

### Review Update: Services for the Deceased

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

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | <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.</b> |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | We recognise the importance of continuing to provide a wide range of services for the deceased and welcome your comments on financial viability.   |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>18 January and 22 February 2011</u></p> <p>The scrutiny committee received an action plan which was then discussed at the second meeting. It was agreed to review the actions within a year.</p> <p><u>2 February and 25 July 2012</u></p> <p>No further updates</p>   |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | No further updates   |

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | <b>That the Council should aim to make cemeteries self-financing in the next five years.</b>   |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | Recommendations have been put forward under the Council's service prioritisation programme to make the cemetery closer to self-financing.  |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u><br/>Burial fees increased by 100% following service prioritisation.</p> <p><u>25 July 2012</u><br/>As part of the potential outsourcing of the Parks and Open Spaces Service, this has been overtaken by ongoing events with the possibility of</p> <p>a) the West Herts Crematorium managing the Cemeteries service within P&amp;OS. A report has already been taken to their Board with further feedback required mid August relating to fees and charges which may need to be aligned with other Herts authorities who are partners at the Crem.</p> <p>b) the possibility that the cemeteries may well be managed by an outsourced partner.</p> <p>Work is ongoing</p> |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | <p><u>Sept 13</u><br/>Cemetery fees were updated in line with Councils increase of 2% This is also in line with other local cemeteries.</p> <p>The Crematorium is providing cover for the cemetery Manager during annual leave and sickness.</p>   |

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | <b>That the pricing structure be reviewed to ensure that it is simple to understand and that costs of individual services reflect the cost to the Council.</b>   |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | 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. |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u><br/>Burial fees increased by 100% following service prioritisation.</p> <p><u>25 July 2012</u><br/>Fees were not increased this year after the dramatic increase in 2011. Burials have decreased at the cemetery partly due to increased costs but also due to the increased numbers now using the crematorium. Fees were therefore not increased this year.</p>   |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | As above regarding fees  |

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | 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.  |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | Actions to improve our national ranking in the Charter for the Bereaved are already under way.  |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u><br/>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> <p><u>25 July 2012</u><br/>No further update</p> |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | Latest update submitted to ICCM. Currently in the Bronze section but increased the scores again this year.  |

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | <b>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.</b>  |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | 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. |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u></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><u>25 July 2012</u></p> <p>Ongoing</p>  |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | Options were submitted to the Watford Muslim Burial Board via Cllr. Khan. No further action taken. We did not receive any further feedback regarding those options. Demand and number of requests remains very low.   |

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| <b>Recommendation:</b>               | <b>That the Council considers developing the woodland areas of North Watford Cemetery to allow for the scattering of ashes there.</b>  |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | 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.   |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u></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><u>25 July 2012</u></p> <p>As part of the options appraisal we will investigate whether this is feasible or whether it would be detrimental to the woodland. No decision has yet been made and we will ascertain whether it is appropriate after carrying out a desk top study as well as local ecological survey of this area of woodland.</p> |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | There have been no requests to scatter ashes as this is something the crematorium do free of charge as part of their cremation package. The reason bereaved families come to us is so they can have a permanent plot where a memorial can be erected. I am not sure that this will ever be a popular service to provide.   |

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| <b>Recommendations:</b>              | <p><b>That green burial grounds be included in the planning for future cemetery sites.</b></p> <p><b>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).</b></p>   |
| <b>Cabinet response:</b>             | <p>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.</p> |
| <b>Previous updates to scrutiny:</b> | <p><u>2 February 2012</u></p> <p>Discussions already held with planning under future site allocations and options discussed.</p><br><p><u>25 July 2012</u></p> <p>Ongoing</p>   |
| <b>Latest update:</b>                | <p>We currently have approximately 8 years of burial space left at North Watford Cemetery. Site allocations are currently being discussed with Planning Officers</p>  |