REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BURIAL WORKING GROUP

1 Purpose of report
To report on the discussions, findings and recommendations of the burial working group meetings of 7 October 2011, 11 November 2011, 9 December 2011 and 6 January 2012.

2 Executive summary
2.1 At Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 June 2011 members agreed to set up working groups to look at different services in more detail. This included a working group on services for the deceased and bereaved, which has become known as the “burial working group”.

2.2 The working group determined that a number of issues were to be reviewed, including: benefit to the community; existing provision; services for the bereaved; cost-effectiveness; audits of burial services; forecast for closure of existing cemeteries; parish cemeteries; closed churchyards; perception and performance.

2.3 These reviews were completed over the course of four meetings, including one meeting dedicated to a presentation on the potential for building a crematorium in the borough.

3 Appendices
The appendix to this report contains the notes from the meetings of the burial working group for October, November and December 2011. Because of the timing of the January meeting, the notes will be circulated before the committee meeting.

4 Proposed action:
4.1 The committee is invited to RESOLVE to approve the recommendations set out in the reports of the burial working group and refer as appropriate to relevant policy committees.

5 Author and contact officer
Bridget Lawrence, Head of Resources
Appendix

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BURIAL WORKING GROUP

7 October 2011

Present: Councillor Pursglove (Chairman), Councillors Carr, Emerson, Simmons and Timms.

Councillor G Lawman also attended the working group at the invitation of the chairman.

Also present: Mr J Casserly (Head of Environment), Ms N Holden (Principal Environmental Maintenance Manager), and Mrs B Lawrence (Head of Resources).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that there were no apologies for absence.

2. SERVICES FOR THE DECEASED AND BEREAVED: BACKGROUND

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received, to provide members with an overview of the current provision of services for the deceased and bereaved.

The report covered the following areas:

(a) benefit to the community;
(b) existing provision;
(c) services for the bereaved;
(d) cost-effectiveness;
(e) audits of burial services;
(f) forecast for closure of existing cemeteries;
(g) parish cemeteries;
(h) closed churchyards;
(i) perception and performance.

In addition, Ms Holden was asked to explain the council’s policy on the re-use of graves. She gave a brief outline on the statute surrounding both the re-use and the reclamation of graves. Council policy was to pursue neither option, but Ms Holden agreed to circulate more detailed information on this to members.

It was noted that the law in relation to the removal of memorials was a separate issue and not addressed unless a health and safety risk had been identified. Statute and best practice determined how this was approached.

Members sought clarification on a number of points in the report:

(a) Muslim burials: it was confirmed that this section of the cemetery complied with the Muslim community’s request in respect of the direction of the graves; other sections of cemeteries were open to everyone.
(b) Vaults had also been requested by other communities and these had been provided.
(c) Isham cemetery showed no budget or income for 2010-11 because no burials had taken place.
(d) Ms Holden agreed to check, and report back, whether St Katharine’s, Irchester, was also a closed churchyard.
(e) Mrs Lawrence agreed to check, and report back, whether Wollaston cemetery was owned by the borough or parish council.
(f) Ms Holden agreed to check two other burial areas and their current status (ie whether they were closed burial grounds): Wollaston Museum grounds (previously congregational chapel) and Wollaston Baptist Chapel.

The working group considered the following:

(a) Whether additional provision for cemeteries was needed in the borough. It was noted that:
   • The new burial ground at Stanton Cross would be made available before occupation of the 2000th dwelling, but it could be transferred earlier. Regardless of timing, preparatory work such as infrastructure and tree planting regimes would need to be carried out in advance.
   • Ms Holden would review the Muslim burial plot in Doddington Road cemetery and report back to the working group on whether there was scope to adjust its size, thus helping to ensure that all sections of the cemetery would reach capacity at approximately the same time. Any changes proposed would need an equalities impact analysis.
   • Land would be made available after mineral extraction had ended. This could be investigated for use as a cemetery. Roads would be in place, but access arrangements would need to be considered if it was outside the town.

(b) Whether the working group would wish to recommend the creation of a green burial site. Only two local green burial sites were noted (both outside the borough). Members expressed support for this option, but a number of considerations would need to be taken into account, such as charges, costs, maintenance. It was noted that design would influence costs.

(c) Whether the council should build a crematorium. It was suggested that this could be co-located with a green burial site as well as other appropriate facilities. Environmental effects of crematoria were discussed, as well as the options for visits to working crematoria if the proposal were to be agreed in principle.

(d) Burial fees and charges: it was noted that these were largely in line with other authorities, and were reviewed annually. If a crematorium were to be built, fees would need to be reviewed.

(e) Whether other services could be provided at cemeteries or a crematorium. Suggestions included:
   • Items such as flowers, memorials and refreshments which could be provided via a licence to a successful tenderer for a specified period.
   • Meeting rooms so that families could use a room to get together after a burial or cremation.
   • Online records for genealogists which could be provided via licence by a successful tenderer. Members suggested that further details and a business
case were required for this approach to ensure that a reasonable payback time was in place for the digitisation of cemetery records.

- A joint approach with the developers of the facilities to be provided on the River Nene.

