

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 2 November 2009

Agenda No:

6

## CEMETERIES & CREMATORIA TASK & FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 PURPOSE

To inform the committee about the recommendations of the Task & Finish group. This group has been conducting a review of Gloucester City Council's cemeteries and crematoria since September 2009, and called on witnesses from the Coney Hill facility, as well as City Council officers and the Cabinet Member for Environment.

### 2 BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Membership of the task group

Councillors Lise Noakes (spokesperson), Mary Smith and Declan Wilson.

#### 2.2 Terms of reference

- To examine the current state of provision in Gloucester's cemeteries and crematoria, with particular reference to the facility at Coney Hill.
- To scrutinise the proposed changes to these services.
- To recommend any changes to on-site facilities, or the proposed revision of services, which may be beneficial to users.

### 3 REPORT

#### 3.1 National Policy Context

In many areas of service provision, Gloucester City Council is bound by a range of national policy documents and may not vary services based on local policies. It is noted that there are no local policies at all. The main national organisations and documents are:

- Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management (Code of Cremation Practice) (referred to below as ICCM)
- Federation of Burials and Cremation Authorities Code of Conduct (referred to below as FBCA)
- Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977 (referred to below as LACO)
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Process Guidance Note 5/2 (04) Secretary of State's Guidance for Crematoria (referred to below as DEFRA note)

In summary, the main policy implications of these factors are:

- The Federation of British Cremation Authorities states that conduct is of paramount concern for staff at such facilities, who ‘must combine to create and maintain an atmosphere of reverence and respect throughout the entire proceedings.’ (FBCA, p1).
- It is vital that all cremators and ancillary equipment used at Crematoria are kept in good repair and maintained in accordance with manufacturers’ recommendations as well as any relevant legislation. (FBCA, p2)
- The Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977 allows room for burial authorities to interpret the way in which they provide such facilities, stating that they may ‘lay out and embellish a cemetery in such manner as they think fit, and from time to time improve it, and shall keep the cemetery in good order and repair.’ (LACO, Section 4.1).
- This can involve significant input from relatives using the facility, who have ‘the right to place and maintain, or to put any additional inscription on, a tombstone or other memorial on the grave space, grave or vault’. (LACO, Section 10.1.(c))
- The levels of mercury and dioxins produced by cremation are to be subject to strict abatement targets. The progress made by crematoria on this matter will be subject to external monitoring. (DEFRA note, p 14).

Any changes which are made at the Council’s cemeteries and crematoria also have to be in line with the relevant planning policies.

### **3.2 Gloucester City Council Context**

Julienne Reeves (Cemeteries and Crematorium Services Manager and Registrar), Steve Phelps (Group Manager Financial Services) and Peter Smith (Crematorium Technician) provided the Group with some information regarding the proposed upgrade to the Coney Hill facilities during a site visit on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2009. In addition, these officers were joined by Steve Morgan (Cabinet Member for Environment) and Jo Styles (Group Manager Customer Services and Leisure) at a meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2009.

In addition, the group also used the ‘Focus’ system to investigate the number and nature of complaints made by users of the facilities and add more detail to their understanding of the background. These complaints were small in number, resolved amicably and did not cause undue concern to members of the group. Some complaints which were handled internally (e.g. locked disabled toilets) were also studied; these were found to be dealt with swiftly and sensitively.

The Council is still working through the details of its planned changes to the service at Coney Hill, although their exact nature will not be apparent until the tender process is complete. However, the improvement of facilities for those who wish to commemorate their loved ones will be a major element to these plans.

The following areas of enhancement emerged from the group's meetings and research:

### **Mercury Abatement**

- 3.2.1. Mercury abatement targets have been set, and will be a prime consideration in any changes to service provision. Abatement needs to be 50% by 2012 to conform with current Government stipulations, and there is a likelihood that this will eventually rise to 100%. The mercury abatement targets have necessitated a managed route for the upgrade of the facility. Cash flow issues and the need for repairs to parts of the Crematorium (e.g. the age of the burners and circuit boards) have been influential here. As a result, these repairs will be an outsourced service, with the Council paying a rate per cremation. It was anticipated that, if this decision was not made, the facility could struggle to maintain service levels in 5 years time. This policy had already been approved by Cabinet, with the relevant fees in place for 2 years. In terms of the Chapel of Rest, the work required for mercury abatement will cost approximately £500,000, with another £100,000 likely to be caused by the Civil works necessary (e.g. removal of roof).

