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1. Introduction

Belfast City Council, as the Burial Board for the city of Belfast, owns and manages eight cemeteries and a crematorium in the Belfast area.

We have produced this booklet to:

- help you arrange a burial in our cemeteries
- provide you with information on the restrictions and conditions that apply to purchasing exclusive rights of burial
- make sure we provide you with a consistently high level of service, and
- make you aware of your rights and responsibilities in relation to our cemeteries.

It also outlines how we will carry out our obligations under the law.

If you would like guidance on arranging a cremation or the burial of cremated remains, please refer to our separate publication called 'City of Belfast Crematorium: arranging a cremation'.

You can request a copy by contacting our Cemeteries and Central Crematorium Office or City of Belfast Crematorium. You can also download useful guidance from our website www.belfastcity.gov.uk/deaths.

2. Contact details

Cemeteries and Central Crematorium Office

Belfast City Hall
Donegall Square
Belfast
BT1 5GS
Telephone: 028 9027 0296
Email: cemeteries@belfastcity.gov.uk

Roselawn Cemetery Office

129 Ballygowan Road
Crossnacreevy
Belfast
BT5 7TZ
Telephone: 028 9044 8288
Email: cemeteries@belfastcity.gov.uk

City of Belfast Crematorium (funeral church)

127 Ballygowan Road
Crossnacreevy
Belfast
BT5 7UD
Telephone: 028 9044 8342
Email: crematorium@belfastcity.gov.uk

Belfast City Cemetery (including Glenalina section)

511 Falls Road
Belfast
BT12 6DE
Telephone: 028 9032 3112
Email: cemeteries@belfastcity.gov.uk

Dundonald Cemetery

743 Upper Newtownards Road
Dundonald
Belfast
BT16 2QY
Telephone: 028 9048 0193
Email: cemeteries@belfastcity.gov.uk

3. Opening hours

3.1. Office opening hours

Our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office at Belfast City Hall is open:

Monday to Thursday	8.30am to 5pm
Friday	8.30am to 4.30pm
Saturday	8.30am to 12.30pm
Bank holidays*	8.30am to 12.30pm

*when we are open for burials

3.2. Cemetery opening hours for burials

Roselawn Cemetery site office is open:

Monday to Thursday	8.30am to 4.30pm
Friday	8.30am to 4pm
Saturday	8.30am to 12.30pm
Bank holidays*	8.30am to 12.30pm

*when we are open for burials

Our cemetery grounds opening hours for burials are:

Monday to Thursday	9am to 3pm
Friday	9am to 2pm
Saturday	9am to 11am

Our cemeteries are not available for burials on:

- Easter Monday
- 17 March (or 18 March if 17 March falls on a Sunday)
- Spring bank holiday
- May day bank holiday
- 12 July (or 13 July if 12 July falls on a Sunday)
- August bank holiday
- Christmas day
- New year's day

Some of our older cemeteries can be opened on request. To arrange for the gates of an old cemetery to be opened, contact our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

4. Fees and payments

We review our fees each year. A copy of our current fees is included at the back of this booklet. You can request additional copies from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

We can accept payment by cash, cheque and credit or debit cards.

Some funeral directors do have an account with us and by arrangement, you can pay fees through your appointed funeral director.

5. Ownership of graves

5.1. Public graves

Public graves are only available to the council's Environmental Health Service, the Health and Social Care Trusts and other statutory agencies as required.

No monument, headstone, headblock, plinth, railing or other structure can be put on or around these graves and these graves will not be decorated, dressed or marked by planting.

5.2. Graves in proprietary ground (ground for privately-owned graves)

Proprietary ground means ground in which the graves are privately owned.

You can only buy a grave at the time of bereavement, so that you can arrange a burial. You can't buy graves in advance. When you purchase the exclusive rights of burial, you only purchase the right to bury. You do not purchase the land.

To buy a grave, you buy what are known as 'exclusive rights of burial' for a grave space. We then consider this grave to be privately owned.

When you buy the exclusive rights of burial, this means that:

- we can't open the grave without your permission, and
- no-one can be buried there without your permission.

You own the rights to bury in the grave forever. Upon your own death, these rights formally transfer to your beneficiaries (unless you have indicated something different to this in your Will).

You also own the right to erect headstones or other memorials, as long as you pay the fees set by us and as long as you do not break any of the other rules or regulations relating to cemeteries.

If the person who owns the exclusive rights of burial dies, we assume they give their permission that they can be buried in that grave.

Only one person will be registered as the owner of exclusive rights of burial for a grave. We don't permit the joint ownership of graves.

You can also inherit exclusive rights of burial, for example if someone has named you as a beneficiary in their Will.