(f) Provision and charges in rural areas: it was agreed that a future meeting of the working group would require a dedicated report on cemetery provision delivered or supported by the council in the rural areas, together with means by which those services should be funded.

(g) Standards of maintenance in cemeteries, including the need to move dilapidated headstones for health and safety reasons. The following were considered:

- A review of standards of maintenance in cemeteries.
- Creation of “Friends of…Cemetery” to encourage local involvement and fundraising.
- Sale or further lease of London Road chapels.

RECOMMENDED that:

(i) a report be made to the next meeting of the working group on the business case for building a crematorium;

(ii) the business case also include options for green burial areas, meeting rooms, and other facilities for families of the deceased;

(iii) a report be made to the working group on scope for value-added services being provided (by licence) at some or all of the cemeteries managed by the council;

(iv) a report be made to the working group on whether adjustments could be made to the size of the Muslim section in Doddington Road Cemetery in order to ensure that the whole cemetery reached capacity at the same time;

(v) a report be made to the working group to review the provision (by the council) of cemeteries in rural areas and the funding arrangements for the service.

(vi) a report be presented to the working group on the feasibility of using mineral extraction land for cemeteries;

(vii) a report be presented to the working group on standards in cemeteries, and whether there was scope for review;

(viii) a report be presented to the working group on the potential use of the two chapels in London Road cemetery.
Present: Councillor Pursglove (Chairman), Councillors Carr, Emerson, and Simmons.

Councillor G Lawman also attended the working group at the invitation of the chairman.

Also present: Mr J Casserly (Head of Environment), Ms N Holden (Principal Environmental Maintenance Manager), Mr R Micklewright (Director of Resources) and Mrs B Lawrence (Head of Resources).

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

   **RESOLVED** to note that there were no apologies for absence.

2. **PROVISION OF CREMATORIUM**

   The annexed circulated report of the Head of Environment was received, to update members on the investigation into the provision of a crematorium in Wellingborough.

   The report covered the legislation relating to the provision of new crematoria, statistical data, and principles relating to the provision of new crematoria, including environmental factors.

   Consideration would have to be given to planning provisions and return on capital investment. Key issues would include: the need for the service; availability of suitable sites; capital and revenue costs/income; environmental issues; and the longer term strategy for burial/cremation provision throughout the borough.

   The Chairman invited Richard Harbord, Clerk of Mortlake Crematorium Board since 1986, and consultant on the financing of crematoria, to make a presentation to the working group. The presentation identified significant issues for consideration by members in determining whether a crematorium would be of benefit to the borough:

   - **Governance:** The crematorium could be either directly managed by the council, in partnership with other organisations, or outsourced.

   - **Need:** Of 563,785 deaths in the UK in 2009, 73% had resulted in cremation, although the number of deaths was reducing each year. The viability of a large crematorium would be affected by this.

   - **Current provision:** 261 crematoria were in operation in the UK, with an average of 1615 cremations each. Of the three new crematoria built each year, some were privately owned, but the market had become competitive so it was essential to provide a good service. Within the county the two crematoria (Kettering and Northampton) carried out 2400 and 1700 cremations respectively in 2009.
Finances: Cremation fees, although only a small part of the cost of a funeral, varied widely: from £198 to £700. A number of variations on the fees could provide flexibility and a better service for bereaved families. Examples of this included: additional time for funerals; Saturday or Sunday cremations; and reduced rates for still-born babies. At Mortlake each cremation was allocated 45 minutes. This had been found to provide a respectful period for each funeral, with each day accommodating up to eleven funerals.

Income: In addition to fees, this includes services such as memorials of varying kinds, rose bushes, online books of remembrance etc.

Employees: The key employee would be the superintendent of the crematorium who may live on-site to provide security, and would be responsible for building up good relationships with undertakers and customers. The post would be supported by a team who would keep the crematorium running on a daily basis.

Strategy: The governing body would need to determine a strategy for its services, investment, and funding of longer-term improvement. Plans would also be needed to accommodate changes to legislation.

Mr Harbord highlighted some individual issues which the council would need to consider:

(j) the number of cremators required to ensure an uninterrupted service;
(k) advance agreements with manufacturers to provide stability;
(l) flexible provision of music and the growing popularity of showing photographs or films;
(m) marketing of the service in a competitive environment;
(n) facilities customers would require at a crematorium eg. pleasant gardens, good parking, and a chapel which would accommodate large or small groups (up to 150);
(o) accessibility when choosing a site, to avoid congested roads;
(p) ability to provide a “greener” service, for example, recycling heat.

A decision to build a crematorium would require capital investment in excess of £2m, and would need specialist project management in order to ensure that the council provided the best facility possible.

If members wanted to investigate this further it was essential to undertake a feasibility study and to consult locally, involving funeral directors, in order to understand what would be required.

