

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL – BEREAVEMENT SERVICES**

**NOTE OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2014**

**WITHIN MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK.**

In attendance: Councillors Dr Craig R Martin and Allyson Black; John Paterson (Head of Operational Services); David Crighton (Estates Manager); Wraight Shepherd (Area Estates Co-ordinator); Eleanor Thomson (Bereavement Manager); Fiona Campbell (Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement) and Arlene Fraser (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Rev Robert S T Allan; Rev Melville Crosthwaite and Rev Louise McClements (all Church of Scotland); Marbeth Boyle (Humanism Scotland); Maria Caramando, Alfred Duffy and George Heriott (all St Francis Xavier Church Bereavement and Befriending Group); Donald G Cowan and Evelyn Hak (both Cowan Funeral Services); Alistair G Cuthell and Paul Cuthell (both Thomas Cuthell & Son); Graeme Easton (Alexander & Easton Funeral Directors); Councillor Dennis Goldie; Robin Hay (James Hay Memorial Services); Stuart Murdoch; Sarah Nelson and Dave Ross (Co-op Funeral Care), and Jim Snedden (William Scott Funeral Directors).

An apology was intimated by Margaret Innes, CRUSE Bereavement Service.

Councillor Martin welcomed everyone to the meeting and after introductions, set out the format of the meeting. He then gave a brief outline of the scope of the Policy Development Panel - Bereavement Services (PDP), the visits carried out, the issues identified to date and the importance of hearing views from those in attendance.

**Item 1 – Summary of Issues Demonstrated on Cemetery and Crematorium Site Visits**

David Crighton outlined a number of issues which had been highlighted on the cemetery and crematorium site visits and how these affected the day to day operations within the Council's cemeteries and crematorium.

Councillor Martin referred to the visual evidence contained in the report which clearly identified many of the issues which required to be addressed.

**ISSUES**

The following views were made:

- equality is important as some people want a simple grave and consideration should be given to the need for a level playing field.
- why do some cemeteries have standardised memorial benches and others don't?
- Section 12 of the current cemetery regulations covers tributes e.g. solar lamps.

- the sensitive nature of retaining/disposing of tributes left at the designated children memorial within Camelon Cemetery and the joint work undertaken by both Council staff and SANDS.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- ***The children memorial is appreciated by the public and it may be beneficial to have similar memorials within other burial grounds.***

## **Item 2 – Proposed Review of Cemetery Regulations and New Cemetery Policies**

David Crichton referred to the Council's existing Cemetery Regulations which were last reviewed in 1996 and to the factors which had brought about a proposed review of the regulations and development of a new bereavement services policy.

In order to update the regulations and develop future policy, the PDP were keen to hear evidence and views from stakeholders on the following:-

### **Memorial Headstone Size**

David highlighted various problems associated with headstones within the Council's burial grounds and referred to the visual evidence circulated with the report.

He advised that the PDP sought views on a proposal to restrict memorial headstone size to 4ft (1200mm) in height which could alleviate potential risk to visitors and users of cemeteries in years to come.

The following points/views were made:

- **where 4 interments plus interment of ashes within a lair is possible and reducing headstone size to 4ft could in some cases limit space for inscription.**
- how would this impact on "double" lairs (adjoining plots)? A separate headstone for each or one 4ft headstone maybe erected between the 2 lairs with approval.
- the problems associated with older headstones falling over could be due to the older techniques used. Modern doweling and concrete procedures provide stronger support for new headstone memorials.

### **Memorial Headstone Foundations**

David provided details on the proposal to roll out the installation of memorial headstone foundations where space allows in cemeteries and that concrete raft foundations be installed in all new cemetery ground/extensions. He also explained the reasoning and rationale behind the proposed establishment of a memorial registration scheme.

The following points/views were made:

- do headstones require to be constructed from granite/stone and why not look at manmade materials as an option which could alleviate some of the issues?

