

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 5.15 pm on Tuesday, 8th October, 2019.

Yours faithfully,

SUZANNE WYLIE

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

- (j) Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Update (Pages 1 - 12)

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Subject:	Update on Strategic Cemetery and Crematorium Development
Date:	8 th October 2019
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	The purpose of this report is update committee on the key issues discussed at the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group meetings held on 21 st August and 2 nd October 2019
2.0	Recommendations
	That the People and Communities Committee:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approve the minutes and the recommendations from the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group meetings held on 21st August and 2nd October 2019.

3.0

Key Issues

Introduction to Bereavement Services

New members were given an overview of Bereavement Services. It was noted that the crematorium a regional service, makes provision for almost one third of all those bereaved in NI. It was further noted that £18m capital has been committed for a proposed new crematorium, and that there is an active expression of interest to acquire new burial land for North and West Belfast. The new memorial for 7,160 babies in City Cemetery has been well received. The Council maintains around 360,000 burial records for nine cemeteries and there is growing public interest in genealogical and historical investigation, including tours.

Memorial Tree Replacement

The Council has not had available land to support the continued provision of memorial trees and this ceased in October 2017. A 30 year scheme had provided 13,000 memorial trees in Roselawn.

Members of the Working Group agreed, subject to Committee approval, to move to a reactive replacement, whereby a tree is only replaced after a direct request from the owner. This will not impact on tree safety inspections nor on tree surgery for reasons of safety.

Update on New Crematorium Development

Members were given a verbal update on progress and they requested that this is made a standing agenda item for the Working Group.

Report on Knock Burial Ground

Members were informed of the historical significance of Knock Burial Ground. The site has a significant number of historic graves and headstones, however the grounds are locked and access control is by request given the site layout and complex challenges around ensuring health and safety for users. To date families and small groups of visitors have been facilitated by staff to access the site. Members were updated that due to recent requests to take bus tours onto the site, a safety review was conducted. A number of health and safety challenges noted would mean substantial investment would be required. As an interim safety measure, Members were advised that visits would be limited to five persons including a tour guide.

Recognition of Success

	The Chairperson on behalf of the Working Group wished to express his thanks to the members of the Focus Group who worked to create the memorial for The Baby Haven at the City Cemetery and that a letter of gratitude be sent to each of the Focus Group members in recognition of their huge contribution. The Chairperson also expressed his thanks to all the officers who worked on the Baby Haven memorial.
4.0	Financial & Resource Implications
4.0	None
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implication / Rural Needs Assessment
	None
4.0	Appendices
	Minutes of the Working Group on 21 st August and 2 nd October 2019

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**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 21st August, 2019

Members Present: The High Sheriff of Belfast, Alderman Sandford;
Alderman Rodgers and
Councillors Matthew Collins, Corr and
Mulholland.

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Election of Chairperson

Nominations were sought to fill the vacant position of Chairperson and it was:

Moved by Alderman Sandford
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

Resolved – that Councillor Corr be appointed to the position of
Chairperson for the period ended June, 2020.

Councillor Corr accepted the appointment and thanked the Members for their
nomination.

(Councillor Corr in the Chair.)

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th March, 2019 were taken as read and signed
as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Introduction to Bereavement Services

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided the Working Group
with an update on the background and role of the Bereavement Services Section and the
link back to the People and Communities Committee. She outlined the key roles of the
Working Group including, amongst other things, the provision of strategic direction and
input into the city's framework for cemetery and crematorium development.

The Members were advised that Belfast City Council was the burial board for
Belfast with responsibility for nine cemeteries including the province's only crematorium.
She highlighted the mortality rates and the increasing pressure to accommodate the
current number of cremations which were far in excess of those that the crematorium was
originally intended to accommodate.

New Crematorium and Cemetery

The Working Group was advised of the progress made to date in the development of new crematorium facilities at Roselawn including the proposal of a new two chapel crematorium to meet the increasing demand associated with future cremation requirements. The Members were advised that a project management team had been appointed to oversee the project which would report back to the next meeting of the Crematorium Development Project Board on 22nd August, 2019. The Bereavement Services Manager advised the Working Group that the Council was undertaking a search for new burial land and that a requested Expression of Interest (E.O.I.) assessment had been undertaken to identify new burial ground which would meet the future burial requirements of North and West Belfast. It was reported that once the submissions received had been subjected to the E.O.I. process, Members of the Working Group would be kept informed with regular updates in regard to the progress made.

