



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Future options for displaying cemeteries records on-line
Date:	14 October 2010
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Margaret Tomlinson, Bereavement & Administration Manager, Parks Ruth Cairns, Senior IS Consultant, ISB

Purpose

To advise Members of the progress being made regarding digitisation of cemeteries records and to bring forward proposals for making these records available on-line.

Relevant Background Information

The Parks and Leisure Committee will recall that in 2006 a contract was awarded for the scanning of Council-owned cemetery records and keying of cemetery data into electronic format. This project, which encompassed the scanning of all burial/cremation orders, grave leases records and a data capture exercise, was completed in March 2010. This provides the Council with a significant information asset.

The next stage of the project entails the provision of a web site which will enable members of the public to search the Council's burial records at anytime.

Research has been done, in particular, looking at what other Councils have done. Some further information and screen shots illustrating the approach taken in Wakefield Council, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, St Helen's, Warrington Borough Council and Manchester City Council can be found in Appendix 1.

Key Issues

It is recommended that this project is considered over 3 phases using the following approach:

Phase 1

In line with the EU Services Directive making information accessible to the public as soon as possible.

Steps involved:

- Importing of records into Cemetery system
- Creation of a search facility for these records
- Improving customer service by making this information available to the public via the Councils website
- Information displayed as a summary of selected fields in tubular form
- Record verification via customer-enabled correction facility
- Market testing of options to charge for the viewing/printing of burial order images.

Issues:

Certain fields are subject to data protection legislation. Data protection legislation applies to the data relating to living individuals. However there is information on the burial orders e.g. grave owner details that could be 'live data'.

As a result of meetings with the Councils' Records Officer and with Legal Services it has been agreed that certain fields should not be shown. The specific fields are detailed in Appendix 2.

The information that has been recorded is currently undergoing an accuracy check to reduce factual error. It is proposed that the information is displayed in its current format with the option to submit corrections should any spelling mistakes or other errors be noticed by users.

This phase will be completed by January 2011 and will run as a pilot for 3 months to gauge public interest in the records.

Phase 2

Facility for the public to view and print burial records, these are the digital images of actual records.

It is anticipated that this phase would be progressed with Committee approval with a review of Phase 1 based on take up of the service and assessment of demand.

Steps involved:

- Update web pages to allow the public to view and print burial records
- Redacting (blinking) of record information which is protected by the Data Protection Act and Legal perspective
- Option to create charging to recover redacting costs or potential income stream

Issues:

- Images could only be viewed when certain parameters e.g. grave owner name/grave owner address have been supplied.
- It is essential that owner details are known before a burial can be confirmed so that an individual can be buried in the right place. These details are also requested in the sensitive situations that require a grave to be re-opened, and so it is important that only the relevant people should have this information to avoid staff disclosing incorrect information to families.

Potential Phase 3

A complete historical picture of burial records for Belfast

- Investigation regarding potential collaboration with Milltown Cemetery
- Investigation regarding funding

This phase would be an opportunity to explore the possibility of completing the historical picture for the city and increase the value of our city heritage. It is proposed that this phase would include a series of meetings to assist Milltown with finding the income that they require to carry out a scanning and data capture exercise similar to the one that we have completed. It is anticipated that this would be a local project that may be able to benefit from heritage and lottery funding and that systems developed for Belfast City Council could be extended to allow access to this information.

The following issues have been considered and will need to be reviewed in the design of the full service:

- Data protection legislation
- Legal issues
- Consultation with other public sector organisations
- Options to charge for information

Resource Implications

Financial

It is planned that Phase 1 will be completed by January 2011 developed using internal resources in ISB.

Human Resources

ISB Project Team with input from Cemeteries office

Asset and Other Implications

None.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to approve the recommendation that Phase 1 is implemented and that market research is undertaken.

Decision Tracking

A further report will be submitted to Committee next April with particular reference to Phases 2 and 3 including costs.

Key to Abbreviations

None.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Screen Shot Appendix 2 – Data to be displayed.
--