For more information on buying graves or exclusive rights of burial, please turn to section 11.2 on 'Buying a new grave'.

5.3. Buying more than one grave

You can buy the exclusive rights of burial for up to three graves, but you can only buy graves at the time of bereavement.

On occasions, the Director of Parks and Leisure may authorise the purchase of exclusive rights of burial for up to four graves. To request this, you should write to our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

5.4. Transferring grave ownership

If you own exclusive rights of burial and you want to transfer these rights to someone else, you need to complete a Deed of Assignment, available from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

We will not transfer any exclusive rights of burial until probate has been legally processed and all transfer fees have been paid to our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

When the exclusive rights of burial transfer because the owner has died, the following conditions apply:

If the owner dies and has left a Will stating who the exclusive rights of burial should transfer to, we require a number of documents in order to process the transfer. These are:

- a copy of the Will, and
- a copy of the grave paper, and
- a request in writing from you stating that the ownership of the exclusive rights of burial should be transferred and to whom. You should send this to the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office, and it will be assessed by our Legal Services department.

If the owner dies and has left a Will, but it does not state who the exclusive rights of burial should transfer to, the rights of burial automatically transfer to the owner's beneficiaries. In this case, we do not change the name of the grave owner. The person or people inheriting the rights of burial must complete a Cemetery Indemnity Form. You can get this from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office and should return it to us at the same office.

If the owner dies and has not left a Will at all (dies intestate), the exclusive rights of burial automatically transfer to the owner's beneficiaries. All beneficiaries must complete a Cemetery Indemnity Form, available from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office, and then return it to us at the same office. The beneficiaries only need to complete one form, but they all should sign it.

When all the documents that we require have been produced, we will make sure we are satisfied that the claim to the exclusive rights of burial is valid. You will have to pay a fee and once this fee has been paid, we will then update our register. We will not grant exclusive rights of burial until the register has been updated.

6. Burials arising from an epidemic

In case of an outbreak of any pandemic or epidemic of disease in the city, the Director of Parks and Leisure may make special arrangements regulating the order of burials and the length of notice required. The Director may also make special arrangements for burials to take place outside normal operating hours.

If a certificate, signed by the Director of Public Health or Medical Director or their deputy, certifying that immediate burial of a body is essential to public health is produced at our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office, we will issue an order for the burial of that body. The normal length of notice is not required.

7. Memorials, headstones and monuments

7.1. Regulations for memorials, headstones and monuments (these regulations apply to all cemeteries)

7.1.1. Requesting permission

If you want to put up or install a memorial such as a headstone on a grave, you need to apply to us to do this. A memorial mason will normally do this on your behalf and should complete an 'Application to erect a memorial' form, available from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

All memorials must be made of stone or another non-perishable material, such as granite. Temporary hardwood memorials are allowed only for the first year after burial. Please refer to section 7.1.4 'Restrictions on size and placement of memorials' for further guidance.

You will need to supply us with a detailed plan of what you wish to have installed, including the type of materials you wish to use and the exact dimensions.

You will also need to provide us with details of any inscription you intend to use. The wording of inscriptions and use of emblems is subject to strict conditions in line with our legal duties of equality and promoting good relations. We will not authorise any inscriptions that contain any sectarian, racist or inappropriate wording or imagery.

You must not place a symbol, flag or emblem on any grave at any time.

We will consider your application and notify you when it has been approved or declined. If your application is approved, all work must be completed within one year from the date of approval. If your application is declined, we will provide you with the reasons for this. If you wish to contest this decision, you can make an appeal in writing to the Director of Parks and Leisure detailing the nature of your appeal.

If you want to add any inscriptions at a later stage, you must also seek approval for these in advance.

If we consider any wording or symbol placed on a memorial to be inappropriate, we will remove the memorial in full and charge the grave owner a fee for removing it.

7.1.2. Failing to request and receive permission

If a memorial is put in place and the grave owner has not sought permission to do this, we will remove the memorial and charge the grave owner a fee for removing it.

If an inscription is made and the grave owner has not sought permission to do this or has been refused permission to do this, we will remove the memorial in full and charge the grave owner a fee for removing it.

7.1.3. Undertaking preparation work

Once we have approved an application to place a memorial, all excavation work to lay foundations and prepare the ground will be done by council officers.

We charge a fee for undertaking this work and you must pay this in advance of us starting any work. You should pay this fee to our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

7.1.4. Restrictions on size and placement of memorials

We do not permit any memorial that restricts access to another grave.

We do not allow the erection of pillars, railings, fences, plinths, hoops or other structures to enclose graves. We will remove any item of this nature and will charge the grave owner for undertaking this work.

