

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 19th March, 2019

Members Present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
The High Sheriff of Belfast, 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 25th February, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

**Presentation by Department of Health on
Death Certification Processes**

Dr. Julian Johnston and Mr. Davy Best, Department of Health, attended in connection with this item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

Mr. Best provided the Working Group with an update on the Death Certification Process as pertaining to Northern Ireland. Mr. Best outlined the statutory obligation specified in the Coroner's Act 1959, including the circumstances under which certain deaths, specified with the Act, should be reported. The Working Group was provided with an outline of the sequence of events following death, including the process from the verification of death to the disposal of the body as pertains currently in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Best provided the Working Group with an outline of the circumstances surrounding the Dr. Harold Shipman Inquiry and the details contained within the Dame Janet Smith report, which highlighted significant failings in the Death Certification process and which made recommendations to mitigate against a similar occurrence in the future, Mr. Best informed the Members that the report had identified significant weaknesses in the system, including the dependence on a single medical practitioner to issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) including the validity of the information contained with the Doctor's assessment in terms of identifying the cause of death. He stated that the report had highlighted the need to subject all deaths to independent scrutiny, including verification of the deceased's medical history as a means to form an opinion on the cause of death.

The Working Group was advised that the Death Certification process involved a number of central government departments, including the Coroner's Service and that, in 2009, an Inter-Departmental Death Certification Working Group had been established to provide a unified system in respect of the disposal of bodies including, amongst other things, the need to enable adequate and independent scrutiny of all MCCD's to identify and deter criminal activity or malpractice. As part of that process, the Northern Ireland

Executive had agreed to the enhancement of the existing assurance arrangements for death certification, with the option of keeping them under review, should further strengthening or improvement of the Death Certification process be required. It was reported that the option chosen, included adding the GMC number and the Health and Social Care number to the existing medical Certificate in regard to cause of death, and an analysis undertaken by the Health and Social Care Trusts in regard to the MCCD process to be completed by hospital based Doctors.

Mr Best provided the Working Group with an update on the recent local O'Hara Inquiry into Hyponatraemia Related Deaths. One of the key recommendations from the inquiry was the adoption of an Independent Medical Examiner of Death role within Northern Ireland. It was explained that the three primary roles of the IME are:

- To check if a death should have been referred to the Coroner;
- Confirmation that the cause of death and the MCCD details were accurate; and
- Identification of potential concerns in regard to the safety and quality of treatment and care.

The Working Group was provided with an outline of the Death Certification process in other jurisdictions within the United Kingdom, in particular Scotland, which already has an IME scheme and England and Wales where an IME scheme was in process. It was reported that, In Northern Ireland, the IME role cuts across the responsibilities of the DoH, DfC, DoJ and DoF as well as District Councils who provide final disposition. All of these are represented on the IME sub-group of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia Related Deaths. The department officials outlined the potential implications from adoption of the recommendations for change, including the impact on funeral and cremations times and the impact on current processes, including the role of the Medical Referee. Mr Best referred to the need to enact legislation which required approval by the Northern Ireland Executive, including consultation with relevant stakeholders involving members of the public, Doctors and Funeral Directors. He referred to the collaborative work required between the four relevant departments to ensure a robust and fit for purpose Death Certification process. He assured Members that key officers of Belfast City Council were being consulted in this work.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked the Department of Health officials for their detailed and informative presentation and they departed from the meeting.

Future Burial Provision

The Working Group was presented with an options report, prepared by Fleming Mountstephen Planning (FMP), which had highlighted a range of scenarios which might impact on future burial requests and land acquisition for that purpose.

