

**STRATEGIC CEMETERY AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 3rd February, 2017

Members Present	The High Sheriff, Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson) Alderman Sandford and Councillors McCabe and O'Neill
In Attendance	Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources; Mr. N. Grimshaw, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services; Mrs. S. Toland, Assistant Director; Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director; Ms. J. Wilson, Business Manager; Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development Officer; and Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th December, 2016 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

**Update on Economic Appraisal
of Future Cremation Facilities**

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided the Working Group with an update on the future cremation facilities for Belfast. It was reported that the majority of party briefings in the matter had been held and that the Strategic Investment Board was in the process of evaluating the various options under consideration. It was reported that a Business Plan detailing the preferred option would be presented to the Working Group in May, 2017.

The Director of Finance and Resources highlighted the importance of undertaking a costing exercise associated with the various proposals under consideration and of the need to calculate the capital finance charges in relation to the development of the preferred option. He reminded the Members that the proposal to construct a new cremation facility was a stage 2, uncommitted proposal in the Council's capital programme and provided the Working Group with a list of steps which required to be implemented prior to the selection of a contractor to commence the work.

Noted.

**Update on the New Tender Arrangements for
the Café at Roselawn Crematorium**

The Assistant Director outlined the new tender arrangements which had been put in place in regard to the operation of the Café at Roselawn Crematorium. The Members were reminded that the new tender arrangements for catering services at the crematorium

related to the period from 4th January, 2017 till 31st March, 2020. She highlighted the fact that the café was located in the waiting area of the crematorium and that mourners would be given priority access to the waiting area in situations where a large number of guests were in attendance. In response to a Member's concern that mourners were being asked to move out of the waiting area to facilitate customers of the café, she assured the Member that any such instances would be fully investigated. The Working Group was provided also with information on the favourable pricing policy of the new café provider and confirmed that pricing had been a key element of the tender evaluation process.

Noted.

Update on Cemetery Offices Opening Hours

In response to concerns by Members in respect of operational staffing, specifically in relation to Dundonald cemetery, the Business Manager provided the Working Group with a copy of a Bereavement Administration report which had been presented to the former Parks and Leisure Committee at its meeting in March, 2013. It was reported that the staffing levels in respect of the Dundonald cemetery were currently being adhered to. She did however refer to a number of staffing issues from October 2016, including sickness absence and redeployments, and acknowledged that the opening hours of the cemetery office at Dundonald had not been strictly adhered to. She stated that flexible staffing arrangements had been put in place to ensure that appropriate levels of customer care could be maintained, across the range of Council cemetery sites. She provided an assurance to Members that, during this period, all funeral services had been staffed adequately to meet customer requirements.

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services recognised the need for improvement on how information was communicated to Members and provided an assurance that the opening hours of the cemetery would be restored to those which had been agreed previously. The Members were advised also that a report on the provision of bereavement administration would be brought back to the Working Group by April, 2017 for its consideration.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Memorandum of Understanding with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

The Director provided the Working Group with a background report, which had been presented to the Transition Committee on 29th January, 2015, regarding subsidy arrangements in respect of burial charges attributable to the former Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (L.C.C.C.) residents. He reminded the Members that it had been agreed that the Council would continue to treat former (L.C.C.C.) ratepayers as non-resident in respect of burial charges but that a subsidy would be made to Belfast City Council in respect of the differential in charges. He highlighted the advantage to those residents affected, in that the administration associated with the implementation of the subsidy would be undertaken by the Council and that the former (L.C.C.C.) residents would be charged at the reduced rate.

The Working Group was provided with an outline of the potential financial benefits, arising to the Council, in respect of this arrangement and the fact that a Memorandum of Understanding, implemented from April, 2017, would be reviewed after a ten year period.

The Working Group agreed, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee, that the Council enter into an arrangement with Lisburn and

Castlereagh City Council from April, 2017, to implement subsidy arrangements in respect of cremations and burials affecting former (L.C.C.C.) residents.

Discussions with Neighbouring Councils
Re Future Cremation and Cemetery Provision

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services requested authority from the Working Group to engage with other neighbouring councils in relation to new cemetery and cremation provision. He highlighted the potential benefits of joint working in pursuit of the objective and reminded the Members that, in December, 2016, the Working Group had agreed the recommendation within stage 2 of the Review of Burial Policy permitting officers to engage with neighbouring Councils to explore potential joint working opportunities.

He stated that it was his intention, subject to the permission of the Working Group, to write to neighbouring Councils, outlining the Council's current position in regard to both cremation and cemetery facilities and how those local authorities might assist the Council in meeting the future demands of burials and cremations. The Director stated that he would bring back a report, to a future meeting of the Working Group, on any progress which had been made in respect of those discussions.

The Working Group granted the authority sought, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee

Chairperson