

# Follow-up Report on the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium Service

## 1. Introduction by the Chair



I could not be more delighted to be delivering this Follow-Up Report on the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium Service, on behalf of the Technical, Economic and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel.

We were all very impressed with the way that the recommendations contained within the original report have been addressed by the Economy and Environment Service.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Cabinet Deputy (Environmental Services) for accepting the recommendations in the original report, the Council for endorsing the recommendations and the Executive Leader for making monies available through slippage in the Capital Programme at the earliest opportunity and the Cabinet as a whole for the investment in our cemeteries and crematorium infrastructure.

Anyone who visits our cemeteries will now see a vast improvement to the footways and roads. Dukinfield Crematorium can boast a new door which will allow mourners to leave the Chapel without coming into contact with the following funeral, thus taking away the feel of a conveyor belt system that on occasions used to exist. In addition, the new method of supporting headstones is a great improvement and in the main, enables them to remain vertical whilst taking care of health and safety issues.

A very well done to all, and thank you.

**Councillor P J Robinson**  
**Chair**

## 2. Summary

On the 6th December 2004, the Technical, Economic and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel published its report on the Review of the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium Service.

The Review, which focussed on the structure of the Council's facilities at its Cemeteries and Crematorium and included buildings, roads, footpaths and grounds maintenance, highlighted the following key issues:-

1. The need for the provision of a second door at Dukinfield Crematorium Chapel in order to facilitate a separate access and egress to ease congestion for mourners;
2. The maintenance and repair of the Council's Cemeteries' footpaths;
3. The health and safety in relation to headstones;
4. The embellishment of graves;
5. Grounds maintenance, security and toilet cleaning at the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium.
6. Environmental issues such as security and dog fouling;
7. The provision of facilities for disabled people;
8. The sale of surplus assets at the Council's Cemeteries.

In revisiting the Review, the Technical, Economic and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel has been delighted to observe that the majority of its recommendations contained in the initial Report have now been adopted and implemented by the Council. Particularly, the large increase in the funding allocation for Capital and Revenue Expenditure to be used for improvements to the footpaths in the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium and the provision of the much needed second door at the Chapel at Dukinfield Crematorium, demonstrates the Council's commitment to ongoing investment in this Service.

The Panel commends the staff in Bereavement Services for their proactive approach in implementing improvements to the Cemeteries and Crematorium in response to customer demand. For example, following discussions with Muslim leaders during 2006, burials are now offered 7 days a week in order to meet the community's religious requirements.



The purchase of an innovative computerised Book of Remembrance which is located in the Remembrance Room at Dukinfield Cemetery is a considerable asset to Tameside's Bereavement Services as it is the first of its kind in Greater Manchester. The memorial entries are carefully executed by highly skilled artists, and inscribed under the date of death with the wording of choice penned in red and black ink. The entries are then scanned and families can access their entry on the touch screen computer, any day of the year, rather than just seeing it on the anniversary, once a year. The inscription can also be enlarged by the touch of a button, assisting those visitors who are visually impaired.

Finally, Bereavement Services should be justifiably pleased that their continual commitment to implementing improvements both at the Council's Crematorium and within the Cemeteries, has been acknowledged by Funeral Directors and Members of the Clergy of all faiths, who have responded positively during the Service's 2006 Consultation.

### 3. Membership of the Scrutiny Panel

Councillor P Robinson (Chair), Councillor R Welsh (Deputy Chair)  
Councillors Carter, Downs, Meredith, S Quinn, S Smith and Roberts  
Mr A Moss - Citizens' Panel

## 4. Terms of Reference

### Aim of the Scrutiny Review Exercise

"To ascertain whether the recommendations in the Scrutiny Panel's Report on the Review of the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium Service have been implemented and to examine the outcomes."

### Objective

To establish what actions have been taken by Bereavement Services in relation to the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.

## 5. Methodology

1. This Scrutiny Review was undertaken by the Members of the Technical, Economic and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel, together with a representative from the Citizens' Panel.
2. The Panel interviewed Councillor C Piddington, Cabinet Deputy for Environmental Services, Mr R Monk, Head of Environmental Operations and Mr M Gurney, Senior Registrar (Bereavement Services) who reported on the implementation of the recommendations from the initial report, together with any specific reasons for any recommendations which had not been implemented.
3. During the course of the Re-Review, Panel Members visited all the Council's Cemeteries and the Crematorium, in order to personally observe the improvements made and examine the outcomes.

## 6. Update on the Implementation of the Recommendations Contained In the Initial Report

### 6.1 Original Recommendation 1

That an overarching policy be drafted for approval by the Cabinet Deputy, to bring together all aspects of the operation and provision of Tameside Cemeteries and Crematorium.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

Draft Policy completed and awaiting presentation and approval from Cabinet Deputy.

#### **Panel Findings:**

The Cabinet Deputy has approved the policy and a copy is shortly to be available on the Bereavement Services website.

### 6.2 Original Recommendation 2

That in order to fund essential improvements and maintenance to the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium, the sale of surplus assets be investigated and any funds raised be reinvested into the Service.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Hurst Cemetery Chapel was demolished due to its poor state. The possibility of the sale of Mossley Lodge was considered but an existing covenant meant the sale would take place at a very low fee. Land at Audenshaw identified for possible sale.

### **Panel Findings:**

The Chapel at Hurst Cemetery has, in the main, been demolished. The base of the Chapel is being converted to a garden of remembrance.

Audenshaw Cemetery Garage, Store and Mess Room block has been demolished and the land at the minor works depot will be sold for housing development.

### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

1. Further essential improvements and maintenance works to the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium will not be feasible without the provision of adequate funding.

### **Follow-up Recommendation**

1. That any sums received from the sale of assets from the Council's Cemeteries be re-invested into Bereavement Services to fund essential improvements and maintenance works.



### **6.3 Original Recommendation 3**

That a second door be created at Dukinfield Chapel in order to provide a separate access and egress.

### **Executive Response Update:**

This work commenced in September 2006 and Members should be able to see the completed work during the next review stage.

### **Panel Findings:**



The construction of a second door at Dukinfield Chapel has been very well received and the work has been approved by the Victorian Society (the national society responsible for the protection of Victorian and Edwardian architecture and other arts).

Additional work immediately outside the second door of the Chapel is also planned and the Panel welcomes this improvement.

#### **6.4 Original Recommendation 4**

That consideration be given to the feasibility of transferring the responsibilities for grounds maintenance, security and toilet cleaning,

Currently under taken by the District Assemblies, to Bereavement Services.

It is however, recognised that there will be insufficient resources to fund the total cost of this work, so consideration should be given to the formulation of a budget specifically for this purpose.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

Discussions have taken place with the General Manager District Assemblies and costs identified. There are technical difficulties in transferring funds from one service to the other. Work will continue to establish a means of improving Cemetery maintenance work.

#### **Panel Findings:**

The District Assemblies continue to provide grounds maintenance work and toilet cleaning at the Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium. There are no mechanisms in place however, that document the specifications required and consequently, Bereavement Services is unable to accurately monitor the maintenance work provided by the District Assemblies.

#### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

2. Although it is understood that there are technical difficulties in transferring funds from the District Assembly to Bereavement Services for grounds maintenance, security and toilet cleaning, the introduction of a Service Level Agreement would ensure that both parties understood the obligations required and accurate monitoring of service standards could be undertaken.

#### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

2. That a Service Level Agreement be drafted and approved, detailing the grounds maintenance, security and toilet cleaning specifications to be undertaken by the District Assemblies at the Council's Cemeteries.