### **Roads**

- 3.2.2. Improvements to the roads servicing the site are vital; some of these roads are 70 years old and have seen very little maintenance leading to a position where the Council is potentially liable for any incidents. The preferred option is to tackle all the issues relating to the roads simultaneously and immediately, although there is also the option of a capital program over 4 – 5 years. However, the status quo must be changed; there is no 'do nothing' option here. In addition, parking for hearses and mourners will also need to be improved as part of any revision of provision. A test run for the new parking arrangements took place shortly before the 4<sup>th</sup> September site visit, and seemed to work well; however, issues over the fact that the Crematorium does not own the land involved are still present. It is proposed that an exit road is developed to ensure the smooth running of the crematorium; this will require joint work with the County Council and, in particular, the Highways department to help prevent gridlock during burials attended by large numbers of people.

### **Facilities**

A number of improvements to the existing facilities have been identified. Appendix 3 gives details of some of the proposed areas of development.

- 3.2.3. Tea Room

The tea room could cost between £¼ million – ½ million, but the covered way and memorial garden could be self-financing if it works as intended. The tea room will offer simple food and soft drinks, and could also host wakes. There may also be the option of using the Guildhall to host licensed wakes should mourners request

this. Wakes may be kept in-house or franchised out (or employ a system between these two extremes); whichever option is taken, the income generated is likely to be unpredictable, as a) the estimates for the number of funerals requesting wakes varies from 20 – 40% and b) the numbers involved in each wake could vary from 5 – 200 (although the average has been estimated at 65). Any outsourcing of wakes would need monitoring, to ensure that issues (e.g. overcharging for goods, lack of sensitivity towards mourners) do not undermine efforts to improve the overall service. As the rates for burials at the cemetery are low (and have been so for some time) whilst capacity is high, these new facilities would not deprive room for burials.

#### 3.2.4. Covered Way and Memorial Garden

The covered way and memorial garden will offer room for families to erect plaques, granite benches and similar memorials. The covered way will be a walkway where flowers are displayed and families can view them regardless of inclement weather, and will lead to the uncovered memorial garden, where there will be a greater space for and choice of memorials. They will provide an area where mourners may commemorate their loved ones after the service, and in future times. It is also anticipated that the memorial items would be provided by the crematorium, and would incorporate both bottom-end and top-end options, as well as middle-range goods. At present, only materials in the middle of the price range are on offer. It is also proposed to offer a wider range of memorial goods than is the case at present. The provision of flowers is intended to be in-house. If the project is accepted, then Gloucester City Council staff will research other similar facilities to gather any relevant information and knowledge.

- 3.2.5. It was also noted that more could be done to improve the rates of recycling goods such as flowers and paper. Whilst, at present, some work was being done here, increased provision of separate bins for recycling waste could improve this. However, the annual cost of emptying bins at the crematorium stood at £20,000, and more bins would raise this as they are charged per lift, rather than for each visit by refuse collectors. As a result, a waste audit will be carried out by staff at the crematorium to evaluate the impact of any changes. The Task & Finish group would like to do a follow-up session approximately one year from now to see if this issue can be progressed.

#### **Finance**

- 3.2.6. Overall, the main aim is to improve customer service; however, it will also need to be self-funding. The budgetary estimates used when discussing the future plans for the service have used three models; optimistic, pessimistic and neutral. To allow for a margin of error, the final figures used have tended to be in the range between neutral and pessimistic. The proposed work has been estimated at £2.1 million, having been through expert analysis and the input of engineering staff; this figure included a 10% contingency. The external finish proposed was redbrick, the

middle range option; Cotswold stone was deemed too expensive, whilst lesser materials may not fit with the surrounding area (as well as potentially undermining the experience for mourners). The new facilities have been estimated at a cost of £375 per square foot, rising to £400 – 500 per sq. ft. for areas such as the tea room. Further details of this can be found in appendix 1.

