

Extracts from minutes

Cabinet – 13 December 2011

C41 SERVICES FOR THE DECEASED REVIEW (Forward Plan ref: CS252)
10/11

As part of its 2010/11 work programme the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee established a Task-group to undertake a review of the Council's services for the deceased. The purpose of the review was to look at the current provision of services and establish future needs of the borough.

Cabinet received a report presenting the findings of the review. The Cabinet response to the recommendations was circulated at the meeting.

The Chair of the Task Group introduced the report. He drew Cabinet's attention to two specific issues which had come out of the review: The impact of the service on the budget and the fact that space was running out.

He commended Watford's Cemetery service which he described as "excellent". He went on to talk about comparisons with other authorities they had visited; the need for quick burials for certain faith groups, including weekend burials; costs and long term sustainability. He referred to the Head of Strategic Finance's comments in the cover report relating to the need to recognise that the Council would have to identify significant savings in the next four years and that there may be a need to focus on statutory rather than discretionary provisions. The Chair of the Task Group said that the statutory provision only related to the very poor (as in the old "paupers graves") and that he would struggle to find this approach satisfactory.

The Mayor thanked the task group for carrying out a thorough and timely piece of work which would assist with decision making. She added that, in face to face conversations she had had, people had considered that the service should not be so heavily subsidised. She also welcomed the opportunity to address some of the cultural issues around burials.

A non Cabinet Member (Labour) said he welcomed the report especially the reference to weekend burials. He agreed that costs would have to be looked at.

Another non Cabinet Member (Conservative) also referred to costs and the fact that some of the charges did not represent the true cost for the Council. The Mayor said that hand digging was an example of this. The Chair of the Task Group added that, in some situations especially where plots had been purchased in advance, it was not possible to use mechanical equipment due to proximity to other graves.

A Cabinet Member concluded the discussion by advising some caution with regard to the use of woodland: There was some ancient woodland in the borough which needed to be protected.

RESOLVED

that Cabinet's responses to the recommendations in the report, as attached as Appendix A to these minutes, be noted and action taken as appropriate.

Policy Development Scrutiny Committee – 18 January 2011

PDS52- SERVICES FOR THE DECEASED – CABINET RESPONSE 10/11

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnership and Performance Section Head including Cabinet's response to the Services for the Deceased review. The Scrutiny Support Officer circulated a draft action plan.

The Vice-Chair, who had chaired the Task Group, suggested that he should consider the recommendations and add the relevant officer and date the Scrutiny Committee felt the individual recommendations should be reviewed. The information could then be circulated to the other members of the Scrutiny Committee.

It was suggested that this item should be deferred to the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the report be deferred to the next meeting enabling the Vice-Chair to complete the action plan and circulate it to the other members.

Policy Development Scrutiny Committee – 22 February 2011

PDS58- TASK GROUP UPDATE – REVIEW OF THE SERVICES FOR THE 10/11 DECEASED ACTION PLAN

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnership and Performance Section Head, including an action plan of the recommendations from the review, which had been completed by Community Services.

The Vice-Chair, who had chaired this Task Group, said that the action plan had been clearly set out. He had noted that Cabinet had said that the cemetery would move towards self-financing although the Task Group had recommended this should happen within five years. He suggested that the review should be carried out within nine months or a year.

The Chair referred to recommendation 5 and asked how this would be monitored. She suggested that the number of requests could be monitored and how many were accommodated.

The Vice-Chair responded that he was unsure the service had the resources to do the monitoring. This question had not been asked during the review.

The Chair commented that officers had provided good responses to the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

that the actions from the Services for the Deceased report be reviewed within a year.