

Report on	Cemetery Administration and Management Update
Date of Meeting	Tuesday 12 th November 2019
Reporting Officer	Terry Scullion, Head of Property Services
Contact Officer	Eunan Murray, Grounds & Cemeteries Manager

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	This report is to seek members approval on the updated Draft Council's administration of burials in relation to Cemetery Management including Rules, Regulations and Memorial Safety.
2.0	Background
2.1	Members were updated in September 2017, and subsequently in March 2018 of the ongoing work in aligning the administration of burials in how it's delivered to the public by the council in its five active cemeteries.
2.2	In March 2018 members agreed to undertake stakeholder engagement on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Cemetery rules and regulations to develop a common policy of rules and regulations for Council's cemeteries, and • Consult on the longer term burial layouts and provision in each cemetery.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Cemetery Management Approach including Rules, Regulations and Memorial Safety</u> The revised draft policy type booklet formalises the proposed cemetery management rules and regulations in one coherent document for use by members of the public and other stakeholders with guidance when arranging a burial within Council cemeteries regardless of which active cemetery.
3.2	The revised document is detailed in appendix 1 and drew from industry good practice, the existing rules and regulations of each cemetery, and a wide range of stakeholders that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 14 Funeral Directors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) 13 Memorial Masons and Sculptors c) Council staff d) Religious Groups and Organisations from the Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, Church of Ireland, e) Refugee Asylum Forum, f) Belfast Migrant Forum, g) Belfast Islamic Centre, and h) Mid Ulster Disability Forum
3.3	<p>It provides information on restrictions and conditions that apply when purchasing exclusive rights of burial, and details rights and responsibilities in relation to our cemeteries. It sets out an approach to the safe installation and management of memorials in our Cemeteries, including historical burial grounds.</p>
3.4	<p>The document regularises and sets out a number of operationally challenging areas that have been revised, or included as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Notice for burials <p>Sunday burials must be agreed by 20:00 on the previous Friday. This is necessary to ensure adequate resources are in place to dig the grave, and cover the burial. On any other day the Funeral Director shall contact the Cemeteries Officer a minimum of 24 hours prior to the proposed burial taking place to ascertain whether other burials have been arranged in the cemetery. When the Cemeteries Officer has confirmed the burial request the Funeral Director will make final arrangements with the family, Clergy etc. and insert a death notice where necessary.</p> <p>An earlier time of 3pm on Friday was proposed but rejected by a majority of consultees as it was deemed too restrictive.</p> b) Interment Hours <p>During winter hours the latest permitted entry time for an interment is 14:30. In summer it's 3.00pm.</p> <p>Some consultees felt that this timeframe needed expanded to 4.00pm in the summer period, and 3.00pm in the winter period. However due to the lack of lighting in the cemeteries, and the drop in natural light at this time of year there are health and safety pressures for both visitors and staff, especially if the funeral arrives late. This also has a knock on staff budget pressure.</p> c) Manual Handling <p>The Funeral Director will be responsible for carrying and lowering the coffin, assisted by the family. In exceptional circumstances, council grave</p>

staff present will assist if notified and agreed in advance to ensure compliance with manual handling requirements.

Many funeral directors disagree with this change, however it is recommended in light of health and safety concerns raised by operatives attending graves, and is reflective of best practice by other local authorities to manage risks associated with manual handling.

d) Non-Christian burials

Council will aim to accommodate all non-Christian burials to the best of our ability. It is the responsibility of the family or funeral director to notify Council of religion, and any special requests or religious traditions that the deceased party may have.

e) Grave Tributes

All types of fresh wreaths, sprays, bouquets and posies must be cleared within 30 days of being laid, if such items have not been cleared, or are found to be in a state of decay prior to the expiry of 30 days, Council staff will be instructed to remove all such items from the grave plots. This includes Christmas wreaths, sprays, bouquets and posies.

f) Dogs

Dogs are permitted in the grounds, but not on or near grave plots as detailed on maps within each cemetery, other than guide dogs. They must be on a lead and under control at all times. It is the owner's responsibility to clean up after their dogs.

g) Unauthorised Memorials

If council haven't been able to contact the owner of a grave with an unauthorised memorial on it, and subsequently someone wants to open the grave for a burial, or to bury cremated remains, any outstanding fees owed to council must be paid before a burial can take place in line with the application process to erect a memorial.

h) Monumental masons and sculptors

Masons and sculptors may carry out their works in Council cemetery grounds during Monday to Friday 8.00am – 3.45pm. Evening and week-end working may be permitted in exceptional circumstances on application to cemeteries officer.

i) Memorial Safety

Memorial safety inspections are done as part of a rolling 5-year programme. Where a memorial has been deemed to be unstable or unsafe, a notification will be placed on the memorial giving cemetery contact details. It may also be staked and supported, cordoned off, or laid flat.

j) Vehicle access

In the normal course of events, only funeral hearses, official funeral cars, wheelchairs, powered chairs and mobility scooters may enter the Cemetery

3.5	<p>beyond the car parking area (except for Council vehicles and monumental sculptors with prior permission to be in the cemetery).</p> <p>The Disability Forum expressed concern for less able bodied people trying to access graves further into a cemetery. In light of the challenges identified by the Forum, the following amendment has been added – “However, in the case of elderly, disabled or infirm visitors, arrangement can be made with the Cemeteries Officer to have access with a vehicle beyond the car parking area. In such cases those afforded this facility must only drive vehicles on roads and pathways. Vehicles must not be driven on grass areas”.</p> <p><u>Long Term Burial Provision Layouts</u></p> <p>While there is adequate physical burial provision developed in all of the active cemeteries, with the exception of Forthill, Cookstown, all consultee’s were satisfied with the current layouts in each respective of active cemeteries.</p> <p>Similarly, no concerns were expressed, should council consider carrying out burials in rotation, irrespective of religious belief, as per the current practice in Cottagequinn Cemetery at some point in the future were development works are being carried out in any of the Cemeteries.</p> <p>3.6</p> <p>The next step is to afford the staff trade unions an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed document, before presenting it to Council’s Policy and Resources Committee for approval with a proposed implementation date of 1st February 2020, subject to Committee and Council meeting schedules.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: Development of the rules and regulations is within existing resources. Limited budget is available in year for roll out of the Memorial Safety Programme.</p> <p>Human: Staff time in the administration of burials, cemetery inspections including training of operatives, and managing third party contractors working in the cemeteries.</p> <p>Other client service support through Council’s Marketing and Communications, Legal Services and Health and Safety teams.</p> <p>Risk Management: This is a risk of injury to staff, contractors or visitors should an unstable headstone or memorial fall, or injury from access to a site, including liability issues associated with maintaining a work area not under the responsibility of Council, or were a maintenance agreement does not exist.</p>

4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>No adverse impact on any equality group has been identified and positive impacts will be minor. See appendix 2 for equality screening document.</p>
	<p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>No adverse impact as it is not specific to both rural or urban burials grounds and cemeteries within the District. See appendix 3 for rural needs assessment.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Members are requested to note the content of the report, and to seek approval for the Policy from the Council by way of the Policy and Resources Committee.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 - Mid Ulster District Council Cemetery Management Policy incorporating Rules, Regulations and Memorial Safety
6.2	Appendix 2 – Cemetery Equality Screening
6.3	Appendix 3 – Cemetery Rural Needs Assessment