

Scrutiny Inquiry Report

Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance

Scrutiny Board (City Development)
May 2011

Scrutiny Board (City Development)

Inquiry into the Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance

Report and Recommendations of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance Working Group for consideration by Scrutiny Board (City Development) on 8th March 2011

Introduction

- 1.1 At the October 2010 City Development Scrutiny Board meeting, Members expressed their desire to conduct an inquiry into the horticultural maintenance of the Council's cemeteries and crematoria. Members were concerned that the level of maintenance was being impaired because the grave conditions were not being enforced and that considerable additional costs were being incurred by staff having to remove large number of flowers, ornaments and trinkets that families place as tributes on graves and on grass next to memorial plaques. Staff then had to replace such items once the grass had been cut.
- 1.2 It was therefore considered appropriate for the Scrutiny Board (City Development) to conduct an inquiry at this juncture in order to identify possible cost savings particularly in view of the imminent budget constraints.
- 1.3 The Inquiry was undertaken by a working group consisting of the following Members;
- Councillor Procter (Chair)
Councillor J Akhtar
Councillor J Elliott
Councillor M Robinson
Councillor M Rafique
- 1.4 The Working Group has received and discussed a range of information, covering the following:
- Reports on enforcement of grave conditions, rules and regulations
 - Problems encountered by obstructions including flowers, vases and other items in strewing areas in the cemeteries and crematoria
 - Paper on experiences of other core cities
 - Site visit to Lawnswood cemetery and crematoria
 - Photographic evidence of various obstructions in the strewing areas
- 1.5 This report presents the observations, conclusions of the Working Group for endorsement by Scrutiny Board (City Development).

Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1.6 We noted that Leeds City Council is responsible for the management and maintenance of 3 crematoria, 23 cemeteries, 23 closed churchyards, 49 war memorials and the contracted mortuary service.
- 1.7 We visited Lawnswood cemetery and crematoria and learned that it was one of the main cemeteries and crematoria in the City, being over 65 acres in size. The cemetery opened in 1876 with the addition of the crematoria in 1905. The site was managed by the Headingley Burial Board, from opening until 1974. Lawnswood was transferred to Leeds City Council in 1974.
- 1.8 We were advised that during the 1960's Lawnswood employed around 32 staff covering gardening duties, cremation duties, grave digging, masons and greenhouse work. Today Lawnswood has 17 staff covering the gardening duties, cremation duties and grave digging duties for Lawnswood and all north side cemeteries in the City. Over the years the cemetery has expanded to its current size of 65 acres. The cemetery became full in 2004 and has not provided new graves since that date, which has put extra pressure on other local cemeteries and increased the pressure for new cemeteries to be opened.
- 1.9 We were informed that Lawn garden rules are enforced in new cemeteries and clearly divided extensions i.e. Guiseley, Garforth and Pudsey, but families still challenge these rules.
- 1.10 Officers advised us that memorial headstones and kerbs are permitted in all other cemeteries, but this makes the maintenance of the cemeteries difficult with small machines and strimmers needed which are more labour intensive. The maintenance of the Gardens of Rest and strewing lawns is also labour intensive as families expect to leave floral tributes on the lawn, but this requires staff to remove them before cutting the area, then replace all the tributes after cutting.
- 1.11 That the City Council does not own any of the memorials as they belong to the families, but safety is the Council's responsibility, therefore memorials have to be tested and either pinned or laid down. Also tidying neglected memorials is a concern once families no longer exist to maintain the memorial.
- 1.12 During our visit we commented on and discussed a number of issues with staff including:
 - (a) The fact that the cemetery is full and no longer provides new burials, however it does continue to provide burials in family plots.
 - (b) The position with regard to land owned by the University next to the cemetery and crematoria.
 - (c) The size of the cemetery of 65 acres and the reduction in staffing levels over the years from 32 staff in the 1960s to 17 staff today. The staff not only undertake all the gardening, cremation and grave digging duties for

Lawnswood they are responsible for all north side cemeteries in the City as well.