Memorial Safety

The Members were advised that a Memorial Management Policy, including a safety inspection programme, had been introduced in 2016 and updated in March, 2019. The Director reported that the Council was responsible for the safety of in excess of 130,000 memorials and monuments within its cemeteries.

Plotbox

The Bereavement Services Manager informed the Working Group that it was in the process currently of introducing a new computerised system to manage all burials, cremations and ancillary services. He referred to the success of that computerised system and of the potential benefits for Bereavement Services once the system had been introduced.

City Cemetery – Heritage Lottery Fund Project

The Working Group was informed that the City Cemetery was the resting place for a number of important historical figures in the city of Belfast, including central vaults, Victorian fountains and a Jewish cemetery and a large number of war graves. The Bereavement Services Manager stated that the Council was working with the Heritage Lottery Fund to enhance the built heritage of the City Cemetery to include improved accessibility to the site while protecting the cemetery for future generations.

The Baby Haven

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the background to the design and installation of a memorial in remembrance of over 7,000 babies buried in the City Cemetery. He reported that landscaping work at the burial site would commence in the near future with an unveiling ceremony scheduled to take place on 12th September, 2019.

Heritage Sites/ War Memorials/ Burial Records

The Members were informed that the City Council had responsibility for five closed graveyards which had historical significance and that there existed important war memorials in both Dundonald and the City Cemetery, the latter being the largest 'war cemetery' in Ireland. In regard to burial records, the Bereavement Services Manager reported that there was currently 360,000 burial records in respect of Dundonald Cemetery, the City Cemetery and Roselawn Cemetery which were accessible online and at the Central Bereavement Office.

In response to a question from a Member in respect of tours being undertaken at the various cemeteries, owned by the Council and the charging mechanism for undertaking such tours, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that the Council's Events Policy allowed for charges to be applied, but that this was not yet in place for cemeteries. It was reported that, at present, tour operators were being managed through the Council's Outdoor Spaces and Active Living process in order to ensure the adequacy of operators risk assessments and provision of public liability insurance. The Working Group suggested that it might be appropriate for officers to investigate the possibility of undertaking a registration system to allow tour operators to use City Council cemetery facilities. A Member referred to the tourism possibilities associated with allowing greater public access to the Council's graveyard sites, given the historical significance associated with many of the gravestones contained therein. The Members were advised of the need to keep some graveyards locked because of the danger to life associated with large unstable and unsafe headstones within the confines of the graveyards. The Director agreed that she would bring back a report in the matter to a future meeting of the Working Group.

A Member raised the issue of the maintenance at Dundonald Cemetery in particular the frequency of the grass cutting at the site and also in relation to the accidental car damage caused to the entrance pillar and gates. In response, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that additional staff had been allocated to maintain the cemetery and assured the Members that the insurance claim in respect of the entrance pillar and gates had been completed and that the repair work was due to be completed by September 2019.

A Member highlighted the capital works undertaken at Roselawn Cemetery in respect of the installation of the new water supply and requested that officers, on behalf of the Working Group, to thank the staff and cemetery operatives at Roselawn for their diligence and hard work. The Members expressed their concern in the delay associated with the construction of the new two chapel crematorium at Roselawn and the associated planning application. In response, the Director stated that she would be meeting with staff from Property and Projects to discuss those concerns. She stated further that she would report back to the Working Group in the matter, and would provide an update in regard to the planning application.

A Member raised a further question in respect of memorial safety and the fact that memorials were still being banded. The Member asked if memorials could be laid flat as a suitable alternative to the banding process. In response, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that although the Council Policy allowed that memorials could be laid flat, there had been problems when that option was applied to modern lawn memorials and agreed to report back in the matter to the next meeting of the Working Group. Several Members asked if the construction of a columbarium might be considered at the City Cemetery. Members were informed that the use of a columbarium had not proved popular as a means of disposal of cremated remains but agreed to look at the possibility of other forms of remembrance, given that tree planting for cremated remains was no longer permitted at Roselawn. Members raised the topic of the recent vandalism in the City Cemetery which had resulted in damage to a number of headstones. The Working Group stressed the need for greater community engagement in an endeavour to eliminate the damage by vandals to headstones at the City Cemetery

The Director in response to a question from a Member of the Working Group in respect of the introduction of C.C.T.V. at the City Cemetery highlighted the considerable cost associated with that option and the shortcomings of the operational effectiveness of undertaking that course of action. She referred to a previous report and decision made on the installation of C.C.T.V. recording equipment.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and thanked the officers for their detailed information in respect of the work of Bereavement Services.

Date of Future Meetings

The Working Group agreed its schedule of meetings covering the period ended December 2020 and agreed further that its next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 2nd October at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 2nd October, 2019

Members Present: Councillor Corr, Chairperson,
The High Sheriff of Belfast, Alderman Sandford; and
Alderman Rodgers.

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Groogan, Kyle and Mulholland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st August, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Report on Memorial Tree Replacement

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the background to the memorial tree scheme at Roselawn Cemetery which had been introduced in 1977. The scheme ran for 30 years with the sale of 13,000 trees. He reported that owing to a lack of space it had been agreed by the People and Communities Committee in 2017 that, no new memorial trees could be released.

Currently the Council runs a proactive replacement programme for memorial trees. These are inspected annually and every year around 400 are proactively replaced with new saplings. The Members were provided with a summary of the resources required to maintain this rate of replacement including the operational difficulties. The Working Group was informed that over the previous four years, £23,478 had been spent on new saplings alone. The Bereavement Services Manager pointed out that every year 30-40 families make requests to have memorial trees replaced. Members were asked to consider the option that memorial trees are only replaced when the owner makes a request and it is verified that the original tree has died. He reported that the resources taken up by the current programme could be redirected to other priority areas within Roselawn.

The Working Group accepted the recommendations to cease the proactive replacement of memorial trees. However, Members raised the lack of options available to the public to have a permanent memorial for family members who are cremated. It was requested that officers investigate what other Councils provide for such memorials. The Director agreed that she would bring back a report to a future meeting of the Working Group providing a range of options for the disposal of cremated remains.

Proposed Crematorium Development

A Member requested that the Working Group be provided with regular updates on the progress being made in the planning application for the new crematorium facility at Roselawn. The Director gave a verbal update. The Director agreed that the new crematorium development would be a standing item on the agenda of this Working Group.

Report on Knock Burial Ground

The Bereavement Services Manager informed the Working Group of the historical significance attached to Knock Burial Ground. The Members were informed that all the site has been taken with historic graves and there are no new ones. It contains memorial structures dated back to 1600s. The site is permanently locked due to safety concerns from the natural topography of the land and the existence of both unstable ground and unsafe headstones. There are surface and tripping hazards throughout and there are no paths. Council Staff continue to facilitate small numbers of family and historical investigators to visit.

The Members were advised that the Council has received a number of applications for bus tours onto the site. The Bereavement Services Manager explained the concerns that the site is not suitable in its current condition to accommodate large numbers –even from the point of somewhere to stand.

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with a number of options which might be considered to facilitate the tour requests including, undertaking discussion with the Department for Infrastructure (D.f.I.) to plan an access ramp at the front gate of the site. It might also be possible to create a safe area within the site and fence it off. Members were reminded that such works are capital schemes and would require the necessary consultation and permissions. The Bereavement Services Manager asked for Members support for a control measure that in the interim, visits to the site should be restricted to five persons including a tour guide whilst officers begin to explore with the Working Group, managing tourism requests across our sites. In the interim period, the Working Group was advised that the burial ground should remain closed and would be opened only on a case-by-case basis until such times as further options are available.

Noted.

Report on Notice of Motion by Alderman Copeland Re: Anti-Social Behaviour in the City Cemetery

The Director addressed the recent Notice of Motion by Alderman Copeland in relation to anti-social behaviour at City Cemetery. She reported that the Neighbourhood Services Manager would draft a report which would be presented to the People and Communities Committee, outlining a range of measures which would address the concerns raised by in the Notice of Motion and by Members in general.

Memorial Maintenance

A Member requested if the Director could arrange for the Thiepval and American war memorials sites to be tidied prior to the annual Remembrance Day Commemoration Service.

In response, the Director agreed that she would investigate the possibility of these actions.

Recognition of Success

The Chairperson on behalf of the Working Group wished to express his thanks to the members of the Focus Group who had worked together with officers to create the memorial for The Baby Haven at the City Cemetery, and requested that a letter of gratitude be formally sent to each of the Focus Group members in recognition of their huge contribution. The Director stated that she was happy to do so. The Chairperson also expressed his thanks to all staff involved.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Wednesday, 20th November at 4.30 pm.

Chairperson

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