

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 5th September, 2018

Members Present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson)
Alderman Sandford; Councillor O'Neill and
Councillor Corr.

In Attendance: Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager,
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 15th August were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Update on Memorial Safety

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the work undertaken as part of the memorial safety programme. He informed the Members that the Council had undertaken a systematic memorial inspection programme since September, 2016, incorporating Balmoral Cemetery, Shankill Graveyard and Clifton Street Graveyard. He stated also that 11,000 headstones in Roselawn Cemetery had been inspected as part of that process.

He referred to the recommendation in a report following a fatality at a Glasgow graveyard, outlining the requirement to undertake a risk-zoning exercise of all graveyards and cemeteries. In August, one of the expert witnesses in the above report assisted BCC Officers with such a workshop. This took account of the size and condition of monuments, foreseeable public/staff access, and the likely consequences of an accident. The output from the workshop was that the nine cemeteries and graveyards were ranked in terms of overall risk. The old City Cemetery was identified as the highest risk because of the size and condition of the monuments and the volume of public and staff in proximity to them.

The Members were assured that every memorial inspected is designated as being safe, unstable or in need of further attention. In August the Teleshore Company provided BCC Cemetery Staff with three days training on how to assess large monuments and take remedial action, where this is within their competency. Cemetery Staff are not competent to inspect tall monuments and those which are built into a perimeter wall. In these cases the services of a Structural Engineer are required to assess stability/safety and an Engineering Contractor is required to make them safe. Where BCC Staff are concerned about the safety of a 'tall or wall' monument they will cordon it off from public access until an engineer can look at it.

In response to a concern from a Member about contacting grave owners prior to laying a monument flat to render it safe, the Bereavement Services Manager assured the Member that every efforts would be made to contact relatives using grave ownership records.

He further stated that there were no instances when BCC staff had found it necessary to lay a lawn headstone (such as at Roselawn) flat to make it safe. However, it is likely that this would have to be done for large monuments in City Cemetery, especially where parts of them have already fallen off. It was pointed out that there would be little chance of finding a current owner for many of the monuments in City Cemetery.

In response to a further question in regard to unused plots which had been purchased by corporate organisations and which might allow for additional grave capacity to be generated at the City Cemetery, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that he would investigate the matter on behalf of the Member.

Noted.

Proposed Memorial Headstone for Titanic Survivor

The Working Group was asked to consider a request by a local historian to erect a headstone in memory of a Belfast survivor of the Titanic disaster, Mary Sloan, who was a stewardess on board the Titanic and who is buried in Dundonald Cemetery. The Working Group was provided with a sample inscription, which if approved, could be undertaken by a memorial sculptor under contract with the Council.

The Bereavement Services Manager requested that the Working Group consider that, in agreeing to a proposal to erect a memorial sculptor to Mary Sloan, that the Council could be setting a precedent in regard to other high profile figures involved in a range of historical events. He highlighted the potential difficulty around reaching a consensus on the form of wording to be used on any memorial headstone and of the potential that a family member or relative could come forward at some time in the future, expressing opposition to the erection of such a memorial.

The Working Group considered the request and accepted that the Council might be setting a precedent by the erection of a memorial headstone, therefore they refused the request stating that there were other external organisations with a vested interest in promoting the Titanic story and who might be in a position to fund such a venture, subject to the agreement of the People and Communities Committee.

Update on Headstone Foundations

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group expressed its concern regarding the Council's position on the maintenance of headstone foundations. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that he was still investigating this matter including looking at the basis on which the current practice was based. He advised that a report on the matter would be brought to a future meeting if appropriate once he had opportunity to investigate and take further advice regarding the specific circumstances of this grave plot.

Update on Authorisation to Erect Memorial Plaques

The Bereavement Services Manager provided an update on the process to grant authorisation in respect of the erection of plaques at memorial trees in Roselawn. He pointed out that there was no legislation in this area, but that a rudimentary check was undertaken to ensure that the applicant was from the same family as the tree owner. He further stated that the comprehensive checks were undertaken in identifying who was authorised to collect the cremated remains and after this, the means of disposition were at that person's discretion.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the provision of a columbarium for cremated remains at City Cemetery, the Member was informed that such a facility

existed currently at Roselawn Cemetery, but that the public demand for it had been very limited.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 3rd October at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson