

<b>Review: Services for the Deceased</b>
<b>Committee/Task Group: Policy Development Task Group</b>
<b>Final report published: 9 November 2010</b>
<b>Cabinet/Executive response: 13 December 2010 (Considered by Policy Development 18 January and 22 February 2011)</b>
<b>Chair: Councillor Mark Watkin</b>

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Cabinet/Executive response/decision (13 December 2010)</b>	<b>Scrutiny follow-up</b>	<b>Latest update</b>	<b>Further review required / completed</b>
That the Council continues to provide a wide range of services for the deceased, even though it only has a statutory responsibility to provide for the burial and cremation of any deceased person without relatives or other means of arranging burials or cremation. This is subject to our financial viability recommendation.	We recognise the importance of continuing to provide a wide range of services for the deceased and welcome your comments on financial viability	Action Plan circulated at the meeting. The report was deferred to allow the Task Group Chair to complete the action plan. <i>(18 January 2011)</i>  The Scrutiny Committee discussed the completed action plan and resolved to review the actions within a year. <i>(22 February 2011)</i>		

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<p>That the Council should aim to make the cemeteries self-financing in the next five years.</p>	<p>Recommendations have been put forward under the Councils service prioritisation programme to make the cemetery closer to self financing</p>		<p>Burial fees increased by 100% following service prioritisation.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>That the pricing structure be reviewed to ensure that it is simple to understand and that the costs of individual services reflect the cost to the Council.</p>	<p>Pricing structures were simplified in 2009/10 and the cemetery manager will seek to simplify the presentation of the fees further for the future. It is a complex service with many options available, which combined with the desire to self finance will require a degree of complexity to be retained. Wherever possible, the range of fees and charges will be simplified, but it is important to ensure a broad choice for bereaved as well as aiming to recover full costs wherever appropriate.</p>		<p>Burial fees increased by 100% following service prioritisation.</p>	

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<p>That officers look further at the areas of the Charter for the Bereaved which could be easily implemented at Watford in order to improve the Council's national ranking, for example, providing a written explanation of 'buying' a grave to purchasers.</p>	<p>Actions to improve our national ranking in the Charter for the Bereaved are already under way</p>		<p>Last charter update submitted Sept 2011. Increased to 432 points – 28 points above 2010 score.</p> <p>Rankings are now listed as bronze , silver and gold rather than highest and lowest score, Watford are in the bronze section but will continue to increase scores to aim for silver level</p>	

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<p>That the Council investigates the feasibility of extending the times during which burials can take place. This would mean operating an 'on call' system on Saturdays for the digging staff. The extra cost to this service would need to be reflected in a revised pricing structure.</p>	<p>Extending opening hours will be investigated by the cemetery manager, however, this is an extension to service that will increase costs and will also be more difficult with the reduced core staffing structure that is proposed to meet the service prioritisation savings required by the Council. The cemetery manager will aim to strike an appropriate balance between cost, service availability and the conflicting needs of different cemetery faiths.</p>		<p>Meeting held with Services Director, Cllr. Asif Khan and Section Head for Parks and Open Spaces. Section Head has written a report on the findings and costings of the options available and options currently being discussed. Options subject to costs.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>That the Council continues with the policy of not allowing the pre-purchase of graves.</p>	<p>The pre purchase of graves can cause significant additional digging costs (as some need to be hand dug) and Officers support the recommendation to continue the policy of not allowing pre purchase.</p>		<p>No pre-purchasing of graves is allowed.</p>	<p>Completed</p>

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<p>That officers research the logistics of allowing shroud burials within the cemeteries and put in place the requisite measures for shroud burials to be catered for in the future.</p>	<p>The Cemetery manager has begun investigating the potential for shroud burials and would expect to report back her findings early in 2011, so that they can be considered and a formal policy implemented.</p>		<p>Meeting held with members of the Muslim Community. Agreement was reached as to how we can accommodate shroud burials. These can be accommodated as soon as possible without any major impact to service delivery.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>That the Council considers developing the woodland areas of North Watford Cemetery to allow for the scattering of ashes there.</p>	<p>The potential use of the woodlands for scattering of ashes will be investigated at the same time, so a decision can be made and implemented upon this too.</p>		<p>Scattering of ashes has been discussed. To date, we have received no requests to carry this out as the majority of families wish for a permanent plot where a memorial can be erected. Ongoing discussions taking place with Southern Green Landscape Architects who are developing a Masterplan for the cemetery. This may include some sort of memorial garden. We are currently already able to scatter ashes if required but it maybe that the need is just not there.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

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That green burial grounds be included in the planning for future cemetery sites.	The future cemetery provision will need to be resolved in the next few years, as it takes a significant time to develop alternative arrangements and a new site (should this be the outcome). Officers would recommend investigating a green burial site and a new cemetery site in 2012. This will allow the Council sufficient time to consider its decisions carefully and to plan for the future in good time.		Discussions already held with planning under future site allocations and options discussed.	Ongoing
That the Council starts future planning to identify a future site for the cemetery within the next few years due to the scarcity of available land and the cost (at least £1 million).			Discussions already held with planning under future site allocations and options discussed.	Ongoing

The completed action plan (referred to at the Policy Development Scrutiny Committees in January and February 2011) is attached at Appendix 2.

The minutes of Cabinet (13 December 2010) and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee (18 January and 22 February 2011) are attached at Appendix 3.