

Subject: Draft Policy and Procedures for
Bereavement Services

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 19 March 2008

Report of: Head of Street Scene and Neighbourhoods

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green
Holder:

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consult members on the proposed updated policy for cemetery rules and regulations which has been revised to reflect current practices.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities;

- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
- Keeping Our Borough Clean and Green (Environment)
- Well Managed Council (Improvement)

3. RISK MANAGEMENT

- The council needs to manage the risks associated with memorial safety and ensure that all aspects of health and safety in the Borough's cemeteries are addressed
- The council's reputation could be damaged if these policies are not reviewed and amended where appropriate.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Council, some time during the 1970s drafted cemetery rules and regulations for the operation and management of its municipal cemeteries. Since this time they have not been amended to represent current practices and changes in legislation. In particular there has not been a sustained approach to erecting memorials and it is apparent that the Cemeteries Rules and Regulations have not been strictly adhered to. The lack of enforcement of the

current policy has caused distress to relatives and discontent from undertakers and stone masons as well as unfavourable publicity to the council.

4.2 In order to mitigate the risks described above and to minimise the distress caused to the bereaved, we have drafted a revised policy for consultation to represent best practice in this service area and reflect current legislation. The draft proposal for the revised policy and procedures are contained in Appendix One.

4.3 The main changes can be summarised below:-

- The maximum grave depth has reduced from 9ft to 7ft 6in to represent current safe practices.
- The description of registrar's office and Registrar has been amended to the cemetery office and Bereavement Services Manager and the regulations once consultation has been undertaken will be applicable throughout the cemeteries in Rossendale.
- All memorial work must be in accordance with the National Association of Memorial Masons Recommended Code of Working Practice which can be found in Appendix Two.
- The acknowledgement of existing unauthorised memorials and establishment of an official commencement date of the new policy and procedures to be 1st April 2008.
- Memorial applications are to be accompanied with:-
 - A copy of the proposed inscription;
 - Authority from the owner of the grave or vault to the mason to erect or inscribe the monument;
 - A copy of the deed of grant or an indemnity signed by a responsible person indemnifying the Council against allowing 3rd parties to undertake work on behalf of the owner;
 - A signed copy of our terms and conditions; and
 - All memorials to be inspected by the Bereavement Services Manager and given a certificate of conformance before erection can take place.

4.4 It is also recognised that breaches have occurred in the previous regulations and unauthorised memorials have been erected without approval by the council. The consequences of having allowed some of these unauthorised memorials are that they are very large and extremely heavy and exceed the capacity of any lifting equipment the council owns. In order to minimise health and safety risks to employees the proposal is to either

- Close these graves to any future burials and offer additional plots for purchase under the new proposed terms and conditions; or
- For the family to arrange a suitable contractor to carry out all the necessary work to enable the grave to be used in accordance with the procedure in

Appendix One. It is noted that this would extend the time required for interments.

5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the report
- 5.2 With regard to future price increases, any future charges should reflect the actual cost of providing the service and should be reviewed on an annual basis.

6. COMMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of REGULATORY SERVICES

- 6.1 The issue of memorial safety is one that needs to be addressed in terms of ensuring that the Council is able to demonstrate good practice.

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 There are no specific HR implications arising from the report.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Any policy changes should take into consideration the needs of a modern bereavement service and the wishes of the bereaved. Cemeteries issues are emotive; however current practices are now beginning to cause significant problems with the administration and management of the borough's municipal cemeteries.

Customer dissatisfaction and significant health and safety breaches, together with a sympathetic regard for bereaved families are at the forefront of what these new policies and procedures aim to promote.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That the proposed draft policy regulations be approved and circulated to local funeral directors, monumental masons and any other appropriate groups for consultation.
- 9.2 That any amendments as a result of the consultation are delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green and the Head of StreetScene and Neighbourhoods.
- 9.3 That members approve the proposed changes, where there are clear health and safety implications, to the use of grave sites that have had memorials erected without authorisation.
- 9.4 A review of charges is undertaken annually.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 The draft rules, regulations and procedures have been circulated to all Funeral Directors and Monumental Masons in the area. Comments have been fed back and a meeting is being arranged to ensure all views are included.
- 10.2 The consultation period will end on 31st March 2008 with the policy being implemented on 1st April 2008.

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required	Yes
Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached	Yes
Is a Biodiversity Assessment required	No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Draft Cemetery Rules and Regulations	Appendix 1
Procedures and Flow Chart	Appendix 2