All stone memorials must be placed on a solid foundation. We do not permit any memorial that is greater than 114.3cm (three feet nine inches) in height, except if the memorial is a cross or a figure. For crosses and figures, the maximum height we permit is 167.6cm (five feet six inches).

The height of memorials is measured from the highest point of the ground within the boundary of the individual grave site, to the top of the memorial.

If you are erecting a temporary wooden memorial, it must be made from a hardwood. It should be placed on a solid foundation and cannot be more than 76.2cm (two feet six inches) in height.

You are only allowed to put a temporary hardwood memorial in place for a period of one year. After this time you should either remove it or replace it with a non-perishable memorial. If a temporary memorial is not removed after one year, we will remove it and charge you a fee for undertaking this work.

In our lawn cemeteries (Roselawn Cemetery and the Glenalina section of Belfast City Cemetery) all memorials taller than 50.8cm (20 inches) must only be placed at the head of the grave.

In the lawn cemeteries, we only allow you to use an area at the head of the grave measuring 91.4cm by 91.4cm (three feet by three feet) for placement of the memorial and any planting.

7.2. Responsibilities of the memorial mason or sculptor

7.2.1. Permitted working hours

Memorial masons and sculptors are only allowed to carry out work in our cemetery grounds during the following hours:

From March to September:

Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm
Saturday 8am to 12 noon

From October to February:

Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm
Saturday 8am to 12 noon

All work must be completed during these hours.

If we find that a memorial mason or sculptor is or has been working in our cemeteries outside of these hours, they will be asked to leave the cemetery. We may also consider refusing all further permission for them to undertake any other work in our cemeteries.

If you have appointed a stonemason or sculptor to undertake work for you and they are then removed from our cemeteries, you will have to appoint someone else to undertake the rest of the work.

7.2.2. Memorial placement and remedial work (re-lettering and cleaning)

Memorial masons, or anyone erecting a memorial or undertaking remedial work, must remove all debris that remains after a memorial is put in place. This must be done immediately, at their own expense and to the satisfaction of the cemetery manager.

They must also make good any damage caused to turf, shrubbery, adjacent graves, monuments or walkways. This must also be done immediately, at their own expense and to the satisfaction of the cemetery manager.

7.2.3. Grave marking

The section and number of the grave must be carved or marked in clear characters on the base of the memorial, monument or headstone.

7.2.4. Monumental Register

All memorial masons and sculptors must report to the cemetery office and sign the Monumental Register **before** proceeding to do any work in our cemeteries.

If the Monumental Register is not signed, we may ask the memorial mason or sculptor to leave the cemetery. If a memorial mason continues to fail to sign the Monumental Register, we may also consider refusing all further permission to undertake work in our cemeteries.

7.3. Responsibilities of the grave owner

As a grave owner, it is your responsibility to ensure that your grave, and any memorial on it, is properly maintained.

We regularly inspect memorials in our cemeteries to make sure they are safe. There are more details on our inspection programme in section 7.4 'Memorial safety inspection programme'.

Please let us know if your contact details have changed. Without your correct details, we can't let you know if something happens to your grave or memorial.

7.3.1. Planting and maintenance of graves

Other than bedding plants or bulbs, you are not permitted to plant anything on a grave. This includes shrubs, trees, roses and other plants. We will remove any excess planting.

In the lawn cemeteries (Roselawn Cemetery and the Glenalina section of Belfast City Cemetery), you can plant bedding plants and bulbs in an area at the head of the grave measuring 91.4cm by 91.4cm (three feet by three feet). This area includes the memorial at the head of the grave. Any plants, vases or bowls that you place outside of this area may be damaged by our grave maintenance equipment. We will not accept responsibility for any damage caused.

We can plant bedding plants on graves for you and we charge a fee for this service. To arrange planting, please contact the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

When you are tending to a grave, please keep waste to a minimum and immediately clear away any waste when you are finished. Do not allow waste to fall onto any surrounding graves and do not disturb any grave, floral arrangements or monuments belonging to any surrounding graves.

Waste bins are located in all our grave sections and should be used for wreaths and papers. You should not use these bins for household waste or heavy items.

If you leave waste behind, either on or nearby a grave you are tending to, we may charge the registered owner of the grave for the expense of removing this waste.

7.4. Memorial safety inspection programme

We are committed to making sure that our cemeteries are a safe place to visit and work in.

As part of our memorial safety inspection programme, we test the safety of all memorials in our cemeteries. The work is the result of a directive issued by the Health and Safety Executive, the organisation responsible for cemetery safety in the UK.

It is the grave owner's responsibility to make sure their memorials are properly maintained.

