

**Meeting date:** 1 March 2023

**Report to:** Cabinet Member for Resources

**Report title:** Bereavement Services Update

**Report from:** Alison McGrory, Assistant Director – Stronger Communities

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**Wards affected:**

- All Wards |  Bickenhill |  Blythe |  Castle Bromwich |  Chelmsley Wood |  
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath |  Elmdon |  Kingshurst/Fordbridge |  Knowle |  
 Lyndon |  Meriden |  Olton |  Shirley East |  Shirley South |  
 Shirley West |  Silhill |  Smith's Wood |  St Alphege
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**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:**

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**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 To update Cabinet Portfolio holder for Bereavement Services on the ongoing review of the service and to seek approval for changes to our policies and procedures which would ensure consistency and fairness in various aspects of our operations.

**2. Decision(s) Recommended**

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member is requested to approve:
- 2.1.1 The removal of 'lawn' from grave deeds in part of Widney Manor Cemetery (Appendix A);
- 2.1.2 The defining of standard grave sizes (Appendix B);
- 2.1.3 A cap on the advance purchase of burial plots (Appendix C).

**3. Matters for consideration**

- 3.1 Bereavement Services operates in three sites: Widney Manor Cemetery, Woodlands

Cemetery and Crematorium and Robin Hood Cemetery and Crematorium. The service has a significant income budget of c.£4million, as well as a responsibility to deliver a number of statutory obligations. Decisions made are therefore impactful both from a financial and emotional perspective amongst users of the service.

3.2 We are currently undertaking a full-service review to ensure our policies and procedures are fair and consistent; the review will also respond to several recommendations highlighted in a recent internal audit report.

3.3 This report seeks Cabinet Member approval for some immediate changes to ensure the safety, continued service improvement and fairness to those visiting the cemeteries and crematoriums. Details and the recommendations for each of the individual changes are provided in the appendices to this report.

**4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

4.1 Our current approach to defining areas of the cemetery for different service users, sizing of plots and approach to memorials and kerb stones has sometimes been inconsistent. The details of the proposed changes can be seen in appendices A and B to this report.

4.2 We also seek Cabinet Member approval to expand the restriction of advance purchases of burial plots across the Borough; limiting advance purchases to 1 per adult defined as aged 18+ and only permitting parents to purchase one plot on the death of their child. More details can be found at Appendix C.

**5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

5.1 Our approach with customers should be consistent and fair to all and therefore we want to formalise our approach in our policies and procedures to ensure that everyone is treated the same.

**6. Implications and Considerations**

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull.</li> <li>2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it.</li> <li>3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>4. Enable communities to thrive.</li> </ol>	<p>Being consistent and fair when dealing with people at their most vulnerable contributes to wellbeing.</p>

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <p>5. Develop and promote the borough's economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres.</p> <p>6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2.</p> <p>7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable.</p>	NA
<p>Environment:</p> <p>8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions.</p>	NA
<p>9. Promote employee wellbeing</p>	NA

#### 6.1 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.1.1 Where these changes directly impact current customers, we will write to them and offer an opportunity to discuss them in more detail.

#### 6.2 Financial implications:

6.2.1 Under the renaming of graves in part of Widney Manor, we will continue to receive the revenue associated with permit applications for all kerb sets installed in this area. Work has been completed with the grounds team to ensure adequate maintenance is completed in this area of the cemetery without impacting maintenance costs.

6.2.2 There is no financial impact in allowing grave deeds to reflect the correct sizing. Whilst historically the deed has shown a smaller footprint, as a service, we have never accounted for any extra space for burials. All plots are planned at the maximum sizing.

6.2.3 This is likely to have a favourable financial impact; where graves are bought in advance in bulk, the purchaser is buying at today's rate. In capping the number of plots sold in advance prevents 'locking in' a cheaper rate and failing to account for inflation. In addition, all interment costs will now be realised where additional plots will

not be possible to buy as a memorial to loved ones.

6.3 Legal implications:

6.3.1 N/A

6.4 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.4.1 N/A

6.5 Equality implications:

6.5.1 Whilst the recommended options have not been the subject of an equalities analysis at this stage, the approach to kerb sets within the cemeteries will evidence a fairer approach for all communities within the Borough using Bereavement Services. The proposal will also support the Council's fulfilment of its public sector equality duty to eliminate discrimination, by ensuring all memorials offered are available for all faith groups in all areas of the cemetery.

6.6 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.6.1 N/A

**7. List of appendices referred to**

7.1 Appendix A – The removal of reference to 'lawn' on part of Widney Manor Cemetery.

7.2 Appendix B – Defined grave sizes

7.3 Appendix C – Cap on advanced burial plot purchase

**8. Background papers used to compile this report**

8.1 N/A

**9. List of Other Relevant Documents**

9.1 N/A