#### **4 VOTE OF THANKS**

The Task and Finish Group would like to register their appreciation for the co-operation and support given by the officers involved in the meetings.

#### **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cemeteries and Crematoria Task & Finish Group supports the proposed program of works as detailed in appendix 1. Should this recommendation not be supported by Cabinet, then the committee requests a written response by 18 January 2010 outlining how the Cabinet intends to address the following key issues identified by the group:

- a) The need for pavement and road repairs (paragraph 3.2.2)
- b) Increasing parking provision (paragraph 3.2.2)
- c) The potential failure of cremators
- d) Fulfilling the need for on-site refreshment (paragraph 3.2.3)
- e) Maintaining income streams (paragraphs 3.2.6)

In addition, the following issues need to be pursued regardless of which proposals are accepted by Cabinet, and requests a written response by 18 January 2010:

- a) Resolution of the land ownership issues of the parking area
- b) The results of the waste audit (paragraph 3.2.5)

#### **6 FUTURE WORK OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP**

A return visit will be made to fit in with either the completion of the works or in a year as most appropriate to see how the facilities have been enhanced. A review of recycling is to be an action at this visit.

**Councillor Lise Noakes**

**Spokesperson for Cemeteries and Crematoria Task & Finish Group**

## APPENDIX 1

<b><u>Proposed Work</u></b>	<b><u>Est Cost</u></b>
Mercury Abatement Equipment	£520,000
Mercury Abatement Civils	£100,000
Top coat (25mm wearing course) existing Roads as shown coloured light green	£35,000
Parking Bay on access road	£30,000
Main Access road re-surfacing	£75,000
New access onto Coney Hill Road	£65,000
Replace slabs with tarmac walkways along access road	£45,000
Grass grid reinforcement (to 50% of LHS only (1450m <sup>2</sup> ))	£95,000
Replace slabs with tarmac walkways around the remainder of the site as coloured blue	£115,000
Cafe & Wakes Room (Redbrick External finish)	£550,000
Garden of Remembrance	£140,000
Sub Total excluding contingency & VAT	£1,770,000
Contingency @ 10%	<u>£125,000</u>
Sub Total excluding VAT	£1,895,000
Future works on Roads	£180,000
Professional fees @ 15%	<u>£206,300</u>
<b>Estimated Total excluding VAT</b>	<b><u>£2,281,300</u></b>
Internal Fees Excluded from Financial Plans (5%)	<u>£68,767</u>
<b>Total as per schedules</b>	<b><u>£2,212,533</u></b>
<b><u>By Category</u></b>	
Construction – Roads	£506,000
Future works on Roads	£180,000
Construction – Buildings	£869,000
Abatement Equipment	£520,000
Fees	
External	£68,767
Internal	£137,533
	<u>£2,281,300</u>
Internal Fees Excluded from Financial Plans (5%)	<u>£68,767</u>
<b>Total as per schedules</b>	<b><u>£2,212,533</u></b>

## APPENDIX 2

Following consultation with Funeral Directors on 8-9-2009.

Below are tables showing their estimated percentage take up of usage for proposed construction of a Tea Room with additional rooms to provide other functions including wakes.

<b>Main Stakeholders</b>		
	<b>As a percentage</b>	
Funeral Director	Tea Room	Wake
Co-op (All branches)	50%	30%
Ernest Cocks	50%	30%
Goodwins	30%	40%
J.Hall	40%	40%
P.Ford	40%	50%
SC & BS Cocks	45%	35 / 40%

<b>Infrequent Stakeholders</b>		
	<b>As a percentage</b>	
Funeral Director	Tea Room	Wake
Allen White	40%	15%
Beechwood	40%	20%
Clutterbuck	20%	20%
F.Stevens	35%	5%
Stockwells	50%	60%
Woods	40%	40%

Research has shown that families will take advice from the Funeral Directors on facilities in which to hold Wakes. There are currently four Hotels within four miles of the Coney Hill site which hold Wakes, charging between £300 and £800 for a 50 person Wake. Funeral Directors are confident that facilities at the Crematorium would be a welcome alternative and has the added advantage of single location.

In the more immediate vicinity of Coney Hill there are little or no facilities providing refreshments.