

# Cabinet

Date 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Report of:

Portfolio holder for Growth & Prosperity

## CEMETERY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

<b>1.0 Corporate Priority:</b>	<b>Decision Type:</b>
1.1 Delivering quality services to business and residents; understanding what really matters to our customers.	Non Key Decision

<b>2.0 Summary:</b>
2.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Cabinet of the actions taken so far and proposes a series of action to improve the facilities at the Thorpe Road Cemetery owned by Melton Borough Council.
2.2 A series of issues have been raised recently by Green Flag award assessment, members of public as well as councillors about the quality of the space and service delivery that need to be addressed. This report summarises a comprehensive improvement plan to ensure the Council maintains the required quality its open spaces.
2.3 This report analyses the service charges and proposes a modest increase to cover the cost for the one-off improvements and the maintenance costs going forward.

<b>3.0 Recommendations</b>
3.1 <b>To approve the cemetery improvement action plan as identified in Appendix A.</b>
3.2 <b>To approve the proposed changes to service charges as identified in Appendix B to take effect form the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. In proposing the price changes it is proposed that all charges associated with child burials (0-12 years) be made free.</b>
3.3 <b>To recommend to the Council to approve the use of special expense reserve to cover the one-off cost for the improvement plan as outlined in App A.</b>
3.4 <b>To approve the commencement of works to explore options on how to make optimum use of Thorpe Road Cemetery and consider options for available sites for future provision.</b>

#### **4.0 Reason for Recommendation:**

- 4.1 The Cemetery is a key element of community facilities offered and managed by the Council. It is important to provide a good quality environment and service to the customers choosing to use this service.
- 4.2 The site has held a Green Flag award for four years, however this year the site did not retain this prestigious award. The judges' feedback report highlighted that a lack of maintenance across the site has unfortunately seen a drop in standards and that it required some attention to improve. The proposed actions address the issues raised by the Green Flag evaluation as well as respond to the complaints received from the customers.
- 4.3 The cemetery services provided are managed on a cost recovery basis and charges are introduced where appropriate to cover the cost of providing the service. The charging levels which are benchmarked and reviewed annually are based on both the fees and charges levied by other local cemeteries as well as consideration for benchmark group partner cemetery charges elsewhere. The benchmark partners include North West Leicestershire, Harborough, Charnwood, Kettering, Peterborough, South Derbyshire, Boston and Gedling. Benchmarking of 55 different types of cemetery service and provision charges have highlighted that some of our charges are below average and should be considered for increase. The additional income that may result from this could be used in future years to ensure ongoing maintenance and management of a higher quality service. It is proposed to remove all charges associated with child burials (0-12 years) to support the families already going through difficult times.

#### **5.0 Alternate Options Considered**

- 5.1 Do nothing.  
This option is not recommended as the cemetery is a key community facility that needs to be improved. Not doing the improvements will have a detrimental impact on the asset as well as service delivery. Maintenance and provision of cemetery service does cost the Council and the charges proposed are considered to be reasonable.
- 5.2 Increase the charges but carry out the works in the next financial year.  
This is not recommended as the works are required to be undertaken now and any delay will cause more complaints and dissatisfaction with the service.
- 5.3 Use the special expense reserve now and replenish it in the future years with the estimated additional income through proposed charges.  
This option is recommended as per the reasons identified in section 4.

#### **6.0 Report Detail**

- 6.1 The cemetery is managed in accordance with the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 under which burial authorities are responsible for maintaining statutory burial registers and grave plans, establishing rules and regulations relating to the management of the cemeteries and the memorials permitted with them and setting fees for burials and memorials. The regulations include the

statutory requirements contained within the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 together with any other relevant legislation that governs this service.

