



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Bereavement Improvement Strategy
Date:	24 February 2015
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Claire Sullivan, Policy and Business Dev Unit Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>Members will be aware that the Council is the Burial Board for Belfast and that we currently manage and operate nine cemeteries across the city and the region's only crematorium. We will also be taking over the management of Knockbreda Cemetery from 1st April.</p> <p>To ensure that we deliver a high quality fit for purpose bereavement service the department has established a Bereavement Services Board which is overseeing a Bereavement Improvement Strategy. The strategy has a number of themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bereavement Services – Administration• Bereavement Services – Operations and organisational design• Investment and finance• Strategic Crematoria and Cemetery Development <p>The Board has identified a number of priority actions under these themes and these are outlined in this paper.</p>

2	Key Issues
	<p>Bereavement Services – Administration</p> <p>Under this theme the Board are looking at the management of our relationship with key stakeholders including funeral directors, the Health Trust and memorial sculptors. A significant element of this theme is our customers and a key action has been a review and rationalization of our forms. One form that we are currently reviewing is 'Authority for Disposal of Cremated Remains'. This form has been updated in relation to our holding over and environmental policy. A key change to our policy is that</p>

we are proposing that we will only hold cremated remains for a maximum of 4 weeks and if they have not been collected at this point they will be scattered within the Garden of Remembrance. It is proposed that we will consult on this change as part of our public consultation on bereavement issues.

Members will be aware that under our Environmental Policy we recycle metals such as those from orthopaedic implants. This is done through the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and any monies we receive from this will be donated to bereavement related charities. Approximately £7,000 per annum is currently raised by ICCM in relation to this and it is proposed that this be split equally between several charities. It is proposed that a section is added to the form asking families to nominate a bereavement related charity that they would like the money to be donated to. Twice a year officers will collate this information and the two most nominated charities in that period, will be recommended to Members for selection as the charities to receive the donation. It is proposed that the same charity cannot receive the donation more than once in 2 years. If a charity that has previously received money is one of the 2 nominated we would move to the next charity on the list. It is proposed that we will consult on this proposal as part of our public consultation on bereavement issues.

Bereavement Services – Operations and organisational design

The Council has a responsibility is to ensure that its cemeteries, graveyards and burial grounds are safe places in which to work and for the public to visit. Historically, health and safety concerns in cemeteries have focused on the risks arising from grave digging. However, in recent years there has been increasing attention on the stability of memorials and the risks these present to cemetery staff and visitors.

Work has been ongoing to identify the risks posed by unsafe memorials and it is estimated that a significant number of memorials in our cemeteries pose a potential health and safety risk. A pilot programme was rolled out in City Cemetery and this found that there was a greater issue with the newer headstones and more of these required fixing. During the pilot these unsafe memorials were fixed by Council; however this does have resource implications for the Council particularly in relation to staff costs. Whilst Belfast City Council has overall responsibility for the safety of its cemeteries, including risks from unstable memorials, it does not own the memorials. The owner of the memorial is the Deed Holder (grave owner of Exclusive Right of Burial) or successor in title, and who is the person responsible for maintaining the memorial so as not to present a hazard. However, the current owner may not be identifiable as some records are extremely old and in many cases have not been updated by current relatives/family members.

Memorial Safety Policy

To help us address the issue we have developed a Memorial Safety Policy. This policy includes three sections which will help us address both

the current issues and puts in place processes to minimise the erection of unsafe memorials in the future. The three sections are:

- Section 1 – the process if you are a grave owner and wish to erect a memorial
- Section 2 – the process if you are a memorial sculptor and wish to work in a Belfast City Council cemetery
- Section 3 – our memorial inspection process and how we will deal with unsafe memorials

Memorial Inspection Process

A key element of the policy is the Memorial Inspection Process. Officers have undertaken a process to identify the total number of memorials across all our cemeteries and have planned a five year rolling inspection programme, as recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. If a memorial is found to be unsafe in the first instance it will be staked and banded, an example of this method is attached as appendix 1. A letter will then be sent to the owner of the memorial, with 10 days, informing them that their memorial is unsafe, that a temporary make safe repair has been made and details of the actions that they are required to undertake to make their memorial safe. If after 6 months from finding a memorial unsafe we have received no response to our attempts to contact the grave owner we will take the necessary steps to permanently make the memorial safe which will involve:

- Removing the memorial from its foundation and partially sinking it into the ground at the head of the grave – action for lawn cemeteries. At least 25% of the memorial will be below ground
- Lay the memorial flat on the grave – action for older cemeteries where there is a surround on the grave
- Removal of the memorial – action for a memorial in a older cemetery where it has found to be structurally unsafe

Members should note that the current practice is that if a staff member through their work finds a memorial that poses a health and safety risk, immediate action is taken to minimise the risk and this will continue.

Work is currently ongoing around assessing the business administration needs of the service and the alignment of business support. As this work progresses an update report will be brought to Committee.

Consultation on policy changes

Members will note that we are proposing several policy changes and the next stage in the process is to undertake a period of consultation on these. It is proposed that we will undertake a 12 week period of public consultation during which we will consult on the change in the period for which we hold cremated remains, the proposal for the distribution of money that we receive from recycling metals and the Memorial Safety Policy. As part of the consultation we will meet with representatives of funeral directors and memorial sculptors. A copy of the draft documents will be available on the Council's website, in our cemetery offices and we will advertise it through the Council's communication channels. It is also

	proposed that we hold four information sessions across the city to inform the public of the proposed changes and to get their views.
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3	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u> There are resource implications relating to the implementation of the memorial inspection process and these are currently being worked up and will be dependent on the final process that is chosen.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> There are resource implications relating to the implementation of the memorial inspection process and these are currently being worked up and will be dependent on the final process that is chosen.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The implementation of the memorial safety inspection programme will have implications for the Council's cemeteries.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	Actions identified as part of this strategy will be screened in line with the Council's policy.

5	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. provide comment on the proposal to the change in the period for which we hold cremated remains, the proposal for the distribution of money that we receive from recycling metals and the Memorial Safety Policy; and ii. subject to any amendment proposed, agree that a public consultation process is undertaken in relation to these.

6	Decision Tracking
	The findings of the public consultation will be brought back to Committee during the summer.

7	Key to abbreviations
	ICCM - Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management

8	Documents attached
	Appendix 1 – Examples of staking and banding