



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Future options for displaying cemeteries records on-line
<b>Date:</b>	9 June 2011
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<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
	<p>In October 2010 committee approved a phased approach to making cemeteries records available on-line. Phase 1 was to make basic information accessible to the public as soon as possible. Phase 2 was to examine the potential of providing additional information on-line and the possibility of charging for the service and Phase 3 was to explore the historical value of extending cemeteries records to other cemeteries in the city such as Milltown.</p> <p>Phase 1 was completed in January 2011 providing a free internet service to the public for retrieval of burial records. The burial search has proved to be very successful with it being the most visited section of the council website for the month of March. Visitors to the site were in the region of 1,000 per day during the first month although this has now dropped to approx 450 per day. Many of the visitors are new visitors to the council website and have originated from 21 different countries outside of the UK and Ireland with USA, Canada and Australia bringing the highest rate of traffic.</p> <p>An on-line feedback form was used to establish what people thought about the site and also to gain insight in to what other information would be useful.</p> <p>The feedback concluded that 99% would recommend the burial search service and 87% thought it was good or excellent. Most of the additional comments were expressing thanks or congratulations on an excellent resource. The following requests were the most popular requests for</p>

	<p>additional information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details of who else is in the grave - 59%</li> <li>• Image of the Burial record – 32%</li> <li>• Location/Map – 21%</li> <li>• Occupation – 20%</li> <li>• Cause of Death – 8%.</li> </ul> <p>Phase 2 will take on board the above feedback and provide an improved free search facility by plot number and provide details on who is in the grave. The improvements will also offer the facility to view and print images of the burial records, giving access to cause of death and occupation details where available. This information is available as a result of significant investment by the council to preserve the public record through digitisation of cemeteries' records. It is proposed that this additional service is available at a charge to the public.</p> <p>The introduction of the search facility has increased public interest and increased demand for searches which has created significant additional work for the cemeteries office staff and staff at each of the cemeteries. For example, the time taken searching for specific name(s), can vary between ten minutes and two hours depending on the complexity of the search and the information provided at the outset. The queries also include staff members being asked to physically locate and show the grave to the applicant.</p> <p>As a result of this additional work a new charge for staff time is also being suggested. The charge would be in line with other councils in Northern Ireland.</p>
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<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<p><u>Phase 2 Proposals</u></p> <p>Phase 2 will include the need to redact or edit information before publication to comply with data protection legislation as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update of the existing on-line search to show all deceased buried within each grave plot</li> <li>• All images prior to 1946 will be made available with no redaction</li> <li>• For images after 1946 the following fields will be redacted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- grave owner</li> <li>- grant number</li> <li>- grant date</li> <li>- applicant signature.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There will be a separate exercise of checking the hand written notes on each record. It is estimated that this will take one person two months. Any details regarding the grave owner will be redacted individually. It is estimated this could take one person up to two years to complete depending on the number of records requiring adjustment.</li> </ul>

Phase 2 will be implemented in stages, with non redacted images made available first and the redacted images being made available in batches of 10 years as completed.

#### Charging for access to images on-line

There are two charging options which could be considered; purchase of credits or a monthly/yearly subscription. Research has shown that the most common charging method is through the purchase of credits.

It is recommended that a charging mechanism is implemented as a trial for 6/12 months based on the model used by Manchester City Council.

If the trial is successful then consideration should be given to the introduction of an option for payment by subscription fee. While a subscription fee may discourage some users it would be beneficial to offer as a second type of charging for historical/genealogical organisations and it could provide an up front income.

Manchester City Council's charging model involves payment for a number of searches:

- 4 credits for £12
- 10 credits for £25
- 25 credits for £50.

The option of purchasing 2 credits for £6 could also be considered.

The proposal to charge is supported by consultation with on-line users of the current site. Thirty two percent of the people who completed the on-line feedback form said they would like to see the image. There is however no guarantee that all of these people would be prepared to pay. Manchester City Council generates in the region of £1,000 to £1,200 per month income and whilst there is no doubt that there is great interest in Irish genealogy it is not possible to estimate what income might be generated from this service.

It is recommended that a charging mechanism is implemented as a trial for six months followed by a review. During the pilot feedback will be sought from users to inform the review. If the trial is successful then committee can consider making the service permanent and introducing the option of payment by subscription fee.

#### Charging for staff time

The creation of the on-line burial search has been very popular, generated positive feedback and compliments and increased the number of visitors to the cemeteries. However it has also created significant additional work for the cemeteries office staff and staff at each of the cemeteries. This is through an increase in the volume of phone calls, emails and visitors to cemeteries looking for additional information and in particular details of the burial record.

	<p>A benchmarking exercise shows that other Northern Ireland councils charge a fee between £16 and £37 per search with one council charging £37.10 for residents and £77.25 for non residents.</p> <p>To cover the additional costs not currently included in the revenue estimates it is recommended that a charge is introduced for detailed or multiple searches by staff in the cemetery office and at each of the cemeteries.</p> <p>It is therefore proposed that a fee of £15 per search be implemented as a trial for six months and reviewed in line with the on-line records pilot.</p> <p><u>Time Scale</u> It is proposed that development of the first stage of phase 2 to enhance the information available on-line is completed by September 2011 and that charging for images and staff searches starts from this point. A review will be carried out in May 2012 with findings and recommendations being reported to Committee in June 2012.</p> <p><u>Legal Advice</u> Legal Services were consulted about the proposed developments and recommendations with regard to Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.</p>
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<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p><u>Financial</u> Phase 2 will be delivered using internal resources in ISB and the cemeteries office.</p> <p>Redaction software will be procured at a cost of approx £8,000 which is within current budgets.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> ISB Project Team and staff from Cemeteries office</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> None.</p>

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
	None.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	Committee is asked to approve the recommendation that Phase 2 is implemented and the proposed charging structure introduced.

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	A progress report will be made to committee in December 2011.
<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	ISB – Information Services Belfast
<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None.