Members had a number of detailed questions to which Mr Harbord was able to respond. He advised that:

- A crematorium can be located within an existing cemetery; built in conjunction with a new cemetery; or built as a stand alone facility within its own grounds but without a cemetery;
• it was unusual to have a green burial site alongside a crematorium; it was possible, although it would affect the size of the site needed;
• to date there had been little evidence of green burials affecting the number of cremations;
• cremation of animals needed a separate licence and location, with different cremators;
• consultation would be required with as many community groups as possible to ensure that all beliefs were catered for in terms of open air services, timing of cremations, and provision for public viewing;
• a room for families to gather after a funeral could be provided, but care would be needed in arranging catering and ensuring there was sufficient car parking. An alternative might be to either provide, or work with a partner to provide, facilities nearby.

In conclusion, Mr Harbord reiterated the need to understand what the local community wanted from the service, and then to provide excellent customer care.

RECOMMENDED that:
(ix) Mr Casserly liaise with Mr Harbord to arrange visits to two crematoria for the working group, together with the chairman of the Development Committee;
(x) consideration be given to identification of potential crematorium sites once Mr Harbord had provided further advice on the number of acres required;
(xi) a recommendation be made to Development Committee that a feasibility study be carried out to assess whether a crematorium was needed in the borough and, if so, its specification.
REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BURIAL WORKING GROUP

09 December 2011

Present: Councillor Simmons (Chairman), Councillor Carr.

Councillor G Lawman also attended the working group at the invitation of the chairman.

Also present: Mr J Casserly (Head of Environment), Ms N Holden (Principal Environmental Maintenance Manager), and Mrs B Lawrence (Head of Resources).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that there were apologies for absence from Councillors Emerson and Pursglove.

2. MINUTES OF MEETINGS ON 7 OCTOBER AND 11 NOVEMBER 2011

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 7 October and 11 November 2011, be confirmed and signed.

3. DODDINGTON ROAD CEMETERY: GRAVE SPACES

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Environment was received, to provide information to members on the predicted life of Doddington Road Cemetery.

Based on current burial rates the cemetery had a predicted life of 13 years (based on 76 burials per year), although one section - the section reserved for Muslim burials (based on 6 burials per year) - had a predicted life of 130 years.

The Head of Environment identified ways in which this imbalance might be amended by changes to the layout of the cemetery. This would potentially extend its life to 19 years for all other sections, and to 26 years for the Muslim section.

The Head of Environment confirmed that no other faith groups had asked for separate sections in the cemetery, but that any request would be considered.

The proposed changes to the cemetery layout would incur some costs, including new hedging and paths.

RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee request that the Head of Environment prepare a costed report for the Community Committee on changes to the sections in Doddington Road Cemetery to extend its life.
4. LONDON ROAD CEMETERY CHAPELS
The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received on the current status and options in respect of the two chapels in London Road Cemetery.

The two listed mortuary chapels, one for Church of England burials and one for Nonconformists had been used for storage for a number of years since the number of burials at the cemetery had reduced significantly.

A marketing report had been carried out and highlighted a number of issues for investigation: bats; whether the buildings were consecrated; and restrictions on future use. The report also noted that the condition of the interior of the buildings was poor.

RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee request that a report be made to Resources Committee on the options for the future of the chapels after a condition and issues survey had been carried out.

5. VALUE-ADDED SERVICES
The working group considered options in respect of providing concessions at existing cemeteries which would add both services for bereaved families and income for the council.

It was agreed that this arrangement would be of benefit, but would not be possible in the cemeteries currently operating. Value-added services could, however, be designed into a new cemetery or crematorium.

RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee propose that any plans developed to build a new cemetery or crematorium include facilities for services including, but not limited to, a refreshment area, stonemason and florist.

6. CEMETERY RULES AND REGULATIONS
The annexed circulated report of the Head of Environment was received, to provide information to members on the current cemetery rules and regulations.

Members were informed that the last review of the rules and regulations was undertaken in 2009 by a dedicated working group. The review had included consultation with the local community and relevant organisations.

Since the review some issues had arisen. These included:

- Temporary grave markers. An ongoing concern, this had been reviewed and revised in 2009, but deedholders were not always complying with regulations, which could result in the removal of inappropriate markers;
- Dogs in cemeteries. This would probably be considered at the next review to include a rule about keeping dogs on leads and removal of faeces;
- Smoking. Questions had been raised about bereaved families who wished to smoke before or after a funeral. The rules and regulations would need to be reviewed in the light of recent legislation.

RESOLVED to note that rules and regulations reviewed in 2009 were still apt, but that recent issues would be included in the next review.
7. **VISITS TO CREMATORIA**

The Head of Environment reported that, following the presentation at the previous working group, it had been suggested that a visit be made to one or more of the following crematoria: Milton Keynes (built in 1982, but with a new chapel); Telford (built around 2000); or Sandwell Valley (a new crematorium, just opened).

**RESOLVED** that the Head of Environment make arrangements to visit both Telford and Sandwell Valley on a Wednesday in January, with the invitation being extended to all members of the working group and Councillor G Lawman.

8. **FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERY**

Councillor Carr suggested that the council support the formation of a “Friends of …” group for local cemeteries as this would encourage community involvement and potential fundraising for improvements.

**RESOLVED** to recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Community Committee be asked to encourage anyone wishing to set up a “Friends of” local cemeteries group.