

Meeting date: 10 December 2020
Report to: Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships



Subject/report title: Review of Solihull's Cemeteries and Crematoriums Policy
Report from: Alison McGrory – Assistant Director Communities & Partnerships
Report author/lead contact officer: Martyn Sargeant – Head of Customer & Library Services

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

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph: N/A

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To request Cabinet Member approval for the updated policy in relation to Solihull's Cemeteries and Crematoriums.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 To agree to exclude the use of grave frames in Solihull's cemeteries.

2.2 To approve the revised policy on Solihull's Cemeteries and Crematoriums attached as Appendix 1.

3. What is the issue?

3.1 Solihull's Cemeteries and Crematoriums Policy was last updated in January 2019

3.2 In recent years there has been a growing trend for families to build wooden frames to surround the grave until turfing. Families remove the soil mound from the grave and construct frames to prevent people from walking on the grave space. The soil mounds are often dumped in hedgerows making the cemeteries unsightly and grounds maintenance difficult. The mound should be left in place to allow for settlement of the ground and frequently we are being asked to 'top up' the soil as it has sunk after the family has removed the mound. There is an additional cost to the Council for this work.

3.3 The measurement of each grave space is 7' x 3', however, a number of the graves frames exceed this measurement, some measuring as wide as 4' 2". This is causing disputes with adjacent families with some people feeling too intimidated to visit their loved one's resting place.

3.4 The use of grave frames present a health and safety hazard, both when the families remove the mounds but also as a tripping hazard. This is particularly the case for people with a visually impairment.

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

4.1 It is important to have a consistent message on our position on this to prevent unnecessary upset.

4.2 The Bereavement Services team has met with families in each of the cemeteries to try to explain that frames are not suitable and particularly to ask for oversize frames to be removed or at least reduced.

4.3 We have also written to families to inform them that they must remove the frames.

4.4 Often, during times of grief and distress, families can fail to understand our reasoning and become very defensive and protective of these frames.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 To ensure the policy is up to date and to address the issue of unauthorised grave frames within Solihull's cemeteries and crematoriums.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revitalising our towns and local centres. 2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2. 3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing. 	n/a
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Enhance Solihull's natural environment. 5. Improve Solihull's air quality. 6. Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions. 	Ensuring consistent standards across and within cemeteries will help provide a pleasant environment for those visiting the graves of loved ones or attending funerals.

People and Communities: 7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities. 8. Enable communities to thrive. 9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults & children with complex needs.	n/a
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6.2 Implications for children and young people, vulnerable groups and particular communities:

6.2.1 The exclusion of grave frames from cemeteries will help to protect the visually impaired when visiting.

6.3 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.3.1 The proposals in this report are based on multiple conversations with bereaved families and visitors to the Council's cemeteries.

6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 There will be a minor financial outlay to procure appropriate signage, which will be managed within existing budgets.

6.5 Legal implications:

6.5.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

6.6 Risk implications:

6.6.1 The Corporate Risk Management approach has been followed.

6.7 Statutory Equality Duty:

6.7.1 Analysis of the proposals shows a positive impact for some communities (specifically those with visual or physical disabilities) and no negative impacts for any particular groups.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix 1 – Cemeteries and Crematoria Policy (updated December 2020)

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 Bereavement Services Policy 2019

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 N/A