- (d) The large number of flowers, ornaments, fenced off sections and trinkets that families place as tributes on graves and on grass next to memorial plaques. This included nailing items to mature trees. Officers reported that in the growing season one member of staff spends his whole time removing floral tributes so the grass can be cut and then putting them all back again afterwards. Members were informed that they often received complaints from the public that flowers and other tributes were missing or had been removed and not put back in the same place after the grass had been cut.
 - (e) The difficulties in maintaining areas where families ignore the rules regarding graves which state that “railings, footstones, kerb and border stones, chains or other structures enclosing graves or parts of graves, flags or chippings are not allowed.” These prevent the larger grass cutting machines from being used. As a consequence staff have to resort to smaller machines and strimmers which are less efficient. In addition having to manoeuvre machinery around obstacles can result in damage to grave features.
 - (f) We were provided with a map of the cemetery and crematoria and a copy of the grave burial rights and extracts from the rules and regulations relating to grave memorials on none lawned areas and lawned gardens.
 - (g) Reference was also made to the Friends of Guiseley Cemetery, which is a group of 20-30 people who support and help maintain the site on a volunteer basis.
- 1.13 We suggested that it might be appropriate to introduce designated areas at suitable locations in the cemetery for people to place flowers and other tributes in an effort to reduce the numbers placed on grassed areas. This could include an area in front of the Gardens of Rest.
- 1.14 Subsequent discussion centred around the fact that, whilst applicants wishing to obtain grave burial rights sign an agreement that places restrictions on what they can and cannot do, these are not being applied by the Council. This was usually because of the sensitivity of the subject and local pressures around enforcement.
- 1.15 We met with Mr Barry Bootland who described how the Friends of Guiseley Cemetery (FoGC) was established about 5 years ago.
- 1.16 He provided us with a leaflet which the FoGC had produced which gave some background to the organisation, outlined some of the work in progress, explained ways in which individuals could help and how individuals could join.
- 1.17 Mr Bootland stressed that it was important in setting up this kind of

organisation that a small group of individuals in the community are identified to drive the process forward by:

- identifying the maintenance problems and issues they are unhappy with in a particular cemetery;
- identifying suitable community service projects that could be undertaken;
- speaking to relevant officers and working with them to develop the ideas and guidelines for them to work to;
- arranging a public meeting to seek support from the local community;
- developing a constitution using already established groups as a basis;
- setting up a bank account;
- arranging insurance;
- identifying various funding streams and applying for funds to undertake community projects; and,
- meeting perhaps once a month as a working party to discuss progress and issues.

1.18 Mr Bootland was asked about the work FoGC undertake and he referred to a number of work areas which, by agreement with appropriate officers of the Council the FoGC carry out

- planting and weeding;
- maintenance of graves where no family members are living; and
- minor maintenance work.

The Friends have also replaced the main gates to the cemetery and painted them, removed and thinned bushes and trees, provided a notice board, demolished an unused building and made a quiet garden on the site.

1.19 Mr Bootland stated that the Council remains responsible for grass cutting, the cutting of hedges and major maintenance work.

1.20 Mr Bootland suggested that in addition to these practical benefits FoGC also act as buffer for complaints as they can often sort a problem out before it is reported to the Council. The fact that the cemetery is now very well maintained also encourages visitors and grave owners to take a pride in the cemetery and it is easier to enforce grave conditions.

1.21 We agreed that because of the success and benefits the Council receives from groups like the Friends of Guiseley and Beckett Street cemeteries that such groups should be encouraged to be established at all the Council's cemeteries and crematoria. It was suggested that this should be done through the Area Committees and that the Head of Parks and Countryside develop suitable information packs and leaflets on how they can be established and promoted in local communities.

1.22 We considered a report of the Acting Director of City Development on the rules and regulations applicable in cemeteries and crematoria in Leeds. It also provided a comparison of how other core cities approach

enforcement and outlined the issues encountered with enforcement and any actions taken to address them. We noted that, with the exception of Newcastle general regulations covering graves are not enforced by core cities, although some authorities are trying to enforce the rules in new extensions.

- 1.23 We were concerned that staffing numbers have reduced to 17 staff and they not only undertake all the gardening, cremation and grave digging duties for Lawnswood but they are responsible for all north side cemeteries in the City as well.
- 1.24 In the growing season staff have to spend more than 1400 additional hours removing these items in order to cut the grass and then replace them afterwards. There are also difficulties in maintaining areas where families ignore the rules regarding graves, which state that “railings, footstones, kerb and border stones, chains or other structures enclosing graves or parts of graves, flags or chippings are not allowed.” These prevent the larger grass cutting machines from being used. As a consequence staff have to resort to smaller machines and strimmers which are less efficient and increase costs. In addition having to manoeuvre machinery around obstacles can result in damage to grave features.
- 1.25 A report of the Acting Director of City Development is attached which details grave conditions and their enforcement.

Recommendations to Scrutiny Board (City Development)

- 1.26 The Scrutiny Board (City Development) is asked to consider recommending to the Acting Director of City Development
- (i) that due to the success and benefits the Council receives from groups like the Friends of Guiseley cemetery and Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery, that these be encouraged to be established at all the Council's cemeteries and crematoria, with the work being done through the Area Committees and the Head of Parks and Countryside developing suitable information packs and leaflets on how such groups can be established and promoted in local communities.
 - (ii) to enforce the grave conditions on lawned and non-lawned areas in all cemeteries and crematoria managed by the Council; to reduce the maintenance by 1400 hours per annum and,
 - (iii) that the Head of Parks and Countryside consider the introduction of suitable stand/display boards in designated areas, in the strewing lawns in Council's cemetery and crematoria, for people to place flowers and other tributes on.



Originator: P N Marrington

Tel: 39 51151

Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Executive Board

Date: 18 May 2011

Subject: Scrutiny Board Recommendations - Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance.