#### **6.5 Original Recommendation 5**

That Bereavement Services work with Patroller Service and the Police to improve security and the prevention of environmental nuisance, such as dog fouling, and consider the enhancement of security by the provision of a columbarium at Droylsden Cemetery.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

Increased CCTV at Dukinfield Crematorium and Cemetery. Crime and Disorder

Have been requested to install CCTV at Hurst. Yard secured at Hurst with vandal proof fencing. Solar lighting installed at Dukinfield.

#### **Panel Findings:**

Since the introduction of the security measures, there have been no incidences of vandalism. Dog fouling has also decreased.

## 6.6 Original Recommendation 6

That consideration is given for the future provision of separate areas for personalised graves and to plain grassed grave areas, in order to meet customer choice.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Space within Cemeteries is a major issue. Consideration to this scheme at the Droylsden extension.

### **Panel Findings:**

The personalisation of graves is a controversial ongoing issue which remains particularly emotive. Although sympathetic on this matter, the Panel believes that cemeteries should be dignified places of rest and that the adornment of graves with personal paraphernalia is not a preferred method of respecting the deceased by the majority of mourners. Furthermore, there is a significant shortage of burial land in the Borough, which prevents the Council from offering its customers separate areas for personalised graves or plain grassed grave areas. At the moment people acquiring grave plots are under the impression that they are purchasing full ownership of the land and have exclusive rights to maintain and embellish it as they wish.

Documentation issued by Bereavement Services to owners of exclusive rights to burial in graves, to be kept with the grave papers entitled "Information and Advice for Grave Owners", clearly indicates the following [1](#):-

*"The popular belief is that the land itself is purchased. This is incorrect. The purchaser acquires only a right of burial in the grave, the ownership of the land and responsibility for its management remains with the council".*

### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

3. The Panel concludes that it is not feasible to provide separate areas for personalised graves and plain grassed grave areas due to a shortage of burial land. During the site visits, the Panel has noted that despite some graves being significantly embellished with personal belongings, this does not appear to be the preferred method of respecting the deceased by the majority of mourners.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

3 (a). As it is not feasible to provide separate areas for personalised graves and plain grassed grave areas, the Panel recommends that Bereavement Services takes the appropriate action to remove any unauthorised personal items placed on graves and that a condition be introduced stating that any personal items placed on or around graves shall be removed.

3 (b). That persons acquiring the exclusive use of grave plots be made fully aware of the conditions relating to the maintenance of graves in Tameside cemeteries and that where possible these conditions also be communicated to the next of kin.

## 6.7 Original Recommendation 7

That regulations relating to the appearance of Tameside's Cemeteries be enforced with clear explanations for any action taken.



#### **Executive Response Update:**

Considered actions of other neighbouring authorities two of which abandoned any whole scale action. One other authority currently in process and is being closely monitored.

#### **Panel Findings:**

The Scrutiny Panel and Bereavement Services remain committed to ensuring that the Council's Cemeteries can be safely accessed and that any potential health and safety hazards are removed. Health and safety however, is sometimes compromised by the over elaboration of personal items, for example metal railings, which are placed on or around graves.

#### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

4. Health and safety within the Council's Cemeteries is of paramount importance to the Panel.

#### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

4. That regulations be enforced to remove any embellishments to graves which create a potential health and safety danger, with an appropriate notification being sent to the grave owners indicating the reasons for the removal of the hazardous item.

Following a site visit to Droylsden Cemetery, the Panel observed that a large plot in Droylsden Cemetery is unmarked and has been used for "paupers' graves".

#### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

5. That the plot of burial ground at Droylsden Cemetery which has traditionally been used for "paupers' graves" should be marked appropriately with some explanation and recognition of those people interred therein.

#### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

5. That Bereavement Services liaises with the District Assembly to provide appropriate signage to recognise the people interred in the unmarked graves at Droylsden Cemetery.

### **6.8 Original Recommendation 8**

That a general review be undertaken of the toilets and other facilities (including facilities for disabled people) at all Tameside's Cemeteries.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

New toilets (disabled) provided at Denton, Droylsden and Hurst Cemeteries. New facility planned for Audenshaw during current financial year.