If your memorial or headstone does not meet health and safety standards, we will attach a notice to it and we will try to contact you so that you can arrange to have it repaired. We will only lay the memorial or headstone flat if it presents an immediate health and safety risk.

If you do not arrange for repairs to be carried out within six weeks, we will repair the memorial and will charge the grave owner a fee for completing this work.

In some circumstances, we may not be able to contact a grave owner, for example:

- if the grave owner has died
- if the exclusive rights of burial have not been transferred, or
- if the owner has changed address and hasn't notified us.

If we can't contact the grave owner, the fees will remain on record to be recovered at a later stage.

All our staff are aware of the sensitivities surrounding graves and memorials and aim to carry

out their work as quickly and carefully as possible.

If you are a grave owner and would like to be present when your grave is tested to make sure it is safe, you can make an appointment by calling the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office on 028 9027 0296.

You can find out more about our memorial safety inspection programme and our progress on our website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/memorialsafety.

7.5. Vaults

It is possible for any owner of exclusive rights of burial to have the grave bricked so as to form a vault. Permission to build a new vault will be at the discretion of the Director of Parks and Leisure. To request a new vault, you should contact the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

Where permission to form a vault is granted, we will carry out any necessary excavation and bricking and will charge you for this service. Only council officers can carry out this work, you can't appoint someone else to do this.

For each burial in a vault, we will again carry out the necessary additional brickwork and supply the slabs of stone. And we will charge you for this service.

You must pay all vault fees in advance.

8. Exhumation

Other than the circumstances provided for by these regulations in section 8.1 'Requesting an exhumation' below:

- no grave will be opened
- no body or the remains of any body will be removed from a grave, and
- no body or the remains of any body will be transferred from one place of burial to another or exhumed, except where the law permits this.

8.1. Requesting an exhumation

For us to undertake an exhumation in the Belfast City Council area, you will require:

- agreement from the council's Parks and Leisure Committee, and
- approval from the Director of Public Health or Medical Director, and
- approval from the Department of the Environment (DoE).

To apply for an exhumation, make your request in writing to our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office. We will then issue you with an Application for Exhumation form, which we obtain from the Department of the Environment. Complete the form and return it to us at our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

The Director of Parks and Leisure will then make a report to the council's Parks and Leisure Committee. If the Committee agrees to allow your application for exhumation to be processed, we will seek approval from the Director of Public Health or Medical Director.

If approval is granted, we will then submit your application to the local government department of the DoE. Once the DoE has made a decision, they will inform us and the

Director of Public Health or Medical Director. We will then contact you to notify you of the outcome of your application.

If your application for an exhumation is approved, this approval is only granted for six months. If you have not arranged the exhumation within six months, you will have to re-apply.

By law, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is notified if we are carrying out an exhumation. We also notify our Director of Health and Environmental Services.

We charge a fee for exhumations. This fee does not include the costs of a new coffin, removal by a funeral director, or the cost of re-burial.

9. Acceptable conduct in our cemeteries

Please be respectful to those who are visiting graves and do not disturb anyone else who is visiting the cemetery.

All visitors to our cemeteries must conduct themselves in a quiet and orderly manner at all times. If you do not abide by the following rules, or do not behave in an appropriate manner, we may ask you to leave the cemetery and prohibit your return.

You must not be in our cemeteries outside of our opening hours.

Do not enter or leave a cemetery by any way, other than the entrance gates.

All children must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

No dogs are allowed in our cemeteries, except for guide dogs and hearing dogs.

Please protect the natural environment in our cemeteries. Do not disturb any wildlife, or natural habitats.

Do not walk over any grave, plants or shrubs, or cause any destruction of any plant or tree.

Do not interfere with any monument, memorial, tomb or gravestone.

Do not place any notice or advertising on any of our buildings, memorials, monuments, walls or fences without the permission of the cemetery manager and do not deface any property located within the cemetery.

We do not allow any games or sports within our cemeteries.

We don't allow any fishing or shooting. Firearms may only be discharged within the cemeteries during a military or police funeral.

10. Facilities and services

10.1. Access and disabled facilities

Belfast City Cemetery and Glenalina section: toilets (office hours only, no push button doors). Good network of surfaced paths, some sloping ground.

Dundonald Cemetery: access to many of the graves is along very narrow uneven grass paths, so you should take extreme care. The layout of the office is not suitable for wheelchairs.

Roselawn Cemetery: disabled parking bays, ramps, public rooms on one level, toilets (office hours only), tactile paving, push button doors, low-level enquiries counter, wheelchair facilities, radio microphone and loop system in funeral church. Access to graves in the older sections and to many of the memorial trees is restricted.

