

**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