occur in a timely, cost-effective and transparent way a longer-term, planned strategy for the Council's cemeteries would provide great value.

As one of the major issues caused by this lack of long-term planning was seen to be maintenance during the winter months, the Committee emphasised that, alongside the production of a plan covering a minimum of 5 years, there should be a winter rolling programme of works to cemeteries. To ensure that the Council's activities are seen as transparent and fair, the Committee recommends that this information is published on the website in due course.

### **FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS**

The Committee acknowledged in this review that the Council is currently operating within a difficult economic climate and that any expenditure must be considered in the light of this. With this in mind, the Committee did not wish to make specific suggestions as to what works should be undertaken on the cemeteries and instead sought to provide areas for improvement to be considered by the relevant officers and Cabinet Member.

Based on evidence provided by all witnesses there were three areas that were felt to be of particular importance.

- Considering the use of more cost effective machinery to break down clay soil used for graves;
- Considering solutions to the lack of toilet facilities and a shelter for families to congregate at Cherry Lane cemetery, noting that there is no place of prayer at this particular ground; and
- Considering the condition of the Grade I arch at the entrance of Hillingdon & Uxbridge cemetery.

## **HEADSTONES AND MEMORIALS**

One of the major challenges faced by the Council in maintaining its cemeteries is the condition of headstones in the Borough and a lack of awareness by grave owners of their responsibilities. An officer from a neighbouring local authority had recently commented that approximately 60-70% of the headstones in the Council's cemeteries were deemed to be unsafe. It was identified that safety issues were related to the poor quality of masonry, the unsafe erection of memorials and lack of memorial maintenance by grave owners. As a way of combating the reoccurrence of this problem in the future, the Committee agreed that the redrafted Regulations should stipulate that no work could be carried out on any grave space except by a mason accredited to the British Registration of Approved Monumental Masons Scheme (BRAMM), or National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM), or an equivalent scheme which will satisfy the Council's requirements. It was further agreed that all memorials installed in any cemeteries from the date of installation must be subject to a "Guarantee of Conformity" granted by the mason. Such a guarantee would given to confirm that the memorial has been fixed to the best standard set by NAMM at the date of fixing and should last for a minimum of 30 years.

Prior to undertaking any works to resolve safety issues, officers would be required to assess comprehensively the memorials across the Borough. As mentioned above, the Council is responsible for the health and safety of its cemeteries but, as it does not own memorials, any work must be undertaken in consultation with grave owners, this would therefore be likely to take a number of years. The Committee therefore felt that the most appropriate way to resolve these issues was to ask officers to consider the best way to inspect memorials and achieve improvements in line with health and safety objectives, linking to the long-term strategy.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

In summary, the Committee found that:

1. The Cabinet's work to bring maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries in house should be welcomed as a decision that will improve services and benefit residents.
2. To ensure transparency, the winter programme of works should be published for residents.
3. Officers should investigate how best to assess the safety of the headstones in the Borough.
4. Options on how to improve the facilities and machinery used at cemeteries should be explored by officers with the relevant Cabinet Members.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**Considers the best way for officers to inspect memorials in cemeteries and how to best achieve this in line with health and safety objectives;**

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Welcome Cabinet's decision to bring cemetery grounds maintenance back 'in-house' as part of the award winning Green Spaces team.**

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That Cabinet agree to the creation of a long-term (5 year minimum) rolling strategy for the Council's cemeteries, which should be published on the Council's website and at the cemeteries office. This should include in particular a winter rolling programme of works to cemeteries be publicised to residents so they are clear when essential works are taking place.**

#### **Recommendation 7**

**Having reviewed the grounds and facilities across the Borough and following evidence received from witnesses, to note three particular service improvements, which Cabinet may wish to investigate further and consider as part of the service and budget planning process:**

- To explore more cost effective options of using machinery to break down clay soil used for graves;**
- The lack of toilet facilities and a shelters for families to congregate at any of the Borough's cemeteries with the exception of Hillingdon, noting that there is also a lack of places of prayer;**
- The condition of the Grade I arch at the entrance of Hillingdon & Uxbridge cemetery.**