



Executive
16th January 2006

**Report from the Director of
Environment and Culture**

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Review of the Cemetery Service

Forward Plan Ref: E&C-05/06-031

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report sets out for Members the main findings of an independent review of the cemetery service and the key recommendations for the future of the service.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to

2.1 Note the review findings and recommendations

2.2 Agree the action plan as set out in appendix 1.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cemeteries are managed in the London Borough of Brent by the Cemeteries and Mortuary Service. The Service manages four open cemeteries (ie; currently open for burials);

- Alperton Cemetery
- Carpenders Park Cemetery (located outside the Borough)
- Paddington Cemetery
- Willesden New Cemetery

At each of these sites the Service manages burials and interments and overall site management, including grounds maintenance. In addition, there are two closed cemeteries where no burials take place but where the service manages the site, including the grounds maintenance; Wembley Old Cemetery and Willesden Old Burial Ground. The Service is managed by a core management team of four people based in offices at Alperton Cemetery and small grounds maintenance teams located at each open cemetery site. The core team based at Alperton cemetery also provides information and advice to the public and where possible grave search services.

3.2 The Service also manages the mortuary located at Northwick Park Hospital on behalf of the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow. The mortuary was outside the scope of this review

3.3 There are a number of pressures facing the cemetery service. Brent, like many London boroughs, is facing a shortage of burial space and measures need to be put in place to address this for the future. The Registrars Service are now operating a seven day a week service for the registering of deaths there is a need to consider a complimentary service from the Cemeteries Service. In addition, financial pressures resulting from the Best Value Review of Fees and Charges have required the service to reduce its subsidy level by maximising income levels.

3.4 The review was conducted by an independent, external consultant; The Cemetery Research Group, University of York. In order to complete the review they were asked to consider a number of background documents and to meet with a number of stakeholders including the Lead Member for Environment and Culture, senior officers, operational staff and local funeral directors. In addition, they were required to consider staff and management arrangements in other similar local authorities.

3.5 Overall, the report concludes that whilst the current team provide a good service there are a number of changes that could be made to ensure the continuation of burial space for the borough and to reduce the current level of subsidy, so creating better value-for-money service. This report outlines the main recommendations under the following headings:

Extending space in LBB cemeteries

Meeting resident demands

The cost of the Service

Extending Burial Space in LBB Cemeteries

- 3.6 As outlined above, the borough is facing a shortage of burial space in the future. The timescales differ across the different cemeteries, with Willesden New Cemetery likely to run out of space within the next year, Alperton Cemetery and Paddington Cemetery within the next two to five years and Carpenders Park being expected to provide space long into the future. Obviously, the length of time depends on the number of deaths in any year and the closure of existing cemeteries will place additional pressure for burial space on those that remain open. The Cemetery Service has already put in place a number of measures to address this including mounding over old graves, the use of redundant paths and using space at the end of roadways within the cemeteries.
- 3.7 To allow Alperton Cemetery to remain open in the long term the review report recommends the adjacent allotment site in Clifford Road be brought into use as burial space. This would require capital funding to develop the infrastructure but should be relatively cheap as much of the cemetery infrastructure, such as the chapel, is already in place. It is believed that there are enough alternative allotments in the area to allow for the plot holders to be relocated. However, these are statutory allotments and so any change in use would require permission from the Secretary of State and so this would not provide a short term solution given the time to seek permission. Therefore, it is recommended that in the medium term the proposals within this report are put in place before any further work is undertaken with regard to the allotment site.
- 3.8 The review also considered the option of re-opening the Willesden Old Burial Ground for burials. There are two ways to do this; clear the existing grave furniture and redesign the space to accommodate lawn graves or clear the site and introduce concrete burial vaults. Concrete vaults (burial chambers) can be installed semi-sunk into the ground above existing grave spaces and can be used for between two to four separate internments (see appendix 3 for an illustration on burial chambers). A number of vaults can be installed at any one time which then reduces the need to dig individual graves in the future. There is a capital cost associated with the initial purchase of the vaults although the income level is likely to be significant. However, re-opening this site would require considerable infrastructure improvements including potentially a new road junction, new roadways and car parking and hence the overall capital costs do not make this a viable option.
- 3.9 As stated earlier, Willesden New Cemetery currently only has enough new grave space for approximately one more year. The introduction of concrete vaults at this site is more viable as the basic infrastructure is already in place.

A business case for this proposal has been developed and it is recommended that 50 vaults (40 allowing double internments and 10 allowing triple internments) be installed as a pilot within this cemetery. It is estimated that the capital costs would be £60K, which would generate £224k of income. Capital costs would include landscaping on the area, purchase of the vaults and installation. Assuming this is successful, additional income generated in the future would allow further vaults to be purchased and installed.

