



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17TH JULY 2012

SUBJECT: GRAVE PERSONALISATION

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek guidance from the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee prior to a report being considered by Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Members will be aware that a Cross Party Bereavement Services Task and Finish Group commenced in 2006. The Group considered a variety of issues facing the Authority's bereavement service, the enforcement of the existing "Lawn" cemetery being one.
- 2.2 A petition was presented at Full Council on the 13th March 2012, which was signed by approximately 1500 people requesting that the Authority reconsider the enforcement of the "Lawn" Cemetery Policy at Bedwellty Cemetery.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Public Services aim in its Service Improvement Plan for 2012/13 in relation to Bereavement Services is:

"To provide a customer focused, sensitively delivered bereavement service and to achieve excellent standards in cemetery management and maintenance".

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 As outlined previously, a Cross Party Task and Finish Group considered a variety of issues facing the service. The Task and Finish Group was unanimous in its recommendations and a comprehensive report was considered by the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 1st July and subsequently Cabinet on the 15th July 2008.
- 4.2 Cabinet requested that the Task and Finish Group reconsider their recommendation on fees and charges. The Task and Finish Group met on the 26th September and the report returned to Cabinet on the 28th October 2008. All the recommendations were subsequently endorsed.
- 4.3 The Task and Finish Group noted that personalisation caused distress to those visiting nearby graves. Not only do items such as wind chimes etc cause distress but edgings and fences etc often impedes access and pose a potential trip hazard.

- 4.4 One of the many advantages of the “Lawn” Cemetery Policy is that it allows efficient grounds maintenance and personal items interrupt grass cutting and requires a more intense operation with strimmers, which is more time consuming and more expensive to complete.
- 4.5 In terms of enforcement, positive articles appeared in Newline and in local newspapers. Signs were strategically placed with the worst affected cemeteries encouraging grave owners to remove unauthorised items.
- 4.6 Following an interment, a Bereavement Pack, which includes the Title Deed, is sent to the Holder of the Exclusive Rights of Burial. This Pack contains letters and leaflets, which clearly outline the policy.
- 4.7 The reinstatement of the “Lawn” Cemetery Policy has been successfully implemented at Rhymney, Risca Old, Bedwas and Abercarn cemeteries and accepted by the grave owners.
- 4.8 Signs were erected at Bedwellty Cemetery in September 2011. However, these were subsequently vandalised or removed. Letters were sent to holders of the Exclusive Right of Burial (but unfortunately not to all) requesting the removal of unauthorised items.
- 4.9 Extensive complaints were received in early February 2012, when items were removed and the plots turfed. A decision was made to suspend all works until such time that the matter could be considered by members.
- 4.10 Public meetings were held and officers provided appropriate information to members, some of which were in attendance. Subsequently, officers met with the MP, AM and relevant elected members on the 30th March. In addition, officers met with the public on an individual basis on the 20th April to work towards a resolution. Fifteen appointments were made by individual families to discuss their concerns (1% of the total number of signatures on the petition presented at Full Council).

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An Eqla is not needed because the issues covered have previously been considered by the Council (Cabinet 28th October 2008).

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 To date, the Authority has successfully returned graves to the lawn principle at Risca Old, Abercarn, Bedwas and Rhymney cemeteries and has been accepted by the holders of the Exclusive Rights of Burial.
- 8.2 The enforcement of the policy enables the Authority to maintain its cemeteries in an efficient manner whilst protecting the Authority against any potential insurance claims.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The views of the Scrutiny Committee are requested prior to a report to Cabinet.

Author: Michael A. Headington, Principal Officer: Outdoor Facilities & Bereavement Services

Consultees: Anthony O'Sullivan, Chief Executive
Mark S. Williams, Head of Public Services
Councillor Dave Poole, Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure Services
Councillor Tudor Davies, Chairman, Regeneration & Environment Scrutiny Committee
Councillor J. Bevan, Chairman, Bereavement Services Task & Finish Group
Derek Price, Parks and Outdoor Facilities Manager