

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 12th December, 2022

Members Present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Bower, Canavan, Flynn and Hutchinson.

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. S. McBride, City Protection Manager;
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager;
Mr. D. Bone, City Services Manager;
Mr. D. Armstrong, Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor;
Ms. C. Skilling, Senior Cemeteries Administrator;
Ms. M. Dornan, Cemeteries Administrator; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th August, 2022 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Bereavement Services - Operational Update

The City Protection Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the operation of the Bereavement Services section. He referred to the operational pressures associated with the current timeframe in regard to the submission of completed cremation forms and of the necessity to extend that to a two-day period. He reported that Bereavement Services was operating above the seasonal average for cremations, with associated pressures on staff and resources. The Members were informed that the service was experiencing an increase in the seasonal average of, both, earth burials and cremated remains burials being undertaken.

It was reported that, to facilitate the increase in cremated remains burials, staff had been exploring and had identified a number of areas within the cemetery that, whilst not suitable for full earth burials, might be suitable for the burial of cremated remains.

The City Protection Manager reminded the Members that the Corona virus provisions had been extended until March 2023, which had allowed the Bereavement Services office to deal with the administration of cremations and burials electronically. He stated that, should the provisions not be extended further, the Bereavement Services office would be required to return to a hard copy administration process. The Working Group was informed that a review of Bereavement Services was ongoing and that workstreams had been identified as part of that process.

The City Protection Manager referred to a report, which has been presented to the People and Communities Committee, on the review of Bereavement Services and which, due to time-frame scheduling and the rates setting process, had not afforded the opportunity for that report to be presented to the Working Group, prior to it being presented to the People and Communities Committee.

The Members were informed that work was continuing on the restoration work associated with the City Cemetery, including the new visitor centre, which was at an advanced stage of completion. The City Protection Manager reported that work was continuing on the dual language signage at the City Cemetery, which had been agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in June 2022. He stated that it was anticipated that a soft launch, of the visitor centre, would take place in the Spring of 2023.

The City Protection Manager reported that £10,000 of funding had been secured from the Department for Communities (DfC), Historical Environment Division, to undertake condition survey work, within the Council's historical graveyards. He stated that the aim of that important workstream was to ultimately provide public access, in the future, to those, closed, historic graveyards.

A Member asked if it might be possible for the Council to contact the relevant Permanent Secretary, with a view to seeking an extension to the Coronavirus Regulations, thereby enabling the processing of cremation documentation and appointments to continue on-line.

In response to concerns raised by the Working Group that a report on the review of Bereavement Services and charges had been presented to the People and Communities Committee, without being considered by the Working Group, the Director stated that in this instance the time-tabling schedule, for decision making, and consideration by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, had not allowed for the Working Group to consider the report, prior to it being presented to the People and Communities Committee.

After consideration, the Working Group noted the information contained within the report and agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Permanent Secretary, requesting an extension of the Coronavirus Regulations, beyond March 2023, and that the timeframe, in regard to the completion and submission of cremation forms, be extended to two working days, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

Update on Crematorium Development

The Project Sponsor provided the Working Group with an update on the development of the new crematorium at Roselawn. She confirmed that a planning application had been lodged with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) and that the majority of consultees had been received with no formal planning objections being raised. It was reported that a response was awaited from the Department for Infrastructure Roads (DfI) and that it was anticipated that the department might place planning conditions, in terms of access to the crematorium. The Project Sponsor stated that she hoped that the planning application, in respect of the crematorium development, would be approved by the spring of 2023.

The Project Sponsor stated that, following a suggestion from the Members, at the previous meeting of the Working Group, the grass roof was being progressed and would cover the administration area and central spine corridor and that this modification had required some structural adjustments to facilitate the new design feature. The Project Sponsor reported that they were exploring also the provision of solar panels and air source heat pumps. She reported that, at this stage, in the design process there was a need to confirm the name of the new facility, including the two ceremony rooms, for the development of signage. She stated that

the team would be drafting an options paper, around naming, and would bring the options paper back to the Members early next year. She referred to spaces which had been made available, within the confines of the building, for art works, both in the foyer and waiting rooms, and reported that specialist advice, in that area, had been sought with an update being provided to a future meeting of the Working Group.

A Member raised concerns that the cost of completion of the crematorium development project could exceed the original estimated cost and could result in the requirement for additional capital funding. The Member raised concerns also in regard to staff pressures in regard to both the cemeteries and cremation service, given the rise in the average number of burials and cremations taking place, currently, at Roselawn.

In response, the Director explained the issue of capital funding would be an item for discussion with the Director of Physical Programmes and the Council's internal assets board.

In response to the Member's concern in regard to the future staffing requirements for Bereavement Services, the Director reported that staffing levels would require further evaluation, including both the administration and front-line service delivery. She reported that a report, on both issues, would be brought back to a future meeting of the Working Group for its consideration and that a future service design process was being developed.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and requested that the staff of the Crematorium and Bereavement Services Section be made aware of their support by the Working Group in regard to their hard work and dedication under difficult circumstances.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 25th January, 2023 at 5.15 pm.

Chairperson