- 3.10 The final recommendation in this section is to introduce a programme of grave reclamation. Under the City of London Various Powers Act 1969 it is allowable for the service to reclaim unused grave space where burial has taken place, providing existing remains are not disturbed. For example, where a grave space was dug with depth for four coffins but only two burials have taken place, it is permitted to use the unused space. It is estimated that this could provide a few hundred additional grave spaces at Paddington Cemetery alone. It is recommended that a programme of reclaiming graves be introduced. This would be a significant amount of work and would need to be identified as part of the responsibility of a specific officer. Currently no such role exists. A further advantage to this proposal is that it is expected that new legislation may shortly be introduced in London relating to the disturbance of human remains for the purpose of reusing graves. If the Cemetery Service already had an administrative system in place then adapting this to accommodate full re-use would be relatively simple.

Meeting Residents Demands

- 3.11 The Council has previously considered the option of building a crematorium in the borough. The review considered this option again, especially in the light of the significant Hindu population in the Brent. However, the recommendation is not to proceed due to the significant capital costs and planning implications associated with such a development. Given this finding, the review recommend the Service should examine the possibility of meeting some need of this community by improving facilities for the memorilisation of cremated remains. Space has been identified at Alperton Cemetery for such a development and the required infrastructure is estimated at £40K. . However, initial consultations with Hindu funeral directors suggest there is not likely to be a large demand for this service. Therefore, it is recommended that further consultation is undertaken with this group to determine what, if any, improvements could be made.
- 3.12 Discussions with funeral directors who routinely deal with Muslim funerals found praise for the current services ability to respond quickly to the need to bury within a strict time limit. There was appreciation of the provision of specific space for Muslims at Carpenders Park, although some relatively small capital improvements were identified, such as the provision of a shelter and improved washing facilities.
- 3.13 The use of Willesden New Cemetery by African-Caribbean groups is also marked and the review found a strong demand for burial space by this community in this cemetery. The review also highlighted a demand for the ability to invest in monumentation by this group, which is restricted by the lawn

grave policy at Carpenders Park. Therefore, the introduction of vaults at this site as outlined in paragraph 3.9 above would help meet this demand.

- 3.14 The review considered a shift towards a seven-day service so that the Cemeteries Services would be in line with the Registrars Service. It was felt that this may be important particularly to the Muslim community who prefer burials to take place within twenty-four hours. The review did not recommend this change for two main reasons; the proposal was not popular amongst the funeral directors, especially the smaller local businesses and secondly, visits to cemeteries by bereaved relatives often take place on a Sunday and it was felt that large funerals during this time would have a negative impact. However, the review does recommend the introduction of a six-day service at Carpenders Park where the majority of Muslim burials take place. It is recommended that a six-day a week working pattern is introduced at this cemetery in line with the shift to single status.

The Cost of the Service

- 3.15 The report concluded that the Cemetery Service should take a more proactive stance in relation to generating income. It recommends that the service could substantially increase its fees and still remain competitive with neighbouring boroughs. This is addressed in section 4 of this report, but it is proposed that fees are increased above the level of inflation at all cemeteries and at Carpenders Park, where fees are currently lower, they are increased to be set at the same level as the cemeteries within the borough. As this would be a significant increase it is recommended that this is phased in over a period of two years.
- 3.16 It is suggested that further income could be generated by a more proactive sale of memorial seats, trees, etc. This will need to be built into the responsibility of one officer. Similarly, additional income could be generated by a more proactive approach to conducting grave searches. Very little income is generated via this means currently and making it the specific role of one officer could result in a much higher income level. It is likely that the majority of requests for searches would be from amateur family tree historians rather than immediately bereaved families and so it would not be inappropriate to charge for this work.
- 3.17 An action plan to achieve the recommendations is attached as Appendix 1.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The detailed proposed fees from 1st April 2006 will be agreed at the Council Executive meeting on 13th February 2006. They will be proposed on the basis outlined in paragraph 3.15 above.
- 4.2 Based on an analysis of previous years the estimated additional income from the proposed increased charges and provision of vaults at Willesden New Cemetery is £126K in 2006/7. A further £78K is estimated for 2007/8 from a

further inflationary increase and the second stage of increasing charges at Carpenders Park to match other Cemeteries.

- 4.3 The cost of installing vaults at Willesden New Cemetery is estimated at £60K. The proposal is to fund £50K of this expenditure from the Capital programme for 2006/7 and the remaining £10K from revenue as a result of the additional income generated. If the pilot is successful the additional income generated over and above the current budget will be used to fund further vaults. The budget projections at Appendix 2 assume £8K in 2006/7 and £40K in 2007/8 will be funded from this source.
- 4.4 Appendix 2 sets out the current level of subsidy for the Cemeteries and Mortuary Service. This shows that current subsidy in 2005/6 is £104K for the Mortuary and £277K for Cemeteries. The proposals in this report will reduce the subsidy for Cemeteries by £52K in 2006/7 and a further £10K in 2007/8. This is after allowing for inflation (£48K in 2006/7 and a further £58K in 2007/8) the purchase of vaults from revenue (£18K in 2006/7 and £40K in 2007/8) and £10K for the small capital improvements at Carpenders Park.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council is a Burial Authority as defined in Section 214 Local Government Act 1972. It is responsible for carrying out the various duties imposed by the Burial and Cremation Acts. This includes providing places of burial in and out of its area maintaining these places of burial.
- 5.2 Detailed provisions relating to the provision, maintenance of Cemeteries and charges that can be made by Burial Authorities in relation to burials and cremations are contained in Section 214 and Schedule 26 of the Local Government Act 1972 and in the Statutory Instruments made by the Secretary of State under Section 214 of the 1972 Act.
- 5.3 The Council will need to comply with the various legislation when implementing the review.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Diversity implications have been discussed within the main section of this report at paragraphs 3.11 to 3.13.
- 6.2 It is the intention to increase the fees for Exclusive Rights of Burial at Carpenders Park Cemetery to bring it in line with the other cemeteries, over a two year period. This will have a larger impact on the Muslim community as this is the preferred cemetery used by this community.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 The review considered the current staffing of the service in comparison with other local authorities and in relation to current roles and responsibilities. It

concludes that there is currently some confusion caused by an overlap of responsibilities, that the service costs seem high compared to other boroughs and suggests a new structure for the service. This includes the introduction of two new posts linked to the new areas of work outlined above and the need to introduce new income generating areas within the service. The new structure can be implemented within the existing staffing budget but may result in a redundancy situation.

8.0 Background Papers

Review of the Cemeteries Service – Report prepared by The Cemetery Research group, University of York, Oct 2005.

Business Case Financial Analysis Dec 2005

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Sue Harper, Sport and Leisure, Brent House, 349 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6BZ, Telephone: 0208 937 5038

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CEMETERY SERVICE – MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**APPENDIX 1**

	Recommendation	Action	Lead Officer	Implementation Date
1.	Review and complete staffing structure in line with the recommendations within the Review report	1.1 Finalise new structure and associated job descriptions. 1.2 Staff consultation 1.3 New structure in place 1.4 Recruit to remaining posts 1.5 Introduce six-day working at Carpender's Park Cemetery in line with single status review 1.6 Develop and implement training programme to ensure all staff, including new staff, are clear on roles and responsibilities.	Head of Service Head of Service Head of Service Head of Service Head of Service Head of Service	Jan 2006 Jan – Feb 2006 1 st April 2006 April – May 2006 March 2007 March – Sept 2006
2.	Review fees and charges in line with Review report	2.1 New fees and charges agreed and in place	Head of Service	1 st April 2006
3.	To implement measures to create additional burial	3.1 Create new function for reclaiming existing grave spaces and member of staff in place	Head of Service	June 2006

	Recommendation	Action	Lead Officer	Implementation Date
	space within cemeteries	<p>3.2 Introduce concrete burial vaults at Willesden New Cemetery on a pilot basis, subject to approval of capital funding.</p> <p>3.3 Continue with mounding programme but ensure better landscaping.</p> <p>3.4 Develop a detailed business plan for the proposal to bring the allotments at Alperton Cemetery back into use as burial land.</p>	<p>Head of Service</p> <p>'Asset Manager'</p> <p>Head of Service</p>	<p>April 2006 – Sept 2006</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>Dec 2006</p>
4.	Memorials programme	4.1 Continue with memorial safety programme, subject to approval of capital funding.	'Asset Manager'	March 2007
5.	Implement equalities improvements to better meet resident's demands.	<p>5.1 Undertake further research into the possible development of a cremated remains section at Alperton Cemetery, including a full business case.</p> <p>5.2 Introduce new shelter and improved washing facilities at Carpenders Park Cemetery.</p>	<p>Head of Service</p> <p>Asset Manager</p>	<p>Sept 2006</p> <p>Dec 2006</p>

Appendix 2**CEMETERIES & MORTUARY SERVICE**

	2003/04 Actual Spend £000	2004/05 Actual Spend £000	2005/06 Original Budget £000	2006/07 Inflation £000	2006/07 Net Savings £000	2006/07 Original Budget £000	2007/08 Inflation £000	2007/08 Net Savings £000	2007/08 Original Budget £000
<u>SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS</u>									
<u>Expenditure</u>									
Employee costs	616	647	746	35		781	42		823
Premises	247	225	159	11	10	180	7	-10	177
Purchase of vaults					18	18		22	40
Transport	84	97	36	1		37	2		39
Supplies & Services	100	140	113	7		120	9		129
Leasing charges	5	4	29	2		31	2		33
Total Expenditure	1,052	1,113	1,083	56	28	1,167	62	12	1,241
Cemeteries Income	664	664	615		126	741		78	819
Mortuary Income	75	75	79		2	81		2	83
Internal Income									
Mortuary internal income	6	28	8			8			8
Total Income	745	767	702	0	128	830	0	80	910
Net Expenditure	307	346	381	56	-100	337	62	-68	331
Mortuary	95	91	104	8		112	4		116
Cemeteries & Churchyards	212	255	277	48	-100	225	58	-68	215
Net Expenditure	307	346	381	56	-100	337	62	-68	331

Burial Vault

**Welters
Classic type
memorial
systems over
Double
Interment
Chambers**