- only stone or terrazzo would be acceptable and other materials such as wood/glass/metal would not be permitted.
- **affordability is a big issue but what acceptable alternatives would be permitted.**
- **agree that the way forward is installation of CRF however at Paragraph 3.1 “Cost for the foundation would be charged when the lair is purchased” – this seems unfair due to financial constraints on families. Could this fee be built into the costs when a memorial is installed?**
- agree with the proposals for CRF within new cemeteries. Older sections more problematic (what Stirling have done).
- what criteria would be required for the memorial registration scheme and would proceed with caution on this matter.

### **Tree and Shrub Planting within Headstone Borders**

David referred to the existing cemetery regulations relating to the management and maintenance of trees and shrubs and to the issues noted during the site visits. He set out the reasons for the proposal that no planting will be permitted within the headstone area. However it was the intention to identify specific areas where limited living memorials could be planted.

The following points/views were made:

- agree and admire the proposals but who is going to monitor and enforce these regulations.
- Falkirk Council to enforce as best they can and ensure that everyone is aware of any amended regulations/new policy.
- Funeral directors can help make people aware of the regulations/policy.
- reinforce regulations/policy and ensure that these are on display at every cemetery.

### **Tributes and Inscriptions**

David made specific reference to the direct impact that tributes have on the routine maintenance operations due to their encroachment on to burial space and neighbouring lairs. Tributes of various descriptions are meaningful to families but not to others, and therefore a means of control is required.

It is proposed that floral tributes be removed from lair space after 2 weeks and that a maximum of one vase per headstone/lair be implemented.

The following points/views were made:

- restricting one vase per headstone/lair may be unrealistic and impractical due to family discord.
- spring bulbs will require to be planted within a pot plant and placed at the headstone/CRF and not in planted in the headstone border area.
- draft policy only but there is provision for toys/ornaments to be stored for a specific time period – need to publicise and market to allow content of policy to be known.
- wind chimes, especially within Muiravonside Cemetery, can be very intrusive at times.
- Section 5.4 refers to proposed restriction on maximum size for image which could be difficult to accommodate certain symbolic detail e.g. 5” Our Lady image. Consider how this would be monitored and what sizes would be restricted.
- each request outlined at Section 5.4 is considered on a case by case basis.
- Section 5.4 is difficult area and open to change wording.
- holly wreaths will not be removed after 2 weeks but will be removed within a specific time.
- an assortment of items are accommodated in coffins with the deceased but relatives choose to make a more public display with items being placed around the lair. This must be difficult for ground maintenance staff to manage but must commend the Council and their staff on the condition of its burial grounds within the district.
- no permanent memorabilia is permitted at the memorial baby garden but any vase/soft toys are stored with many being retrieved. No items from adult graves are retained these are removed and disposed of, however there is discretion used by Council staff in this regard.
- amended regulations and new proposals will not please everyone. Use funeral directors, Central FM, local press. Falkirk Council has the authority to bring in and/or to amend policy in order to make maintenance easier, cost effective and cemeteries will look nicer.

### **Provision for Muslim Burials**

David advised that the Council has made provision for Muslim interments within Hills of Dunipace Cemetery and it is intended to continue to provide this facility.

- representatives from the Muslim faith had been invited to attend.

## Memorial Benches and Trees

David advised that it was proposed to standardise memorial benches and that these be placed within designated areas. It was also intended to identify areas for planting of memorial trees with a palette of 5 trees to choose from. Maintenance of memorial benches and trees would be undertaken by the Council.

The following points/views were made:

- small plaques would be sited on benches with base rings on trees.
- need to further consider woodland burial sites.

## Item 3 –Cemetery Space

John advised that the Council currently operates 9 active cemeteries which carry out approximately 820 burials as opposed to 1950 cremations per annum. Reference was made to the table contained in the report to Falkirk Council on 26 June 2013 which highlighted the pressure on 6 of the cemeteries if advance lair purchase remained. The Council agreed to the temporary cessation of advance lair purchases, at all sites where demand causes the cemetery to have fewer than 10 years remaining capacity (at the prevailing rate of advance lair purchases).

He referred to the strict regulations and criteria which made securing and developing sites more difficult.

Councillor Martin recognised the need for new sites but requested thoughts on whether cessation of advance lair purchase should remain or whether this would require to be amended.