<p>Electoral Wards Affected:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)

<p>Specific Implications For:</p> <p>Equality and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Community Cohesion <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Responses to Scrutiny Board reports and recommendations are no longer required to be approved by Executive Board. Instead, Executive Board will receive a report from the Scrutiny Support Unit summarising all responses to Scrutiny recommendations agreed by the Director, in consultation with the relevant Executive Member, since the last Executive Board meeting.
2. Where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member, or where recommendations are directed specifically at Executive Board, a more detailed narrative will be given and Executive Board will be asked to pronounce on the matter.
3. This report lists those Scrutiny Board recommendations which have been agreed by the relevant Director, in consultation with the appropriate Executive Board. There is one recommendation where agreement cannot be reached.
4. Executive Board is asked to note the agreed recommendations and to rule on the recommendation where agreement cannot be reached.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of responses to Scrutiny Board recommendations received since the last Executive Board meeting.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Responses to Scrutiny Board reports and recommendations are no longer required to be approved by Executive Board. Instead, Executive Board will receive a report from the Scrutiny Support Unit summarising all responses to Scrutiny recommendations agreed by the Director/Executive Member since the last Executive Board meeting. This report will include, if required, a more detailed narrative around any recommendations where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member.
- 2.2 Where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member or where recommendations are directed specifically at Executive Board, Executive Board will be asked to pronounce on the matter.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 Responses have been received to the following Scrutiny Board report:
- Scrutiny Board (City Development) - Inquiry into the Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance
- 3.2 The recommendations arising from this report are shown in Appendix 1
- 3.3 There is one recommendation where there is disagreement between the Scrutiny Board and Director/Executive Member.

Recommendation Two:

To enforce the grave conditions on lawned and non-lawned areas in all cemeteries and crematoria managed by the Council in order to reduce maintenance costs.

- 3.4 The Scrutiny Board (City Development) is of the view that the large number of flowers, ornaments, fenced off sections and trinkets that families place as tributes on graves and on grass next to memorial plaques result, particularly in the growing season, in staff having to spend additional hours removing these items in order to cut the grass and then replace them afterwards. There are also difficulties in maintaining areas where families ignore the rules regarding graves, which state that "railings, footstones, kerb and border stones, chains or other structures enclosing graves or parts of graves, flags or chippings are not allowed." These prevent the larger grass cutting machines from being used. As a consequence staff have to resort to smaller machines and strimmers which are less efficient and increase costs. In addition having to manoeuvre machinery around obstacles can result in damage to grave features.
- 3.5 The Directorate has responded that implementing this recommendation in full would present difficulties on grave plots already in place and therefore do not think that a retrospective approach is practical due to difficulties associated with enforcement that are likely to be involved. The Directorate is of the view that a preferable solution would be to enforce current conditions (with a degree of sensitivity given the

nature of the service) on new graves within existing cemeteries (but not re-opened graves), cemetery extensions and new cemeteries. With respect to existing graves, enforcement would be implemented on a proportionate basis again with sensitivity to the client base.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

4.1 There are no governance implications arising from the recommendations. The Council's policy on Horticultural maintenance in cemeteries and crematoria would be changed if all recommendations were agreed.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications. The Scrutiny Board (City Development) is of the view that substantial savings in maintenance hours (1,400 hours in Lawnswood alone) can be achieved if staff didn't have to spend time removing items or use smaller machines and trimmers because of obstructions.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Scrutiny Board (City Development) has received responses to recommendations made in its final report; Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance. Two of the three recommendations have been agreed by the relevant Director in conjunction with the relevant. There is disagreement on one recommendation.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 That the Executive Board notes the responses to Scrutiny Board recommendations and pronounce on the recommendation where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member.

8.0 Background Papers

8.1 Scrutiny Board (City Development) - Final Inquiry Report - Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance.

Scrutiny Board Final Reports, Recommendations and Responses

Scrutiny Board (City Development) - Inquiry into the Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance

Recommendation One

That due to the success and benefits the Council receives from groups like the Friends of Guiseley and Hunslet Cemeteries, that these be encouraged to be established at all the Council's cemeteries and crematoria, with the work being done through the Area Committees and the Head of Parks and Countryside developing suitable information packs and leaflets on how such groups can be established and promoted in local communities.

Agreed

Recommendation Two:

To enforce the grave conditions on lawned and non-lawned areas in all cemeteries and crematoria managed by the Council in order to reduce maintenance costs.

Response

We believe that implementing this recommendation in full would present difficulties on grave plots already in place and therefore do not think that a retrospective approach is practical due to difficulties associated with enforcement and related costs (particularly legal) that are likely to be involved. We believe that a preferable solution would be to implement current conditions (with a degree of sensitivity given the nature of the service) on new graves within existing cemeteries (but not re-opened graves), cemetery extensions and new cemeteries.

Recommendation Three:

That the Head of Parks and Countryside consider the introduction of suitable stand/display boards in designated areas, in the strewing lawns in Council's cemetery and crematoria, for people to place flowers and other tributes on.

Agreed