#### **Panel Findings:**

The Panel notes the installation of new disabled toilets at Denton, Droylsden and Hurst Cemeteries and welcomes the facility planned for Audenshaw Cemetery.

### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

6. That the new toilet facilities will require regular maintenance and adequate funding to do so.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

6. That the facilities at all Tameside's Cemeteries be reviewed on a regular basis and that adequate funding be allocated for any essential maintenance.

### **6.9 Original Recommendation 9**

That consideration is given to the provision of an appropriate excavator which is capable of digging graves to a depth of 9 feet.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

Completed.

### **6.10 Original Recommendation 10**

That a rolling programme of repairs to Cemetery footpaths be implemented, subject to appropriate funding being available.

#### **Executive Response Update:**

To date Hurst, Mottram, Droylsden and Dukinfield (part) completed with capital funding. Hyde to be completed in 2007/08 and Audenshaw for 2008/09. Capital bid submitted for completing works in 2009/10.

#### **Panel Findings:**

Since the original Scrutiny review, January 2005, there has been a sharp rise in Capital and Revenue Expenditure for improvements to the Council's Cemeteries and the Crematorium. The Panel notes that despite the significant improvements already completed, further footpath maintenance work is still required at some of the Council's Cemeteries, and consequently appropriate funding will be necessary.

Capital Budget allocation for footpath refurbishment for the period 2004/05 to 2009/10, totalled £553,000. The amount for each year is shown below.

2004/05 - Nil  
2005/06 - £168,000  
2006/07 - £109,000  
2007/08 - £73,000  
2008/09 - £83,000  
2009/10 - £120,000



### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

7. The Panel notes that a rolling programme of repairs to Cemetery footpaths has been implemented and that funding has been secured until 2009/2010. £73,000 has been allocated for 2007/08, £83,000 for 2008/09 and £120,000 for 2009/10.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

7. that additional funding be secured in order to complete the repairs to the borough's footpaths, and for ongoing maintenance works that may arise.

## **6.11 Original Recommendation 11**

That consideration be given to the future provision of horizontal cushion headstones rather than vertical headstones.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Existing plots for upright headstones. Consideration on new extensions at Mottram and Droylsden.

### **Panel Findings:**

The shortage of available burial land at the majority of the Council's Cemeteries prevents the implementation of this initiative at all but Mottram and Droylsden Cemeteries.

### **Follow-Up Conclusion**

8. With the exception of Mottram and Droylsden Cemeteries, the shortage of burial land is a significant issue which prevents the introduction of new schemes such as the introduction of horizontal cushion headstones rather than vertical headstones, which require larger plots.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

8. That subject to the availability of burial land, consideration is given to the provision of horizontal cushion headstones rather than vertical headstones on the new extensions at Mottram and Droylsden Cemeteries.

## **6.12 Original Recommendation 12**

Although it is recognised that in certain cases unstable headstones have to be made safe, care should be given to ensure that headstones are laid down with the inscription facing upwards, that headstones are not broken and that the graves are left neat and tidy.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Headstones no longer lay down. All are supported and left upright. As a result public reaction has been good.

### **Panel Findings:**

There are significant visual improvements at the Council's Cemeteries as a result of the new procedures for supporting headstones.

All headstones are owned by and are the responsibility of the grave owner or their next of kin. When headstones are found to be unsafe however, the Council has a legal obligation to make an unsafe headstone safe. Headstones which are found to be in danger of falling will have a

temporary support fitted to it to stabilize it. Where possible, contact will then be made with the family advising them of the need to have the memorial permanently anchored. This support will remain in place for a period of 4 months.

After the 4 month period, if no action has been taken by the family, the memorial will be carefully laid flat and sunk flush into the ground with the inscription facing upwards. This ensures that the grounds maintenance works at the Cemeteries are not impeded by raised headstones which obstruct the grass cutters.

