

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 CEMETERIES

Wednesday, 27 September 2017

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Brian Sargeant (Chair), Councillor Vicky Culbard (Deputy Chair); Councillors Alan Bottwood, Arthur McCutcheon and Dennis Meredith

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Simon Hollowell

Witness Ruth Austen, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager

Officers
Julie Seddon, Director of Environment and Culture
Mick Tyrrell, Contracts Manager
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Member of the Public Thomas Appleyard

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aziz and Kilbride.

At this point the Chair welcomed Simon Hollowell, of Hollowells Funeral Directors, Co-Optee to the meeting. He emphasised the value of co optees to the Scrutiny process.

2. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

The Chair confirmed that he had received written documentation from Mr Appleyard, member of the public, regarding some of the town's cemeteries. This information would be documented as received and he invited Mr Appleyard to address the Panel on this information at the next meeting under Public Addresses.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2017 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

5. EXPERT ADVISORS

(A) CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING MANAGER, NBC

The Scrutiny Panel noted Councillor Hallam's apologies for attendance of this agenda item.

Julie Seddon, Director of Environment and Culture and Mick Tyrrell, Contracts Manager, presented the response to the core questions from the Cabinet Member for Environment and highlighted the key points contained within.

Ruth Austen, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, presented the written brief around Local Authority funerals and highlighted the key points.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- There is a need to ensure that the Policies and Regulations regarding cemeteries are adhered to. The Scrutiny Panel felt that a potential recommendation of its final report could be that the Policies, procedures and guidance are tightened up and a zero tolerance policy is applied.
- Should a tombstone become unstable and unsafe, Officers can organise for it to be made safe.
- The Co Optee referred to the Scrutiny Panel to a cemetery within a local churchyard where the Vicar had given notice that all solar lights and toys must be removed within six months. If they were not removed by this date, he removed them himself.

AGREED; That the comprehensive updates are noted and inform the evidence base of this Scrutiny review.

6. SITE VISITS

The Scrutiny Panel referred to its recent site visits and the written brief detailing the findings and potential recommendations:

The cemeteries visited were all of a high standard and were well maintained.

The paths and edges in Towcester Road Cemetery were pristine.

One of the litter bins, as located in Towcester Road Cemetery, as detailed in paragraph 2.2 of this briefing note requires replacing.

The Site Visit was concerned that some of the graves located in Towcester Road Cemetery had trees planted on them.

A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested – some of the trees in situ in Towcester Road Cemetery are removed as soon as possible.

A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested – consideration is given to the issuing of key passes to the Chapel in Towcester Road Cemetery.

A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested – the water tanks located in the extension at Duston Cemetery are plumbed in as soon as practicable.

A potential recommendation of the final report was suggested – the trees that are obscuring the sign at the entrance to Duston Cemetery are pruned as soon as possible.

In discussing the findings as detailed above, the Scrutiny Panel felt that the potential recommendation regarding the removal of trees at Towcester Road cemetery should be widened to include the removal of trees at all cemeteries, where appropriate.

It was highlighted that the potential recommendation regarding a key pass for the cemetery in Towcester Road should be widened to emphasise that the key pass is for the use of toilet facilities within the cemetery.

A further potential recommendation was suggested:

Signs be erected in cemeteries “ Dogs to be kept on a leash at all times” “Please clean up after your dog.”

The Scrutiny Panel felt it would be useful for a potential recommendation to be included within its final report that litter and recycling bins in situ within the cemeteries are replaced with modern bins, where appropriate.

A further potential recommendation for inclusion within the final report was suggested:

“All signs erected within the borough’s cemeteries are of the same style and standard”

and

“The tops of the vaults are made secure”

The Scrutiny Panel discussed green burials and asked that a briefing note regarding green burials is presented to the next meeting.

AGREED: That the information is noted.

7. BACKGROUND INFORMATION - RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The background information was noted.

8. FEES AND CHARGES - CEMETERIES

The Scrutiny Panel considered the briefing note around fees and charges for cemeteries. The fees and charges are set by the Local Authority annually. Benchmarking takes places across the country.

The Scrutiny Panel felt it would be useful for consideration to be given to the building of a crematorium in Northampton and that this would be considered as a potential recommendation for its final report. The Scrutiny Panel had been very impressed by the crematorium at Kettering which it had visited as part of the scheduled site visits. It was noted that Billing Road cemetery is closed to new burials.

The Chair requested that the Scrutiny Officer undertakes research regarding price comparisons for burials and cremations from:

Kettering, Wellingborough and Rugby

This information would be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED: The information on fees and charges is noted and informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

9. CEMETERY GUIDANCE

The Cemetery Guidance was noted. The Scrutiny Panel reiterated that a potential recommendation of its final report could be that the Policies, procedures and guidance are tightened up and a zero tolerance policy is applied.

The meeting concluded at 7:21 pm