

## COMMUNITY &amp; SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

19 SEPTEMBER 2012

## REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES &amp; NEIGHBOURHOODS

## THORPE RD CEMETERY REVIEW OF SERVICE CHANGES SINCE APRIL 2012

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update in regards to changes in the way the cemetery service has been delivered since April 2012 following receipt of a petition to Full Council on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012.
- 1.2 Detail any issues or matters that have arisen due to those changes.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members note the content of this report.**
- 2.2 **Members seek further cemetery performance and cemetery issues reports periodically.**

## 3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 In April 2012 two main changes to the Councils Thorpe rd Cemetery Service occurred:
  - The resident cemetery superintendant post was removed from the establishment
  - The site had vehicle access time restrictions removed
- 3.2 At the time there were concerns that the reduced council presence and unrestricted vehicle access would lead to:
  - Increased thefts of grave adornments
  - Possible damage or vandalism to graves or headstones
  - Increased or likely increased occurrences of anti social behaviour
  - Difficulty in accessing information regarding cemetery services
  - Difficulty on site with searches or finding plots etc

A petition was received by Full Council on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012, the petition was signed under the following heading:

*"We the undersigned petition Melton Borough Council to ensure that robust security measures are put in place to prevent vandalism and theft from Melton Thorpe Road Cemetery."*

- 3.3 To address these concerns a number of proactive preventative measures have been introduced :
  - A number of self recording close circuit motion sensor cameras have been put up at strategic points within the cemetery, not only acting as deterrents in their own right but also providing a 24/7 visual record of all activity within the cemetery.
  - The local police now include the cemetery site within their night-time patrols.

- There has been no marked change at all to the very small number of minor thefts that have unfortunately always occurred at the cemetery from time to time, due to reasons including: the police night time patrols, the 24 hour closed circuit cameras surveillance made known to the public by a number of strategically placed signs along with client officer morning patrols Monday – Friday along with frequent and regular daily client officer, maintenance operative, customer and patron visits.
- In regards to establishing unrestricted vehicle access members may wish to note that this has been the case since the start of February 2012, from which time the vehicle road gates have remained open at all times. This period to trial leaving the gates unlocked was chosen deliberately as the resident superintendant was still living on site and it was felt a sensible thing to do should any unforeseen issues emerge.
- To date that has not been the case, the unlocked gates if anything appear to have had two positive effects, 1) youths who tended to congregate inside the cemetery after the gates were locked (as they felt quite hidden away) no longer do so, one reason being visitors do attend in cars in the early evening and the seclusion provided by locked gates is no longer there. Secondly, the police now enter the cemetery at nights during their routine patrols, one instance enabled them to very promptly enter the cemetery in response to suspected anti social activity with this capability acting as a further deterrent and preventative measure in regards to such incidents.
- It is intended to keep the issue of the unlocked gates under review with an option to revert back to the previous limited vehicular access by locking them at nights should it be felt necessary.
- To improve the matter of information and guidance in regards to cemetery services and facilities without an officer in residence, new information signs have been put up at the exit / entrances to the cemetery. See attached as Appendix A.
- These signs are expected to assist site visitors and potential users of the services available with prominent and clear information and direction.
- Since April work has been done to both improve the accuracy as well to update various site records. In regards to plot / grave identification as well as requests for site searches, the new records can be fully interrogated at the Councils Environmental Maintenance team Snow Hill depot which is from where the service is now administered. In addition, when required, upon request and at short notice officers can and do attend the site to meet customers and resolve any on site issues.
- The toilets have been made available for public use during the period of any official cemetery services

3.4 Essentially the concerns raised in regards to an unmanned cemetery which now includes vehicle access at all times have either not emerged or have been addressed / mitigated by the measures detailed above.

3.5 Therefore members are advised that overall the changes introduced appear at this time to be successful, the cost of the service has been reduced by the removal of an establishment post, any possible confusion regarding plot identification and grave tracing have not occurred, improved and alternative security arrangements appear to be working well and in general there is no increase in anti-social activity, theft or vandalism.

- 3.6 However, those unwanted issues do and will almost inevitably occur from time to time but they will be managed appropriately and are not expected to or have shown any signs of increasing in number or magnitude as a result of the recent changes.
- 3.7 Conversely the improved overall management of the service, the updated mapping of the site and the high day time daily presence of Council officials and cemetery professionals have all contributed to a current satisfactory corporate cemetery service.

It is intended that this public service will remain under close scrutiny for the foreseeable future as it is not only highly emotive and very sensitive in nature but remains both an important corporate provision as well as being a well liked and well received front line service provision.

#### **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no policy or corporate implications arising as a result of this report.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The changed service incorporates a number of measures designed to ensure a satisfactory service albeit a different service to that previous to April 2012. There will be costs associated with some of these new measures such as security camera maintenance and officer time attending the site on various official duties, however, on balance there is the expectation that overall costs will be noticeably reduced with the increased efficiency and effectiveness brought about by those changes.

#### **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising as a result of this report.

#### **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no direct community safety issues arising as result of this report.

#### **8.0 EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 This report does not have any direct impacts upon equalities issues, such issues are under constant consideration in regards to the cemetery service . Accessibility and inclusion are high priorities matters integral to a good cemetery service and all current protected characteristics are given full consideration in regards to all the elements of the services provided.

## 9.0 RISKS

### 9.1

Probability



Very High A				
High B				
Significant C				
Low D		1		
Very Low E				
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

Impact →

Risk No.	Description
	That the changes result in increased unwanted behaviour

## 10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no direct climate change issues arising as a direct result of this report.

## 11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 There has been no consultation undertaken as a result of this report, however, the public in general that had concerns over the changes, raised the matter with the Council, and this report is one of the outcomes in regards to and in response and reply to those concerns.

## 12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 The cemetery is available for use by any member of the public, however, it is in Newport ward and primarily serves all Melton Mowbray residents.

Contact Officer Raman Selvon

Date: 10 September 2012

Appendices : A- Cemetery signs

Background Papers: None

Reference : X : C'tees, Council & Sub-C'tees/CSA/2012-13/190912/HR-Cemetery Services