### **Conclusion**

9. The Panel is pleased to note the improvements at the Council's Cemeteries demonstrated by the new requirements for supporting headstones with a permanent anchor.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

9. That for reasons of safety, the erection of vertical headstones be permitted only if they are permanently anchored.

## **6.13 Original Recommendation 13**

That the feasibility be explored of laying down headstones, so that they are flush with the ground level, lying on top of the grave and causing no obstruction.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Gantry purchased to reinstate memorials in the ground and upright. This is where families do not come forward.

Appointed a dedicated Memorial Officer who is trained in all aspects.

## **6.14 Original Recommendation 14**

Those relatives continue to be informed of the reasons why headstones have been laid down and advised about reinstatement.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Advertise in local press prior to any inspections. Due to our new methods there has been no adverse publicity and an Ombudsman Enquiry resulted in no action and supported the Council's procedures.

## **6.15 Original Recommendation 15**

That parking bays for disabled people be designated at the Council's Cemeteries either in car parks or on the highway, where they will not cause an obstruction.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Not progressed at present.

### **Panel Findings:**

The Panel is pleased to note that parking bays for disabled people have been provided at Dukinfield Cemetery, the only Cemetery with a car park. Parking Bays for disabled drivers have not been provided on the Highways adjacent to the other cemeteries although disabled drivers are allowed to drive as close to a grave as safety will allow.

## 6.16 Original Recommendation 16

That Traffic Engineers be asked to give consideration to enhanced signage and making the entrances and exits from Dukinfield Cemetery easier to negotiate for funeral traffic.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Not progressed at present.

### **Panel Findings:**

The existing road design on the corner of Sandy Lane in Dukinfield still prevented modern funeral vehicles from easily manoeuvring during egress from Dukinfield Cemetery.

The Panel is informed that the Engineering Development Manager is currently examining the egress from Dukinfield Cemetery, with a view to implementing improvements for funeral traffic. Consultation is taking place with local residents regarding changing the one way system at the entrance from Crescent Road. The exit at Prospect Road does not appear to present a problem.

### **Conclusion**

10. the provision of enhanced signage and improved egress from Dukinfield Cemetery from Sandy Lane, Dukinfield should be progressed as soon as possible.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

10. That the Assistant Executive Director (Engineering and Environmental Services) be requested to improve the signage and consider improving the existing road design on the corner of Sandy Lane in Dukinfield in order to facilitate easier egress from Dukinfield Cemetery by funeral vehicles as soon as possible.

During a site visit, it was noted that the road approaching Mottram Cemetery had severe potholes. (Please refer to the illustration below)



### **Conclusion**

11. The Panel concludes that the road approaching Mottram Cemetery is in need of urgent repair.

### **Follow-Up Recommendation**

11. That the District Assembly be requested to repair the potholes in the road which approaches Mottram Cemetery.

## 6.17 Original Recommendation 17

That consideration is given to extending the areas for woodland burial to other parts of Tameside.

### **Executive Response Update:**

Bid for Green Flag award at Denton Cemetery in 2007. Woodland burial will

Form part of this bid/scheme. However demand is low and therefore at present there are no plans for any other Cemetery.

**Panel Findings:**

The Panel notes the progress.

## 7. Borough Solicitor's Comments

The Panel's continuing review will further ensure the improved amenity and safety of the Council's cemeteries. In particular the work already undertaken and recommended will address, amongst others, the Council's statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Council's common law duty of care to the visitors to its cemeteries. The review also contributes to the Council's Community Strategy in respect of a safe environment and an attractive borough.

## 8. Borough Treasurer's Comments

Any additional capital expenditure arising from the recommendations in this report would have to be funded from the sale of cemetery assets or from bidding for capital funding at the appropriate time.

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**Source:** Information and Advice for Grave Owners, "Grave Ownership" - [www.tameside.gov.uk/bereavement/graveowners](http://www.tameside.gov.uk/bereavement/graveowners)