6.2 The Cemetery has an estimated capacity of around 8000 plots and currently accommodates 31 Commissioned war graves. There are also dedicated areas for:

- Cremated remains burial
- Children's Burials
- Scatterings – Wall of remembrance
- Sanctum II Vaults

6.3 The Cemetery has a traditional non-denominational chapel which can seat up to 50 persons. The former cemetery lodge located at the entrance was modernised internally four years ago and is now occupied privately through a tenancy agreement.

6.4 Maintenance of the cemetery is carried out by the environmental maintenance team. The following services are provided:

- Purchase of plots
- Burials/Cremations – prepare plot – discreet attendance to ensure H & S is satisfactory throughout the interment process.
- Scatterings
- Maintenance of chapel
- Sanctum vaults – interment
- Install remembrance benches
- Headstone safety checks
- Locate and research – assist customers to locate relative's graves
- Installation and purchasing of memorial plaques and benches

6.5 Following the Green Flag award assessment earlier this year, some of the recommendations have been actioned and funded through existing budgets. The pest control officer has carried out regular pest treatments over the past two months which has rectified the fly infestation issue, but will still continue to monitor the situation. The existing heating system has been tested and the current heaters have been renovated, new thermostats are installed and it is recommended that the heaters are left on continuously low to try to alleviate the damp and reduce complaints from residents stating that the chapel is far too cold.

6.6 Taking into consideration the Green Flag judges recommendations and implementing them as per the cemetery development plan, the Cemetery can be restored to the required quality for all residents of the borough. With this in mind a proposed schedule of improvements has been compiled:

1. Signage – Install additional and modify existing signage.
2. Chapel – decoration and replacement of several fixtures (carpet/flower displays/chairs/audio device).
3. Cemetery grounds – replacement compost bins – demolition of two concrete garages – screen off compost and spoils bays in car park.
4. Information leaflets – services provided/site history/facilities.

- 6.7 It is also acknowledged that good service delivery includes the training and management of behaviour and culture of the team and staff. Measures are being taken to provide relevant training to staff preparing for and attending funerals on site. Further actions are being considered within the current budget allocations to introduce a standard uniform for the staff attending the cemetery during a funeral and a service. This is to ensure due respect appropriate decorum required for the occasion. It is expected that the proposed work will be carried out with minimum disruption to the cemetery service. The works can be completed in the current financial year.
- 6.8 The proposed charging schedule takes into account the cost of the service to the Council, staff time required for administration, benchmarking with other similar authorities in the region, benchmarking with private sector and other community sector providers as well as inflation cost on previous years' charges. While it is proposed to consider increase in most charges, all child (age 0-12), infant and still-born burials are proposed to be free.
- 6.9 In 2018/19 there were 61 burials and 48 cremations. Based on these numbers, it is assessed that the cemetery has an estimated supply of 5 years worth of space left. The amount of land required annually to meet the demand for interments (both full burials and created remain burials) is reducing year on year. In order to extend the working life of the cemetery, the following measures are being taken:
1. Search for unused spaces in the older sections of the site
  2. Consideration to use expired graves where deeds of ownership have expired and the spaces are recorded as unused
  3. Removal of the un-used pathways and other spaces for additional burial spaces
  4. Purchase and development of a new burial site
  5. Collaboration with other cemetery outside Melton area
- 6.10 It is acknowledged that the purchase and development of a new burial site will require additional resources and will have significant budget implications. There are many legislative regulations that the Council will have to comply with, which will involve working closely with the Environment Agency who are a statutory consultee for the potential pollution of ground water, which is a key consideration, as is consecrating the site, which will increase the time scales involved. Therefore it is expected that the Council prepares a report with external advice if needed, to explore options on how to make optimum use of Thorpe Road Cemetery and look for options for available sites for future provision.

## **7.0 Consultation and Feedback (including Scrutiny Committee)**

- 7.1 Ward councillors will be consulted with following Cabinet approval. Future provision options will need to be consulted with stakeholders.

