

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

06 NOVEMBER 2018

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MINUTES EXTRACT

Present: Councillor Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE (Chairman); Councillors J Butler, P Hogarth MBE, T Hodgson, B Holmes, Mrs G Sleigh, M Parker (sub), P Thomas and M Wilson.

Apologies:

Councillor A Mackiewicz.

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate).

Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director - Stronger Communities, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate).

Emma Mayhew (Head of Customer Services, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate).

Julie Williams (Contract & Operational Support Manager, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate)

Jo Foley (Finance Manager, Resources Directorate)

External Witnesses in attendance:

None.

Cabinet Members in attendance:

None.

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

1. **BEREAVEMENT SERVICES – DELIVERY OF THE 30 YEAR STRATEGY**

In attendance: Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director - Stronger Communities, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate), Emma Mayhew (Head of Customer Services, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate), Julie Williams (Contract & Operational Support Manager, Managed Growth and Communities Directorate) and Jo Foley (Finance Manager, Resources Directorate)

The Board was invited to consider options to provide future direction on the development of a new Bereavement Strategy. In preparation for the consideration of the report, some members of the Board had also recently visited the improved facilities at Robin Hood Cemetery Crematorium.

The current Strategy had been approved in 2012 and covered a 30 year period to 2042. The purpose of the development of a 30 year Strategy had been to ensure that Solihull planned for and provided a structured and coordinated implementation plan for the delivery of a sustainable Bereavement Service, responding to a number of future challenges. The Strategy provided the long-term vision that defined policy and established objectives and targets for delivery through the Council's Bereavement Service.

In 2012, the Strategy development had been based on best estimates of future demand trends for Cremation and Burial services at the time. That had been informed by Government

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forecasts of national bereavement rates and local knowledge provided by the Solihull Observatory. Data from the first 5 years had also now shown that the number of bereavements was lower than forecasted both nationally and locally. Whilst that had not had an impact of the take-up of our services, it had meant that the Council now needed to undertake a more detailed review and adjust the future forecasts accordingly.

Officers highlighted four key questions from the report for consideration:

- Should the new Bereavement Services Strategy cover a shorter period, such as 10 years, so that it could respond to reviewed forecasts as required?
- Should the Council continue to seek an extension to Woodlands Cemetery and, when costs had been established, that an options appraisal report be taken before Cabinet Member for decision?
- Should the Council continue to investigate above ground vaults and chambers, given the lack of demand?
- Should the Council acknowledge the lack of local demand for natural burial provision and use feedback from Funeral Directors to inform the new Strategy?

The Board made the following observations:

- The main cemetery for residents in North Solihull was expected to be full within five years. It was recognised that the Woodlands Cemetery was running out of burial space.
- Officers had been investigating options for an extension for several years, although finding a suitable solution had proven complex. That was further complicated by the fact the Woodlands site was just over the Solihull boundary and located in Warwickshire. The location just over the local authority border created a unique situation in which planning permission would need to be dealt with by Warwickshire.
- Members were keen that investigative work continued to avoid bereaved relatives being unnecessarily displaced in the future to alternative facilities further afield. For those venturing outside Solihull, the report recognised that was likely to increase the cost as most authorities charged non-residents an increased fee.
- In addition, the current cremator at Woodlands needed to be replaced within two years, as it was said to be reaching the end of its serviceable life.
- Following discussions with the Greek community, an area of Widney Manor Cemetery had been identified for below ground burials.
- There appeared to be little demand in Solihull for natural burials, which saw people being interred in a less formal setting. Natural burials tended to be conducted in specific settings, rather than cemeteries with small designated areas.

The Board made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships**:

- (i) That, the new Bereavement Services Strategy should cover a shorter period, such as 10 years, so that it can respond to reviewed forecasts as required;
- (ii) That the Council should continue to seek an extension to Woodlands Cemetery and, when costs had been established, that an options appraisal report be taken before Cabinet Member for decision;

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- (iii) That, based on the current lack of demand, the Council should not continue to investigate above ground vaults and chambers; and
- (iv) That the Council should take account of the lack of local demand for natural burial provision and use feedback from Funeral Directors to inform the new Strategy.