10.2. Annual baby service of remembrance

Any parents who have lost a baby can attend our annual baby service of remembrance. The service is held at the funeral church in the City of Belfast Crematorium at Roselawn Cemetery. The service usually falls on the second Sunday in September, but please ring 028 9044 8342 to confirm the service date and time.

10.3. Books of Remembrance

We hold Books of Remembrance at the City of Belfast Crematorium in Roselawn Cemetery. The Books of Remembrance are displayed in a purpose-built cabinet in the remembrance room and provide a beautiful and dignified memorial for loved ones.

There are four volumes, one for each quarter of the year. The Book of Remembrance has a separate page for each day. We turn the pages daily so that a lasting record appears at each anniversary according to the date of death. You can view other entries during normal opening hours, providing the volume has not been sent away for inscription.

The books are hand-made with fine quality paper. Calligraphy can be either blue or black and initial lettering is done in gold.

You can arrange an entry in the Book of Remembrance, consisting of lines of text, an image, motif, badge, coat of arms or a combination of these. You can enter a minimum of two lines and a maximum of eight. Images can accompany an inscription of five lines or eight lines only.

Contact the City of Belfast Crematorium to arrange an entry. If you wish the entry to appear on time for the first anniversary of a person's death, you must arrange the entry no later than seven months after the date of the person's death.

The wording of entries in the book and the use of emblems is subject to strict conditions in line with our legal duties of equality and promoting good relations. We will not authorise any entries that contain any sectarian, racist or inappropriate wording or imagery.

We can provide copies of your inscription as it appears in the Book of Remembrance as a keep-sake, or for you to send to those who can't easily visit the crematorium to see the original entry. We supply these on white memorial cards. You can place your order for memorial cards at the City of Belfast Crematorium.

10.4. Cardboard coffins

Cardboard coffins are becoming an increasingly popular choice for those wishing to protect the environment by not using traditional woods. These coffins are inexpensive, fully degradable and are suitable for both burials and cremations. You can purchase cardboard coffins or request further information from the City of Belfast Crematorium.

10.5. Car parking

We permit parking on most roads within our cemeteries. Where parking is not allowed, we will mark this clearly. There is a five miles per hour speed limit throughout all cemeteries.

10.6. Catering facilities

Reflections Coffee Shop is able to offer refreshments for relatives and friends after a burial in Roselawn Cemetery or a cremation at the City of Belfast Crematorium.

The coffee shop opening hours are:

Monday to Thursday	9am to 3.30pm
Friday	9am to 2.30pm
Saturday	9am to 12noon
Sunday	Closed

Pre-booking is essential. For prices, reservations and special menu requests, please contact the City of Belfast Crematorium.

The coffee shop is also open to visitors to Roselawn Cemetery.

10.7. Funeral church hire

The funeral church at the City of Belfast Crematorium is available to hire for a funeral service prior to a burial in the adjoining Roselawn Cemetery. The church is non-denominational and we can facilitate services for all religious and non-religious beliefs.

To request a service in the funeral church, please contact our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

10.8. Grave planting services

If you own a grave in one of our cemeteries, we can arrange to plant bedding plants on the grave on your behalf. We charge a fee for this service.

To request planting on a grave, please contact our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

10.9. Memorial seat scheme

You can purchase memorial seats in Dundonald Cemetery (limited availability), Roselawn Cemetery and in the garden of remembrance at the City of Belfast Crematorium.

Seats are made of galvanised metal and you can view a sample at the City of Belfast Crematorium. You cannot supply your own seat. Our charges include the cost of the seat, foundations where required, installation and a plaque.

To request a memorial seat, you should write to the relevant Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office and state your preferred location for the seat.

Please make sure that the family of the deceased and the deceased's next of kin are fully informed of all applications to install a memorial seat. This helps avoid duplicate applications, differing preferred locations and possible disputes.

The cemetery manager will let you know the outcome of your application. It is not always possible for us to permit the locations applied for and the cemetery manager's decision is final.

Once your application is approved, you need to pay the fee and supply us with the inscription for the plaque. We need to approve inscriptions on plaques in the same way as inscription on headstones. Please read section 7.1.1 on 'Requesting permission' for the regulations applying to inscriptions.

We will let you know when the inscription has been approved and when the seat is in place. You only own the seat, not the area under or around it.

You are not permitted to place personal items such as toys, ornaments, balloons, flowers or plant bowls on or around a memorial seat. We will remove any item that is not permitted.

If we consider any memorial seat to present a health and safety risk, we will remove the seat. If a memorial seat is vandalised or damaged, you are responsible for repairing it. We do not accept any liability for memorial seats damaged through vandalism or by a member of the public.

