



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Services Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Holding Over of Cremations at City of Belfast Crematorium
<b>Date:</b>	15 November 2012
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director Parks and Leisure Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sharon McCloy, Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>Work will begin this month at the City of Belfast Crematorium to replace the existing four cremators with three new ones to include mercury abatement filtration equipment. The entire programme of installation is expected to last until April 2013. Part of the refurbishment work will include the installation of a refrigerated storage unit which can hold up to three coffins. This unit will be used to hold over coffins in the event of the breakdown of one of the cremators, or to follow best practice and carry out the cremation first thing next morning in the event of a small number of cremations being booked in that afternoon.</p> <p>The practice of holding over cremations is not unlawful and has been followed throughout England, Scotland and Wales for a number of years. At a meeting on 17 June 2011 facilitated by the Ministry of Justice, the subject of crematoria holding over cremations was discussed by representatives of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities, the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, the Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries and the Cremation Society of Great Britain.</p> <p>At the meeting the majority of stakeholder organisations agreed in principle that the practice of holding over is acceptable in some circumstances, but that there should be a single set of guidelines for it.</p> <p>Subsequently the stakeholder organisations met and agreed a set of Guiding Principles which is attached at Appendix 1.</p>

	<p>In the 52 year history of the City of Belfast Crematorium a procedure whereby cremations could be held over until the next day. If a break down occurred one of the other three cremators was used, or in periods of low demand a cremator was still used despite the very high cost of preheating, running it on pre-heat idle mode and using it for one cremation. In periods of high demand the staff worked late at night to ensure that all cremations were completed on the day in which they were received from the funeral church. This led to inefficient use of cremators and high overtime costs.</p>
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<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<p>The key issue is ensuring proper use of this new operating procedure at the City of Belfast Crematorium which must adhere to the Guiding Principles. By holding over cremations on the afternoons of very low numbers rather than incurring the high operating cost of starting up and running one cremator, or incurring increasing overtime, the cremation can take place first thing next morning. This will reduce the operating costs at the crematorium and lead to efficiency savings.</p> <p>For example if there is a cremation at 2pm and another one at 5pm, it would be prudent to carry out the cremation of these two coffins on different days rather than run a cremator on pre-heat idle mode after the 2pm cremation is finished for 1-2 hours and start it up again at 5pm. This is not using a cremator in an efficient way. Additionally the cremation could take longer than the staff finishing time of 7.30pm in which case overtime costs would be incurred. The cremator could be shut down after the 2pm cremation is complete and the 5pm coffin placed into the refrigerated storage unit until the next morning – family wishes permitting.</p> <p>Since 1 October 2012, 33 additional cremation times were introduced meaning that 96 cremation times are now available. The staff are on a shift pattern finishing at 7.30pm. In the rare event of a low number of afternoon cremations being booked, the staff could place the last coffin of the day into the holding over unit and the cremation could be carried out first thing next morning. This would eliminate the need for staff to stay beyond 7.30pm and thereby reduce overtime.</p> <p>It is our intention to engage with Funeral Directors to make them fully aware of this new operating procedure, the impact on bereaved families and the booking process. The Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager meets monthly with representatives of the National Association of Funeral Directors and the implementation of this procedure will be fully discussed with them. The current Form A Application for Cremation will have to be amended to inform families and give them the opportunity to allow/disallow their loved one's cremation to be held over as per the Guiding Principles.</p>

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p>The cost of the refrigerated storage unit has been incorporated into the cost of the cremator replacement Tender by the Contractor.</p> <p>By introducing this new procedure best practice will be followed and will lead to a reduction in operating costs of the cremators and staff overtime</p>

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
	There are no equality or good relations considerations.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	It is recommended that the Committee approves the adoption of the Holding Over Guiding Principles as per Appendix 1 so that this operating practise can be introduced at the City of Belfast Crematorium.

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	Responsible Officer: Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	None.

<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1: Guiding Principles for the Holding Over of Cremation