The following points/views were made:

- agree with “at needs” sales as this happens everywhere else and why not Falkirk
- there are lairs within Hills of Dunipace where only 2 interments can be accommodated and family often wish to purchase adjoining lairs and the cessation of ALP would not allow the additional lair purchase
- **require to consider this in terms of pre-paid funeral plans or those who are terminally ill and wish to purchase lair before their “imminent death” and as an important part of their planning for death**

#### **Item 4 – Policy Principles for Cremations at Falkirk Crematorium**

John outlined the report which set out the background to the Falkirk Crematorium; financial impact due to new environmental legislation and replacement of existing cremators and detailing the cremation charging scheme.

He highlighted the principle behind the proposal to create a pricing incentive which encourages the choosing of cremation over burial. He also referred to the possibility of heat generated from the abatement unit being used to heat the crematorium building and sought views on this.

The following points/views were made:

- fresh water and cups to be made available for celebrants.
- new velvet covering has been replaced.
- **a longer time slot would be beneficial and suggested that the 30mins be extended to 45mins. This would still allow 2,500 cremations p.a. to take place (2,000 took place in 2013). This would help alleviate the car parking/traffic problems and delays which can adversely affect the bereaved at a very sensitive time.**
- **possibility of extending Saturday opening hours**
- **opening on a Sunday**
- **extending opening hours**
- **creating a privacy corridor**
- **partial refurbishment but bearing in mind that there are limiting factors**
- funerals have changed over the years and more services are carried out at the Crematorium.
- could the car park be extended onto the grassed area/island to increase capacity from 40 cars to around 100 cars; the creation of a hatched yellow parking area for hearses and limousines only which could help with traffic flow; utilise and upgrade the existing family room by installing large glass window; creation of an additional “exit” only road
- there is stress for staff/funeral directors/mourners and the bereaved on a daily basis and would urge that you consider extending the time allocated to each service to 45mins would help the “gridlock” which occurs
- good practice elsewhere in terms of video links/sound system (Wesley System) – could this be looked at as an option for Falkirk Crematorium. Data protection issue which can be rectified by positioning the camera from the rear of the room.
- the Roman Catholic community would consider cremations but feel that there is a lack of “warm” and wonder why the coffin is removed shortly after it arrives and if there is a reason for this. It was confirmed that the coffin can be on display for the duration of the service if advance notice is given to crematorium staff.

- is there the possibility of erecting a small timber satellite building within the crematorium grounds.
- the Council look at options for funding/contributions from other service users to help with the replacement of hymn books.
- upgrade of the facilities is long overdue and with charges for non-residents being more expensive and should receiving the service/facilities they are paying for.
- **encourage the use of churches for funeral services which could help with delays at the crematorium.**
- sound proofing of the waiting room doors and option to look at a projection system which can be used instead of hymn books.
- **additional signage of the family room would be beneficial.**
- Sunday cremations could potentially conflict with other church services e.g. baptisms, Sunday worship.
- **for additional improvements officers to look at the potential for approach to parties, external organisations or other fundraising.**
- no issues in relation to excess heat from the abatement unit being used to heat the building.
- the difference in charging between cremations and burial would need to be significant to sway people's choice
- possibility of holding an open afternoon/tour of the crematorium.
- **could there be a minimum of 3 grounds maintenance staff on duty when interment is taking place at all cemeteries**
- **could the time allocated for interment of ashes be reduced from 90 mins to allow less impact on interment time slots**
- Falkirk Council staff within the Bereavement Service and ground maintenance staff do a wonderful job with the condition of the areas cemeteries being commended.
- the meeting today has been a very positive and useful experience.
- the policy would be reviewed in 12 months time of its implementation in order to monitor progress etc.

John acknowledged that there are problems with the size of the Crematorium, access and egress, and there are times when it feels like a conveyer belt which can cause added distress. There is limited funding and imminent legal compliant issues which have to be addressed but would look at costs for the privacy corridor.

Councillor Martin thanked everyone for attending and for contributing to the meeting.