



COUNCIL – 13TH JULY 2021

SUBJECT: NOTICE OF MOTION – MEMORIAL BENCHES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Council is asked to consider the Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report and make an appropriate recommendation. In accordance with Rule 11(3) of the Constitution, the notice of motion was first considered by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd June 2021.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 A Notice of Motion has been received from Councillors John Roberts and Colin Elsbury and is supported by Councillors A. Farina-Childs, B. Owen, C. Mann and T. Parry.
- 2.2 The Notice of Motion meets the criteria set out in the Council's Constitution and in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure is now referred to the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee for consideration, prior to its consideration by Council.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Council are asked to consider the notice of motion the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1 and make an appropriate recommendation.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 Notice of Motion

Councillor Roberts and Councillor Elsbury request the Council immediately ends its blanket ban on grieving relatives erecting memorial benches on its cemetery sites.

This ban unjustly deprives individuals, families and friends from paying their full respects and being able to remember as they would like, a departed loved one.

In new parts of cemeteries where graves are now being placed people are being discriminated against, particularly some of our more vulnerable people who cannot stand for very long. This might well prevent some people from even visiting the final resting place of their nearest and dearest.

- 5.2 Councillor Roberts provides the following information in support of the notice of motion: -

For years now, as an Authority, we've not permitted benches within cemeteries. We do allow families to consider planting a memorial tree for loved ones, location to be agreed on site with an Area Officer, which makes perfect sense. But it's been asked of me what of the vulnerable, especially if they can't stand for very long, are we preventing some from visiting and with this in mind I asked Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee to consider the above motion.

- 5.3 The following information is provided in relation to cemetery benches: -

A cross party Task and Finish Group reviewed the Council's bereavement service in September 2006, the findings were considered and endorsed by the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 1st July 2008 and then Cabinet on the 15th July 2008.

Prior to the decision taken in 2008, families could purchase a wooden bench (for a one-off fee of circa £500) however, this then created a liability for the Council not only in the terms of maintenance but also any damage which was sustained (i.e. the bench would be replaced free of charge). However, when the Task and Finish Group visited each cemetery it was evident that there were far too many benches sited which clearly detracted from a place of dignity and rest.

Officers were also aware of a number of complaints received from families who had purchased memorial benches, requesting that measures be put in place to prevent other visitors from sitting on what they deem as 'their' bench.

The Council now provide suitable metal benches across municipal cemeteries and if required, bereaved families may apply for the installation of a plaque in memory of a loved one. These benches are sited in such a position not to cause any operational difficulties.

Officers are not aware of any specific complaints from service users or stakeholders in relation to the lack of bench provision across municipal cemeteries.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 As a notice of motion is a procedural matter and must be dealt with in accordance with Council's Constitution, no assumptions have been made.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report does not require an Integrated Impact Assessment as it relates to a procedural matter under the Council's Constitution.

- 7.2 The procedural rules regarding a Notice of Motion are contained within Council's Constitution as adopted in May 2002. The Council's Constitution sets out the framework for the decision-making roles and responsibilities.
- 7.3 However the outcome of the Notice of Motion and any subsequent reports arising from it may require an Integrated Impact Assessment.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

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

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The notice of motion was considered by the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 22nd June 2021. Councillor John Roberts confirmed the details of motion and provided background information as to why he was bringing the issue forward for consideration.

Cllr Roberts expressed the concern that as a result of the recent pandemic there were more grieving families that needed support and the ability, for those that wished to do so, to place a bench close to their loved ones resting place would form an important part of the healing process. He also expressed the view that as the policy had been in place since 2008, this would be an ideal opportunity for it to be reviewed.

Members sought clarification as to whether families had the ability to place a plaque on an existing bench and sought clarification as to the provision of benches in new cemetery areas.

Members also referenced the uneven distribution of the number of benches within the various cemeteries, with only 4 at Risca Old Cemetery and 83 at Bedwellty Cemetery.

Officers outlined the work of the Task and Finish Group that had led to the introduction of the current policy and confirmed that there was not a blanket ban on the placing of memorial benches within municipal cemeteries. The Council continues to install a suitable number of metal benches, appropriately placed to ensure that there was no interference with the operational needs of the cemetery. Members were advised that there were currently 287 benches within the borough's 10 cemeteries and confirmed that the current approach had worked well for the past 13 years.

Reassurance was given that bereaved families could place a bench mounted memorial plaque on the metal benches if they wished to do so and Officers were not aware of any lack of provision at any of the municipal cemeteries. Dedicated areas in new cemetery extensions and any new cemeteries being developed would include the provision of metal benches.

The Scrutiny Committee were also advised that there had been further reports in

2012 which had undergone extensive consultation with bereaved families and the initial decision made in 2008 was subsequently reinforced. No reference was made to the lack of memorial bench provision at any particular cemetery during this consultation.

The Notice of Motion was then moved and seconded and by way of roll call and in noting that there were 4 votes For, 10 Votes Against and 0 Abstentions the motion was not supported.

The Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee RECOMMENDED to Council that the notice of motion not be supported.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000

Author: Emma Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

Appendices: Appendix 1 Signed copy of Notice of Motion.