

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 CEMETERIES

Monday, 8 January 2018

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillor Brian Sargeant (Chair), Councillors Andrew Kilbride, Arthur McCutcheon and Dennis Meredith

**CO-OPTED MEMBER:** Simon Hollowell

**Officers** Julie Seddon, Director of Customers and Communities  
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Anamul Haque - Observing

**Members of the Public** Mr Abdul Ali  
Mr Thomas Appleyard  
Mrs Margaret Pateman  
Mrs Coolman

#### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Vicky Culbard (Deputy Chair) and Councillor Alan Bottwood.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

#### 3. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Mr Abdul Ali, St George's Mosque, addressed the Scrutiny Panel on agenda item 5(a). Mr Ali commented on the need for a seven day cemetery service. The Muslim community bury their deceased as soon as possible. He suggested this as a possible recommendation for the Panel to consider. He also asked for there to be toilet and washing facilities at cemeteries. Mr Ali concluded his address by conveying his concern on the shortage of burial space and what will happen when it is full. The specific area at Towcester Road cemetery is getting filled up very quickly; there is a need for extra land for cemetery space. It was suggested that potential extra land for burials is a potential recommendation of the final report.

Mr Thomas Appleyard and Mrs Pateman addressed the Scrutiny Panel on agenda item 6. Mrs Pateman commented that Mrs Coolman and herself would like to thank the members of the panel for taking the time to visit Dallington Cemetery in November 2017. She did not agree with a number of points from the Panel's site visit report: She did not feel that Dallington cemetery is of a high standard or it is well

maintained. The whole cemetery has been deemed by several people they have spoken to as a dark and dismal place due to the number of trees and shrubs that have become extremely overgrown and need attention. Boundary fences need to be repaired in several places as the gaps only serve to provide access for people who have no interest in the Cemetery. Recently, an adult on a scrambling bike was sighted near the grave plots overlooking Kings Heath where access can be gained through the shrubs. Mrs Pateman referred to her own inspections, commenting that litter bins are constantly overflowing, and many of the wire bins are not fit for purpose as they are bent out of shape. The water tanks are in working order, but there are only three in the whole of the cemetery and none in the lower part which overlooks Kings Heath, making it difficult for relatives to fetch and carry water to graves in these areas. There are only 3 dog bins in situ. Several dog walkers use the cemetery. The 3 roundabouts on the main avenue are in poor condition, especially the one at the end, with traffic cones permanently sited there. This is a place where funeral cortege's park, whilst burials take place and is not a pleasant place for mourners to wait in any case as it is very dark and dreary due to the overgrown trees. Mrs Pateman concluded her address advising that whenever a grave is excavated for a burial, the lack of care and attention is unacceptable as mud and other debris is left on the paths and grass prior to and after the burial has taken place which is disrespectful to the mourners.

Mr Appleyard commented that he had visited Dallington Cemetery; and was surprised that the report of the Panel made no reference to the toilets there. He commented on the condition of the toilets. Mr Appleyard advised that the water tanks are often full of plastic bottles that often blow out of the tanks across the cemetery. The verges are muddy and driving around the cemetery is dangerous. Mr Appleyard suggested that the bins are in the wrong place, wrong area and of wrong type. Mr Appleyard acknowledged the problems of trees on graves but also referred to the problems that trees in Kingsthorpe cemetery are causing to the residents. Mr Appleyard concluded his address by conveying his disappointment that the Friends of Dallington Cemetery were not informed of the date of the site visit.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding whether the water tanks in situ in cemeteries and allotments are to be replaced, the Scrutiny Officer undertook to find out and report the findings to the Panel.
- The Scrutiny Panel commented on some cemeteries in other towns having stand pipes and felt this to be a useful alternative to water bottles. It was suggested as a potential recommendation of the final report. It was also felt that service users need educating on using and disposing of plastic bottles.

Mr Ali, Mrs Pateman and Mr Appleyard were thanked for their addresses.

#### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2017 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

## **5. WITNESS EVIDENCE**

### **(A) WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM SERVICE USERS**

The Chair advised that contact had been made with various groups, forums and associations but no written evidence had been received, however, a number of service users had previously written to the Panel and addressed it; the comments of which would be included in the final report.

### **(B) WRITTEN EVIDENCE - WAR GRAVES COMMISSION**

The Chair drew the Panel's attention to the written report of the War Graves Commission. The Panel commented on how immaculate the war graves are kept.

It was suggested that the Imperial War Graves Procedures Guide would be useful for the Panel to have sight of; the Scrutiny Officer undertook to circulate this to the Panel.

The evidence received would inform the Scrutiny Review.

## **6. SITE VISIT**

Councillor Meredith presented the report of the site visit to the Panel and highlighted the salient points. He referred the Panel to the conclusions and potential recommendations following the site visit.

The Co Optee referred to a Regulations Guidance Booklet for cemeteries and queried why this no longer existed. It was a useful document for service users.

In response to a query regarding the cutting back of trees on cemeteries; the Scrutiny Panel heard that it often depended upon the extent of the problem. It can be a sensitive situation. Initially Officers will start a negotiation process with the service user. However, if the tree is causing damage or is a health and safety issue a decision has to be made regarding the wider implications. Each situation is looked at individually.