

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 19th December, 2018

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

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st November were taken as read and signed as correct. Cllr O'Neill asked that her apology be noted.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Update on Headstone Foundation Policy

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the history and current approach on headstone foundations. Members are aware of complaints regarding single headstone foundations in Council cemeteries. The Bereavement Services Manager reminded members that the grave owner is always responsible for the monument or headstone built on the foundation. Historically contractors acting on behalf of grave owners installed foundations. With the advent of lawn cemeteries such as Roselawn in the 1950s, the Council, provided an individual foundation at the time of each burial. Since the 1980s, the Council has provided strip foundations for all new graves. There are approximately 21,000 graves with individual foundations in Roselawn Cemetery alone. Where there are repeated excavations and ground settlement at some sites, individual foundations can subside slightly. Members have asked for clarity about who is responsible for the repair and replacement of these.

The Bereavement Services Manager stated that there is no formal Council policy on the responsibility for foundations. There is currently a practice whereby the Council will consider replacing a foundation when a complaint is made, and there is evidence that it was poorly constructed or fails structurally within the first 15 years. There is limited information on this in the application process.

The Working Group was informed that in September/October 2018, cemetery staff undertook a sample survey of foundations, across all of the council Cemeteries. This was a visual survey for signs of foundation failure or subsidence. It was not a structural survey nor a test of the safety of the memorial on the foundation. The results identified that 47 out of 364 foundations displayed signs of slight subsidence. Five of the 364 showed signs of some further failure. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that the costs associated with the replacement of failed foundations could be considerable and would involve the removal of the headstone, storage and replacement of the headstone by a monumental sculptor, including any disposal costs of the materials removed.

The Chairperson expressed concern at this situation and requested that, a further report be submitted to the Working Group, which includes the relevant practices of other Councils, a copy of the current headstone application forms, along with a draft liability clause. A Member requested further information on the number complaints received regarding foundations, and the numbers the Council had replaced at its own cost across Council cemeteries.

Noted.

Update on National Association of Funeral Directors

The Bereavement Services Manager advised the Working Group that Rev. Dr. Haire (President of the N.I. Federation of National Association of Funeral Directors) had written to the Chief Executive expressing his concerns that the current legislation relating to all aspects of bereavement was outdated and not fit for purpose. His letter singles out the Cremation (Belfast) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1961 as the cause of unnecessary obstacles to families at time of bereavement, when the respective legislation in GB has been revised several times. Furthermore, it was alleged that, the outdated legislation was impeding the operational effectiveness of the cremation services. The Director agreed that the current legislation relating to the operation of Bereavement Services required to be updated.

The Working Group noted the information provided and agreed to invite Rev. Dr. Haire to its January meeting in order to address the issues highlighted in his letter to the Chief Executive. The Working Group agreed also that, an invitation to attend the January meeting of the Working Group be extended to the Members of the People and Communities Committee.

Update on Crematorium

The Project Sponsor provided the Working Group with an update on the capital works associated with the new crematorium facility at Roselawn. She stated it was advised to undertake a consultation exercise with relevant stakeholders prior to an outline planning application being lodged. There was a discussion around road access to the site. Members asked for the maps of the proposed road access to be circulate to them.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 22nd January, 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson