

**STRATEGIC CEMETERY AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 7th December, 2017

Members Present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
Alderman Sandford and
Councillor Sian O'Neill

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd November were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

**Update on the Charity Nomination Process for the
Distribution of Money Received from the recycling of Metals**

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on a range of options in regard to the distribution of funds to charities in respect of recycled metals. He reminded the Members that the Working Group had agreed in June, 2017 to the use of a survey as a preferred method to select a nominated bereavement charity. He advised the Members that the cost of adopting a survey for that purpose had proved expensive and that the low level of response had rendered this method relatively ineffective. The Policy and Business Development Manager referred to issues around sensitivity in the distribution of the survey, in that some bereaved families had felt it inappropriate to receive charitable donation requests from the Council following their loss.

In order to achieve a more effective response to the consultation process, he provided the Working Group with a number of alternative options including:

Option 1. Continue with the current nomination process by the use of a survey to determine charitable nominations

Option 2. Permit the Working Group to nominate a programme of charities for 2018.

Option 3. Grant authority to the Bereavement Services Manager to liaise with Funeral Directors as a means to agree a programme in respect of nominations of charities for 2018

The Bereavement Services Manager reminded the Members that the nomination process involved the selection of two charities per year and stated that any nominated charity would not be permitted to receive a donation more than once in any three year period. The Working Group considered the options proposed and agreed that option 3

would be its preferred choice, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

Funeral Poverty

The Assistant Director provided the Working Group with an update on the increasing level of funeral poverty that has been researched across the UK and experienced by bereaved families. She reported that the average cost of undertaking a funeral in Northern Ireland was approximately £3,000 and provided the Members with a breakdown of the detailed costs attributed to the provision of that service, including the costs associated with burials and cremations. The Working Group was provided also with information in regard to the financial assistance available currently through the Social Fund Funeral Expenses (S.F.F.E.P.), a fund which had been established to assist those individuals struggling with funeral debt and administered in Northern Ireland, by the Department for Communities. She reported that currently the costs considered 'necessary' can be fully covered – these include burial or cremation fees and doctors' fees. There is no upper limit on the amount that can be claimed for these although all applications will be considered on a case by case basis. However, there is a cap of £700 for other costs, which includes coffin, cars and the funeral director's fees, and this has not increased since 2003

She referred to a number of initiatives which had been adopted in England and Wales to alleviate the problem of funeral poverty, including direct contract arrangements with Funeral Directors, as a means to provide fixed price funerals. She referred to a 'Respectful Funeral' branding initiative undertaken by East Ayrshire Council which specified the minimal service required with agreed standards and cost limits for funerals.

In order to assist the Working Group to make an informed decision on the most effective way to alleviate the issue of funeral poverty in Belfast, she provided a range of ideas as to possible ways forward. As Funeral Directors work across NI the proposed next steps would involve discussion with other Councils, Faith Communities and Funeral Directors as well as the necessary legal and policy screening. She stated further that, once these exploratory discussions had taken place, she would report back to the Working Group with options to address the matter. The Working Group agreed to Council Officers taking the next steps proposed in the report.

Update on Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council – Memorandum of Understanding

The Assistant Director referred to a Memorandum of Understanding which had been in place between Belfast City Council (BCC) and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) and which involved residents of LCCC being charged a subsidised rate for burials and cremations. BCC then reclaimed the difference between the subsidised rate and the non-resident rate from LCCC. She informed the Working Group that LCCC had formally terminated the agreement, a decision which had been ratified by that Council in September 2017.

She referred to a different scheme, whereby former Belfast residents who had been obliged to move out of the city to avail of residential/ nursing care, were still eligible to apply for a subsidised rate where proof of residency was provided. She stated that this scheme remained in force and was not affected by the Memorandum of Understanding.

Noted.

Water Infrastructure at Roselawn Cemetery

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the water supply problems at Roselawn Cemetery. He pointed out that the water network supplying the 35 standpipes in sections E to T of the cemetery was installed 50 years ago and required full replacement if it was desired to continue this facility. The standpipes were provided so that the public have water for flowers and to wash headstones. He specifically mentioned the 16 standpipes in sections R,S, and T which were currently dry due to chronic leaks and airlocks. This system is separate from the supply to the offices and crematorium and they remain unaffected.

He reported that the water supply issues at Roselawn Cemetery had been discussed at a meeting of the Finance Oversight Board. It was agreed that the Council's Property Maintenance Unit would engage the services of a consultant to report on the current water supply infrastructure and make recommendations to remedy the problem. The Bereavement Services Manager stated that a report on the matter would be made available in the spring of 2018 and that, in order to remedy the water supply problem, would require approval to incur major capital expenditure from the Council's capital programme budget

As an interim measure, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that he would report back to the Working Group on the matter and would explore the possibility of hiring water bowsers for positioning at suitable locations at the above sections, to provide a temporary water supply until such times as the water supply issue had been addressed.

Noted.

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

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the progress which had been made, to date, in respect of the consultation and procurement process to erect a permanent memorial at Plot Z1 in the City Cemetery. He reminded the Members that the project was currently at a stage 3 committed expenditure in the Council's capital programme, with a maximum allocated budget of £50,000. He referred to a previous proposal to design a public art piece of art at the plot which had been considered by some of the bereaved families not to reflect their views, and stated that it had subsequently been agreed to establish a focus group, comprising representatives of bereaved families to ensure that their views were considered in any future design options in respect of the memorial. It was reported also that the focus group, at its second meeting, held on 26th October, had focussed on the design brief to be included within the tender documentation. The Working Group was provided with a copy of the draft tender documentation and agreed, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee, that the tender documentation which would be published, would provide for the appointment of a stonemason to create and erect an agreed memorial structure at Plot Z1.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 29th January at 4.30 pm.

Chairperson