## **8.0 Next Steps**

- 8.1 Seek Council approval to this report
- 8.2 Undertake the works as approved
- 8.3 Consult with relevant stakeholders expansion and future provision
- 8.4 Report the findings of the works to Cabinet

<b>9.0</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>
9.1	These one-off improvement works as outlined in Appendix A are estimated to be in the region of £17k and as outlined in the report it is suggested these works need to be undertaken in this financial year. The latest in year budget monitoring for 2019/20 hasn't identified any underspends within the Special Expense area and therefore in order to fund these works a supplementary estimate is required. The current balance on the Special expense reserve as at 31 March 2019 is £287k where it is proposed to fund these works from.
9.2	Alongside these improvement works a review of the current fees and charges have been undertaken which are outlined in Appendix B whereby it is suggested a number of charges are increased after taking into account the date of last increases and benchmarking information. It is proposed these charges are introduced on the 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2020 following completion of the improvement works and as result of the increased charges it is anticipated based on current usage additional income of circa £14.5k per annum will be generated. This will be an ongoing increase in income which can then replenish the contribution from the Special Expense reserve to fund the improvement works initially.

<b>10.0</b>	<b>Legal and Governance Implications:</b>
10.1	There is no statutory duty on a local authority to provide burial facilities, but if they do so, the management is governed by the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977.
10.2	Local authorities are defined as burial authorities and given the power to provide Cemeteries by virtue of the <b>Local Government Act 1972</b> .
10.3	The cemetery is managed in accordance with the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 under which burial authorities are responsible for maintaining statutory burial registers and grave plans, establishing rules and regulations relating to the management of the cemeteries and the memorials permitted with them and setting fees for burials and memorials. The regulations include the statutory requirements contained within the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 together with any other relevant legislation that governs this service.
10.4	It should be noted that there is a statutory duty placed upon local authorities to provide Public Health interments as and when required, which is an occasional occurrence in the Borough. In such circumstances any known wishes of the deceased would need to be taken into consideration and responsibility for the associated costs agreed with the relevant government agency.

<b>11.0</b>	<b>Equality and Safeguarding Implications:</b>
11.1	EIA has not been carried out

<b>12.0</b>	<b>Community Safety Implications:</b>
12.1	NA

<b>13.0</b>	<b>Other Implications</b>
13.1	NA

**14.0 Risk & Mitigation:**

14.1

<b>L I K E L I H O O D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>Very High</b>				
	<b>B</b>	<b>High</b>				
	<b>C</b>	<b>Significant</b>				
	<b>D</b>	<b>Low</b>				
	<b>E</b>	<b>Very Low</b>		1,2	3	
	<b>F</b>	<b>Almost Impossible</b>				
			<b>Negligible 1</b>	<b>Marginal 2</b>	<b>Critical 3</b>	<b>Catastrophic 4</b>
<b>IMPACT</b>						

<b>Risk No</b>	<b>Risk Description</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>Delay in delivering improvements to the service leading to increased level of complaints</p> <p>If the report is approved and funds are released, this risk will not materialise</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>The increase in service charges are not supported by customers</p> <p>The increase in service charges is proportionate and in line with inflation as well as other benchmarked authorities</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>Improvements to the environment are not matched by the staff behaviour</p> <p>Measure are being taken to ensure staff training, provision of uniform and monitoring of staff behaviour are integral to service delivery going forward</p>


**Background Papers:**

List any background papers that have informed the report

**Appendices**

Appendix A: Action Plan  
 Appendix B: Proposed charging schedule

<b>Report Timeline:</b>	<b>Date of sign-off:</b>
<b>Equalities Check &amp; Challenge</b>	-
<b>SLT Sign off</b>	10/09/2019
<b>Previously Considered by Cabinet</b>	-
<b>Director Approval</b>	13/09/2019
<b>Legal Approval</b>	16/09/19 [KS]
<b>Finance Approval</b>	13/09/19
<b>Chief Finance Officer Sign Off</b>	16/09/19
<b>Monitoring Officer Sign Off</b>	16/09/19

<b>Report Author</b>
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