

**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