If we accidentally damage a seat with equipment or a council vehicle, we will arrange for the seat to be repaired (or replaced if it cannot be repaired at a reasonable cost).

10.10. Public toilets

Public toilets are available at Belfast City Cemetery, Dundonald Cemetery and Roselawn Cemetery for your convenience.

10.11. Reflections coffee shop

See catering facilities.

10.12. Roselawn bus service

At certain times of the year, we run a free bus service for older people travelling to and from the City of Belfast Crematorium and Roselawn Cemetery.

The bus collects passengers from a number of pick-up points in the city and drops passengers off at their family grave or memorial tree in Roselawn Cemetery.

After the bus has returned to pick passengers up, it stops at the City of Belfast Crematorium, where toilet facilities and refreshments are available.

You can find out more about the free bus service on our website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/crematorium or telephone 028 9027 0296 to book a place.

11. How to arrange a burial

11.1. Registering the death

Before you can arrange a person's burial, you must have registered their death with the Registrar. By law, all deaths occurring in Northern Ireland must be registered in this way and in Northern Ireland.

You can either register a death in the district where the person lived, or in the district where they died. You should register a death as soon as possible to allow funeral arrangements to be made, and no later than five days after the date of death unless the death has been referred to the Coroner.

In Belfast, our Registrar's Office is located at Belfast City Hall, Donegall Square, Belfast, BT1 5GS. You do not need an appointment and you can contact this office for further guidance by telephoning 028 9027 0274.

You will need to bring with you a medical certificate of cause of death. This is issued by a doctor who treated the deceased person within the 28 days before to their death.

If the deceased person was not seen by a doctor within the 28 days, or if the death was not caused by natural illness, it is referred to the Coroner. In this case the Registrar or a funeral director will provide you with guidance. If a death is referred to the Coroner, you should not make any funeral arrangements until you have been given consent to do this by the Coroner.

Once you have registered the death, the Registrar's Office will give you (among other documents) a form known as a GRO 21. This form allows a burial or cremation to take place.

11.2. Buying a new grave (obtaining exclusive rights of burial)

If you already own the exclusive rights to burial, or the person that owns the rights to burial has died, this section does not apply to you and you should turn to section 11.3 on 'Applying to open a grave for burial'.

Roselawn Cemetery is currently the only area in Belfast where you can buy a new grave site.

You can only buy a new grave at the time of bereavement, you can't buy graves in advance. To buy a new grave, you need to purchase exclusive rights of burial. Please refer to section 5 'Ownership of graves' for further information on exclusive rights of burial.

If you want to buy the exclusive right of burial for a new private grave, you need to complete a New Grave Application Form. You can get a copy of this form from our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

A funeral director or a family representative can complete this form on your behalf. But it is better if you complete this yourself, so that you can make sure all the details are correct.

When you sign this form it means that you, and your beneficiaries, are agreeing to take all responsibility for maintaining the grave site. It also means that you agree to conform to all our rules and regulations relating to cemeteries.

11.2.1. Grant of exclusive rights of burial (grave paper, grave lease or grave deed)

Once you have paid the required fee for the exclusive right of burial, we will issue you with a Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial, signed by the Director of Parks and Leisure and our Bereavement Administration Manager. This grant is normally referred to as the 'grave paper'.

You should always keep the grave paper in a safe place. You will need it if a burial is to take place in the grave.

It normally takes between six and eight weeks after a burial for us to issue a grave paper. For a new grave, you don't need to present the grave paper to arrange a burial. We will be aware that we are processing your application.

When we issue you with a grave paper, we will record in a register:

- the date we issued you with the grave paper
- your name and address
- the amount you paid, and
- the grave number.

You, or your beneficiaries, can ask to see this register at all reasonable times, by visiting our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

As the owner of a grave, you are responsible for notifying us if you change your address. If anything happens to the grave or memorial and we do not have your correct contact details, we will be unable to let you know.

If there is a problem with the grave and we cannot contact you, we will take the necessary actions to deal with the problem. If there is a fee for any of this work, you will still be responsible for paying this fee.

11.2.2. Replacing lost grave papers

If you lose a grave paper and need a replacement, and you are the grave owner, you must:

- complete a Duplicate Grant Application form stating that you have lost the grave papers, and
- provide us with some details about yourself and the relevant grave.

If you lose a grave paper and need a replacement, and you are not the grave owner but are applying for a replacement on the owner's behalf because the owner cannot do this for themselves, you must:

- complete a Duplicate Grant application form stating that you have lost the grave papers
- provide us with some details about yourself and the relevant grave
- complete a Cemetery Indemnity Form, and
- provide us with proof of your identification, such as a passport or driving licence.

You can download all of these forms from our website. You must present all documentation to us in person at our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

If you lose a grave paper and need a replacement, but the grave owner has died, please refer to the previous section (5.4) on transferring grave ownership.

You will have to pay a fee for replacement grave papers. You should pay this at our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office during normal opening hours.

If you find the original grave papers that were lost, the duplicate grave papers are no longer valid and we will keep a record of this. We will also ask you to return the duplicate papers to us.

11.3. Applying to open a grave for burial

Once you have the exclusive rights of burial, you may apply to arrange a burial.

To arrange a burial, you (or someone acting on your behalf, normally a funeral director) can telephone our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office to make the arrangements. You must then produce the grave paper or the Deed of Assignment in person at the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

If a person who owns a grave dies, and you wish to arrange for them to be buried in their own grave, you do not need to produce the grave paper.

To apply to arrange a burial in a privately-owned grave, you should provide us with a number of details about the person who is to be buried:

- full name
- age and sex
- marital status (civil state) and occupation
- religious persuasion
- place, date and cause of death, and
- last place of residence.

We also need you to provide some additional details, including:

- the name and address of the person who will manage the burial (normally a funeral director), and
- the time that the funeral will arrive at our cemetery
- the grave section and number. This will be printed on the grave paper. For new grave sites, we will tell you the number of the grave when you apply.

For all burials, you must submit a statutory registration certificate of the Registrar of Births and Deaths. This is known as form GRO21 and is the form that you will have received when you registered the death at a local council's registration office for births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.

If you don't have the form GRO21, you must produce either a medical certificate (if the death is non-notifiable), or a Coroner's Order for Burial.

If you don't produce at least one of these forms, we cannot permit a burial.

11.4. Notice periods

If you wish to arrange a burial, you need to give us at least the following periods of notice at our Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office. Saturdays and Sundays do not count for the purposes of these periods.

Type of burial	Your preferred time for the burial	Amount of notice we require
Re-opening of an existing grave	Any day we are open for burials (there are some days our cemeteries are open to visitors only)	At least 48 hours notice. Less than 48 hours notice is only allowed by agreement with the cemetery manager.
Burials in new graves	Monday at or before 3pm	Not later than 3.30pm on the Friday before
	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday	At least 24 hours notice
	Saturday at or before 11am	At least 24 hours notice
Burials in a bricked grave or vault	Monday at or before 3pm	Not later than 12noon on the preceding Friday
	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday	At least 48 hours notice
	Saturday at or before 11am	At least 48 hours notice

Please note that even when you have given the above notice, we may not be able to grant you the requested burial time. This could be due to ground conditions that make digging graves more difficult, because of obstacles such as trees near to the grave or during peak periods where there are no more burial times available.

If we cannot grant you the burial time that you would like, we will contact you to discuss alternative available times.

11.5. Testing graves for opening

When we receive an application to open a grave, the cemetery manager's decision is final.

Whether or not a burial can take place depends on:

- all regulations being met
- ground conditions, and
- how deep the coffin is to be placed below the surface of the ground.

If the cemetery manager has any doubt as to whether the burial can take place, you can pay a fee in advance and the grave will be opened for testing. Fees can be paid at the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office.

You will also need to produce the grave paper before we will carry out the test.

Once the grave has been tested, we will notify you of the outcome.

If we find that the burial cannot go ahead, or if the grave has only been opened to determine if a burial can take place at some point in the future, we will retain the fee to cover the cost of the work.

If you are unable to bury in an existing grave, your options are to:

- purchase a new grave, or
- choose to opt for cremation.

You can bury cremated remains in a grave, even if the grave is full.

If the burial can go ahead, we will deduct the fee from the amount you will owe for the burial.

11.6. Depth and direction of graves

The depth of a new grave is 274cm (nine feet), as long as the ground conditions permit.

By law, we must leave a depth of at least 70cm measured from the upper surface of the coffin to the surface of the ground.

Usually, four burials are possible in one standard grave site before it is full. You can continue to bury cremated remains in a grave site, even when the grave is full.

We have a number of graves within Roselawn cemetery that are reserved for Muslim burials, so that Muslims may arrange burials in accordance with their faith. We prepare these graves so that the body can rest on its right side. The direction of these graves points towards Mecca.

11.7. Receiving the burial order

If you are using a funeral director, we can charge them and you will reimburse them.

Once we receive your application for a burial along with the fees you have to pay, and also any outstanding payments due in respect of the grave, we will make out an order for the opening of the grave. This is known as the burial order and we will complete it in triplicate (three copies). It contains all of the information that you provided when you applied to register the burial.

We will:

- keep the first copy at the Cemeteries and Crematorium Central Office
- send the second copy to the appropriate cemetery
- give the third copy of this order to the person making the application (usually this is either the person arranging the funeral, or the appointed funeral director). We will only give out this copy when all documentation has been produced.

The third copy of the burial order, along with the GRO21 or the Coroner's Order for Burial, must be presented to the cemetery manager immediately on the arrival of the funeral. If you don't have the GRO21 or the Coroner's Order for Burial and only have a medical certificate, we will note this. We will also inform the cemetery site office so that the burial can go ahead.

On arrival at the cemetery, the funeral director or family representative must present the burial order to the cemetery site office. We will give them directions to the grave and will issue them with a funeral conductor's card. They should give the funeral conductor's card to the gravedigger on arrival at the grave site. The gravedigger will check that they have arrived at the correct grave and if so, the burial will take place.

11.8. Signing the Register of Burials

Immediately after a burial, the person managing the burial (normally the funeral director) needs to attend the site office at the cemetery to sign the Register of Burials. This is required by law.

12. Glossary of terms

Assigns	see 'Beneficiaries'.
Beneficiaries	(also known as heirs and assigns) these are the people who benefit from another person's Will.
Burial order	a certificate issued by us, stating that a grave can be opened for a burial.
Cemeteries and crematorium central office	our main administrative office for bereavement services.
Cemetery	means the 'active' burial grounds that we provide at Belfast City Cemetery and Glenalina section, Dundonald Cemetery, Roselawn Cemetery and the historical cemeteries that we manage at Balmoral Cemetery, Clifton Street Graveyard, Friar's Bush Graveyard, Knock Burial Ground and Shankill Graveyard.
Cemetery indemnity form	a form that we prepare when someone does not have a copy of the original grave papers and the exclusive rights of burial are transferring to the next of kin or next generation.
Coroner's order for burial	a certificate issued by the Coroner, stating that a body can legally be buried.
Deed of assignment	a form that is completed by someone who wants to pass a grave on to someone else (transfer the exclusive rights of burial).
Exclusive rights of burial	when you buy a grave, you are not actually purchasing the land. What you buy is the right to bury someone in that grave space. This is known as the 'exclusive rights of burial'. Once you have bought these rights, you own the rights forever.
Exhumation	when we dig down into the ground to remove a body from its burial place, this is called exhumation. You have to apply to arrange an exhumation and a number of organisations are involved in the process.
Funeral conductor's card	this card is checked by the gravedigger to verify that the burial will take place in the correct grave.
Grant of exclusive rights of burial	(also known as the grave paper, grave deeds or grave lease) this is the certificate that you get when you purchase the exclusive rights of burial.
Grave paper	see 'Grant of exclusive rights of burial'.
GRO21	the form that the Registrar will give you when you register a death. This form allows a burial or cremation to take place.
Heirs	see 'Beneficiaries'.
Intestate	when someone dies any they haven't left a Will, they have died 'intestate'.
Memorial mason	refers to a memorial mason, stonemason, sculptor or other craftsman who specialises in working with stone.
Probate	this is the certificate that gives a person the legal authority to deal with the affairs of someone who has died.

Proprietary ground	ground that is marked out and used for privately-owned grave sites. Once the exclusive rights of burial are bought from us, we consider the grave to be privately owned. The owner doesn't buy the piece of land, only the right to bury.
Public ground	ground that is used for public graves or mass graves.
Registrar	the person that is employed by us to make sure that all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships that happen within the Belfast City Council area are registered within the legal time limits.
Vault	an underground burial chamber that has bricked or concreted walls and is closed with a slab of stone.
Will	a legal document that a person writes to define who they want to deal with their affairs and receive their estate (all their land and possessions) after they die.

13. About our regulations

All our previous rules remain in force, and are binding on all owners of the exclusive rights of burial in our cemeteries and all other people, until we alter these rules.

These Rules are to be interpreted in accordance with the Interpretation (Northern Ireland) Act 1954.

For the purposes of these rules "we", "us" or "the council" means Belfast City Council.

The Rules for the Regulations of the Belfast Cemeteries made on the 3rd day of January 1921, 1st day of February 1927 and 1st day of December 1953 are replaced by these regulations and guidance.

Your feedback

How useful did you find this publication? If you have any comments or suggestions on how we could improve this publication, send us your feedback by emailing cemeteries@belfastcity.gov.uk or writing to the Lead Communicator, Parks and Leisure Department, 5th Floor The Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BP.

We will provide this publication in alternative formats on request.

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