Based on three scenarios A, B, and C, each accounting for future population, death rate, personal choice and preference, current trends and epidemiology, the Bereavement Services Manager informed the Working Group that central government emergency planning guidance indicated that it was prudent for Belfast to maintain a capacity of 3,000 graves in addition to the yearly rate of burials.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained the rationale behind the scenarios and why A and C were less realistic. He reminded the Members that space in existing family graves in Dundonald, Knockbreda and City Cemeteries was limited and that these

cemeteries were almost at capacity. He reported that Roselawn was the only source of new graves and, as other cemeteries declined, its usage would increase. He explained that scenario B factored this decline into account and was the most realistic scenario of the three. In order to maintain a ten year supply, scenario B would require the Council to acquire between 5.51 and 8.66 hectares of new land for burial space. It was recommended that Members adopt this scenario with its associated recommendation. The Members were advised that the report also recommended that the Council undertake an internal annual review of burial capacity in order to confirm and validate the chosen scenario, which would be presented to the Working Group annually.

Expression of Interest

The Working Group was advised that, at its meeting, held in December, 2016 it had agreed to undertake an Expression of Interest (EOI) assessment as part of its burial policy, in an endeavour to identify potential burial land which would service the needs of North and West Belfast. The Director stated that officers were engaged currently on drafting the necessary documentation to undertake that process and requested that Members consider the recommendations contained within the report and that the Council undertake to procure between 5.5 hectares and 8.6 hectares of additional burial land, to meet its future burial needs.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to how the future burial capacity requirements for the city was calculated, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that it was a statistical exercise, based on average grave usage and other parameters gained from experience on the amount of space required for each grave and associated services.

The Working Group considered the information which had been provided and agreed to the recommendation associated with the acquisition of between 5.5 hectares and 8.6 hectares of burial land to meet the future requirements of the city, in that the 2016 Council decision stated that this should be based on the requirement to service North and West Belfast, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

Proposed Cemetery at Loughview

The Members were reminded of a report which had been presented previously to the People and Communities Committee outlining the work undertaken, by the Council, in regard to the acquisition of additional burial land. To that end, it was reported that a request had been received by Gravis Planning requesting representation by the Council in their appeal against a refusal to allow planning permission in respect of Loughview Park Cemetery.

The Members were informed that Gravis Planning had submitted its appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) and requested that the Council submit a letter expressing its wish to make representation to the P.A.C. highlighting its future burial requirements.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Update on Plot Z1 City Cemetery

The Policy and Business Development Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the progress of the procurement and design for the memorial in recognition of those babies interred in "The Baby Plot" in the City Cemetery. The Working Group was advised that the work had commenced on the engraving of the memorial which, it was anticipated, would take approximately three months to complete. The Members were advised that the sculptor had agreed to provide both the Working Group and Focus Group with regular updates on the progress of her work. She informed the Members that the

Focus Group was happy with the progress, to date, and that a meeting with members of the Focus Group would be held, prior to the completion and handover of the memorial.

Noted.

Update on the New Crematorium Development

The Project Sponsor provided the Working Group with an update on the progress made, to date, in regard to the new Crematorium development at Roselawn. She reminded the Members that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting in January, 2018 had granted approval for the new crematorium to progress to stage 3 committed expenditure which included a new 2 chapel (2 X 200 seat) capacity on the existing site, incorporating reuse of the existing building. She informed the Members that the money had been allocated to fund the capital project.

In terms of access facilities to the proposed new Crematorium facility, the Project Sponsor stated that a new entrance to the facility might be required and that discussions in that regard were ongoing with Department for Infrastructure

The Members were advised that a Project Board had been established and that its first meeting had been held in February, 2019. The Project Sponsor stated that, as a result of that meeting, a governance structure, outlining the roles and responsibilities associated with that project, had been agreed and that discussions in regard to access to the new facility were ongoing.

The Project Sponsor then responded to a number of queries from the Members

Noted

Update on Dundonald Cemetery

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, requested information on measures to repair the damage to the gates at Dundonald Cemetery, following a vehicular collision at the entrance gates. The Chairperson raised concerns in regard to the delay in having the gates repaired.

In response, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that, as a result of the collision, the gates and supporting pillar had been badly damaged. He stated that the Council's insurance Settlement of the issues was close to a resolution and that this process had delayed the repair.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next meeting would be held after the 2019 Local Government Elections and after a new Committee schedule for the remainder of the year had been agreed.

Chairperson

