

**STRATEGIC CEMETERY AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 26th June, 2017

Members Present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
Alderman Sandford; and
Councillors McCabe and O'Neill.

In Attendance: Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. S. Toland, Assistant Director, City Services;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Kyle and McCabe.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd May were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Appointment of Chairperson

After discussion, it was agreed that Alderman Rodgers be appointed to the position of Chairperson for the period ending May, 2018.

Update on Business Case of the Crematorium Development

The Director of Finance and Resources provided the Working Group with an update in respect of the options to develop a new, fit for purpose, crematorium. As part of the update, the Members were provided with an options paper outlining the various proposals under consideration which included:

- Option 1.0 Do Nothing
- Option 2.1 Extension and Refurbishment of existing Crematorium incorporating two Chapels.
- Option 3.1 A new two Chapel Crematorium on Roselawn site and reuse of existing building (alternative use).
- Option 3.3 A new one Chapel Crematorium on Roselawn site and refurbishment of existing Crematorium.
- Option 4.1 A new two Chapel Crematorium on a new site and reuse of existing building (alternative use)

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The Director of Property and Projects reported that, further work required to be undertaken in respect of option 3.3 to firm up the proposals contained therein. The Director of Finance and Resources reminded the Reference Group that the Council retained the licence to undertake cremations and that it was proposed to undertake negotiations with other Councils, including Newtownabbey, to agree contractual arrangements for the provision of future cremation services with external organisations.

The Working Group considered the aforementioned options and agreed, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, that option 3.3 could be considered as the Council's preferred choice in respect of future crematoria development, however it was recognised also, that there were variations within this option which required further exploration.

Update of Meeting with Other Councils re: a Regional Discussion on Crematoria and Cemetery Development

The Assistant Director provided the Working Group with an update on discussions which had taken place previously with other councils, in respect of crematoria and cemetery development. It was reported that the decision to engage with neighbouring councils had been approved by a previous meeting of the People and Communities Committee. Subsequently, a meeting with senior officers from 11 councils had taken place on 15th May, 2017 in respect of future cemetery and crematoria development.

The Assistant Director reported that as a result of those discussions, it had been agreed that officers from Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Antrim and Newtownabbey including mid and East Antrim Councils, would meet to identify potential opportunities for joint working in respect of crematoria and cemetery provision. The Reference Group was advised that officers from the council would report back on any progress made arising from those discussions.

Noted.

Update on findings of Survey of Crematorium Users

The Assistant Director provided information on the findings of a survey which had been conducted recently, in respect of users of the City of Belfast Crematorium, at Roselawn. It was reported that the survey had been targeted as those individuals who had used the crematorium in the previous 6 months. In November, 2016 the survey had been sent to 1,500 users of the crematorium, covering the period 1st October 2016 till 31st March, 2016, of which 372 responses had been returned.

It was reported that feedback from the responses had been positive and that suggested improvements had included the fact that facilities were not adequate to deal with the number of cremations taking place currently. Officers had agreed to consider the suggestions for improvements taken from the survey and would feed them into the process, in respect of the provision of future cremation facilities. The Working Group noted the positive results from the survey which indicated a high level of satisfaction with the quality of service provided by staff at the crematorium and which had been noted by officers, as a means to enhance the service provided.

The Working Group was provided with information in respect of the donation scheme, including the nomination scheme to receive money in respect of recycled metals. It was reported also, that owing to the high level of work involved with undertaking the survey process, it had been proposed that the council replace the 6 monthly survey with a single annual survey. It was proposed that the survey would remain the method for collecting nominations and that the top 2 nominated charities would be selected for that particular year, with the caveat that no charity would be eligible to receive a donation in consecutive years. The Working Group was advised that, nominations to the scheme was

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scheduled to take place in September, 2017 and that it was proposed that the charity, which was second on the list from the survey, be chosen as the second nomination for 2017.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and agreed, in principle, to the change in frequency of the survey and in respect of seeking nominations for charitable donations regarding recycled metals. The Working Group paid tribute to the work undertaken by staff at the crematorium, including the improved signage which had provided improved access and egress to and from the facility.

Noted.

Update of Meeting with Memorial Sculptors – Stone Masons

The Assistant Director provided the Working Group with an update on a meeting which had taken place on 23rd May, 2017, between officers from the council and memorial sculptors/stone masons. She reported that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct exploratory discussions around agreeing set prices associated with undertaking both, the erection of memorials and any additional remedial work required.

The Members were advised that the meeting had proved useful in communicating to relevant parties the implementation of the council's Memorial Management Policy. She outlined the need to undertake a registration process with sculptors/stone masons, with a view to ensuring compliance with the policy. She reported that the concerns of the Working Group in respect of costs associated with the repair and maintenance of headstones, had been raised at that meeting and that discussions had taken place on how these issues might be addressed.

It was agreed subsequently, that a further meeting would be arranged with memorial sculptors in the autumn to progress the issue. The Assistant Director reported that, discussions with officers from other councils would be taking place to inform them of Belfast City Council's approach in the matter and how they might work collaboratively, to ensure a consistent approach in working with memorial sculptors/stone masons, in the future.

The Working Group expressed its concerns that some headstones appeared to have been erected without supporting dowels, or with dowels which were not made of sufficient composition to resist weathering and deterioration. The Assistant Director assured the Working Group, that this matter had been raised and would be discussed at future meetings with the sculptors/stone masons.

Noted.

Update on Permanent Memorial to mark Plot Z1 in the City Cemetery

The Policy and Business Development Officer provided an update on the proposal to install a permanent memorial at Plot Z1 in the City Cemetery. The Members were reminded that the proposal had been moved to stage 3 committed expenditure in respect of the Council's capital programme. It was reported that an artist had been appointed to design the sculpture and she outlined the need to undertake an extensive consultation exercise in respect of refining the design of the memorial. As a consequence, she stated that it would be necessary to extend the consultation timeframe until 30th June, followed by an information session, which would be used to present a summary of the selected design. This session would include the wording which would be etched on the plinth of the memorial sculpture.

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The Working Group was informed that it would be provided with updates on a regular basis, in regard to the progress made in respect of the memorial sculpture and of the need to progress the project as quickly as possible, given the age of many of the bereaved relatives.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Thursday, 3rd August at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson