

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM  
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

**Minutes of Meeting of 25th February, 2019**

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

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;  
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

**Apology**

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of The High Sheriff of Belfast, Alderman Sandford.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd January, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

**Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

**Update on Revisions to Memorial Management Policy**

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the Council's Memorial Management Policy and Memorial Safe Working Practice, which had been agreed in 2016. The Members were presented with a revised draft of that Policy which incorporated three additional elements, namely:

- i. An application process to erect memorials in Council owned cemeteries;
- ii. A permit process to manage the construction work undertaken by monumental sculptors; and
- iii. A five year rolling inspection programme in respect of existing memorials.

The Working Group was informed that Council staff continued to monitor the implementation of the policy and evaluate best practice in other local authorities, to ensure that the policy was effective and fit for purpose. The Bereavement Services Manager informed the Working Group that, following agreement of the policy by Members, it was his intention to invite Memorial Sculptors and Funeral Directors to attend a workshop to update them on changes to the policy.

The Members agreed the recommendations contained within the report and raised a number of related items for follow up and discussion. The Chairperson referred to instances where grave surrounds had been broken in order to re-open graves and the fact that the cost of remedying the damaged surrounds resided with the family/owner of the grave. He stated that he had received information that indicating that other local authorities had successfully reopened graves without the need to break the joints in the grave surround.

Members discussed further the need to ensure quality of work by professional contractors including Monumental Sculptors, who were contracted to work on Council sites by families or Funeral Directors. The Bereavement Services Manager reminded Members that, a British Standard (BS 8415:2018) described best practice in memorial construction. The Bereavement Services Manager stated that the approval of the Council's Memorial Management Policy, which allowed for non-compliant memorial sculptors to be de-registered, was the most effective means of ensuring the quality of workmanship in this area, given that the industry is self-regulated. A Member suggested that further training sessions in respect of Monumental Sculptors could be beneficial and recommended that an article be published in City Matters advising the public on relevant questions to ask, prior to purchasing a headstone or memorial

The Working Group agreed to adopt the revised policy, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

### **Update on Memorial Safety Inspection Programme**

The Bereavement Services Manager referred to the circumstances surrounding the fatality which had occurred at a graveyard in Glasgow, including the recommendations contained within a report following that fatality.

The Working Group was provided with an update on the Memorial Inspection Programme undertaken within Council owned cemeteries which had commenced in September, 2016. He stated that, as part of the Memorial Inspection Programme, inspections at Balmoral Cemetery, Shankill Graveyard and Clifton Street Graveyard had been completed, with a total of 11,000 headstones being inspected at Roselawn Cemetery. The Members were informed that the inspection programme had identified 900 memorials at Roselawn Cemetery which had been deemed to be unsafe, and 2,100 which were considered to be unstable. He reminded the Working Group of the Council policy to band unsafe headstones considered to be unsafe, including measures to contact grave owners in respect of unsafe headstones.

The Bereavement Services Manager stated that Belfast City Council managers and staff had been trained in managing the safety of large historic monuments and had been provided with the necessary expertise to inspect free-standing monuments, up to 2.5 meters high. The Working Group was advised that monuments, which were above that height or attached to another structure, required the expertise of a Structural Engineer. The Working Group was informed that the Council had applied a system of risk zoning in respect of its graveyards and cemeteries, following the recommendations contained within Glasgow report. The risk zoning exercise had identified that the City Cemetery as the highest priority for inspections. He stated that inspections were ongoing currently in the sections containing large historic monuments which were constructed in the 1800s. He stated further that where necessary, engineering specialist advice and support might be required and that Members would be kept updated should remedial work impact on revenue budgets.

Noted.

### **Update on New Commonwealth War Graves**

The Working Group was provided with background information by the Bereavement Services Manager in respect of the establishment of The Commonwealth War Graves Commission. He reported that the Commission had constructed and maintained 791 headstones in Council owned cemeteries, including a 'Cross of Sacrifice' in both Dundonald and the City Cemetery. He referred to the high standards of workmanship undertaken by the Commission, including the use of Kilkenny Limestone to

construct its headstones and the fact that the Commission used the services of an approved sculptor, registered by the Council. The Working Group was informed that an application had been received by the Commission in respect of two additional war dead, who had died from their wounds after the First World War. He stated that it was proposed that one of the headstones would be erected in the City Cemetery and the other in Dundonald Cemetery. The Bereavement Services Manager advised the Working Group that, the cost associated with the erection of a headstone was an application fee of £16, and a permit fee of £16. He stated further that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was a not-for-profit organisation and that it was proposed that the Council waive the aforementioned fees, given that there was no survivable relatives and that it was unlikely that many similar cases would be identified in the future. Members recommended that the waiver should apply only to Commonwealth War Graves Commission applications in respect of historic cases when there was no family identified to take responsibility for the deceased.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and recommended that both the memorial application fee and permit fee be waived, given the specific circumstances outlined, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

### **New Crematorium Facility at Roselawn**

The Chairperson requested that the Working Group be provided with regular updates, including progress on the planning application, in respect of the new crematorium facility at Roselawn.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 19th March at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson