



High Wycombe Town Committee

Penn Road Cemetery – proposed burial arrangements and fees and charges. High Wycombe Cemetery – proposed fees and charges

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Recommendations:

- a) That the Committee note and comment on the content of the report.
- b) That the Committee agree the recommendations set out within this report for proposed burial arrangements for Penn Road Cemetery.
- c) That the Committee **does not** agree the extension of the standby end time for short short-notice Saturday burial services (from 12.00 to 14.00 hours) or the provision of a short-notice Sunday burial service for Penn Road Cemetery and High Wycombe Cemetery.

1. Background

In 2017 Wycombe District Council approved the allocation of Special Expenses Reserve funding for the development of a new cemetery following referral from the High Wycombe Town Committee. The new Penn Road cemetery was completed and handed over to Buckinghamshire Council on the 27th November 2020. Whilst the cemetery is now complete from a build perspective there are a number of key decisions and operational factors that need to be addressed before the cemetery can open for burials (currently scheduled for 4th April 2022). These include agreeing the types of burials that will be provided which will inform the section designation and grave positions across the site. New fees and charges must be reviewed and recommended for approval for both the Penn Road and High Wycombe Cemeteries which reflect recent changes in the Wycombe area grounds maintenance contract. New Rules and Regulations for the Penn Road cemetery must also be agreed prior to opening.

2. Main content of report

- 2.1 On the 28th July 2021 the Committee received an update report on Penn Road Cemetery which recommended the creation of a member/officer sub-group to review and consider burial provision and the arrangements that should be put in place for the cemetery. This group have met and reviewed and considered information on a number of points since, including benchmarking burial fees and charges and Muslim burial provision and with other cemeteries, reviewing alternative options to concrete burial chambers and carrying out a closed key stakeholder consultation with representatives from religious and cultural organisations that the cemetery will service going forward. This information is summarised below and has informed the content of the report.



2.2 Key stakeholder consultation

Following input from the burial sub-group the Cemeteries Service carried out a targeted closed consultation with key stakeholders and partners to understand their views on core proposed arrangements for the cemetery. The online consultation ran from 17th November to the 1st December 2021 and responses were received and considered up to the 24th December 2021. A copy of the survey questionnaire is shown at Appendix 1 and responses are shown at Appendix 2. In total 24 organisations were contacted for their views as well as local ward councillors. These organisations were predominantly within the unparished area of High Wycombe as the cemetery will primarily serve this area, but also included 2 churches in the Hazlemere area that are in very close proximity to the new cemetery. Organisations consulted included those from Baptist, Church of England, Hindu, Methodist, Muslim and Roman Catholic faiths. A total of 6 responses were received to the online survey (5 from representatives of religious organisations and 1 from a ward councillor). In addition a written response was also provided by the Wycombe Muslim Communication Forum (WMCF) which represents Mosques, Muslim faith/religious leaders and Muslim funeral services in High Wycombe including Wycombe Islamic Mission & Mosque Trust, Totteridge Road Mosque, Castlefield Mosque, Micklefield Mosque, Jamia Rehmania Educational and Cultural Trust, Karima Foundation, The Friday Club/ Imam Ali centre, Wycombe Islamic Society (WISE) and the Muslim Education Centre and Welfare Trust.

2.2.1 Consecrated Ground

Consecrated ground is ground that has already been made or declared sacred or holy by the Church of England prior to use, and is therefore suitable for Church of England burials. Land used for other faith burials, such as Roman Catholic burials, is generally consecrated at the time of burial.

2.2.2 The existing High Wycombe Cemetery has a large area of available burial space that has been consecrated by the Church of England (CoE) which means that Church of England consecrated burials can continue on this site for many years to come. The Council is not proposing to consecrate land at Penn Road cemetery at the moment. This approach means that we can be flexible about how we use the available cemetery space across the two sites and cater to a wide range of religious and cultural requirements.

2.2.3 Two thirds of those responding to the online survey agreed with this approach. The WMCF response was also supportive of this approach because of the flexibility that this provides and that it should enable a section of the Penn Road Cemetery to be allocated solely to Muslim burials. Of those that did not agree they commented that

they felt that people may want to be buried at Penn Road Cemetery (as well as at High Wycombe cemetery) in CoE consecrated ground.

- 2.2.4 The recommended approach is that the Council does not seek to consecrate land at the cemetery for Church of England burials at this point. The new cemetery will operate as part of a combined cemetery facility alongside High Wycombe Cemetery providing a range of burial provision and space for the High Wycombe town area. Subject to any future decision making by the Council and equalities impact assessment, the Council may carry out consecration at a future date, if and when required.

2.2.5 Scattering of ashes

The Council is not proposing to provide a service for the scattering of cremated remains at Penn Road Cemetery. Demand on the cemetery will primarily be for burials, as families often seek to scatter ashes in personally meaningful locations rather than on cemetery sites. However, the Cemetery will offer columbarium for long-term lease which are memorials for holding cremated remains (ashes). At the end of a lease period cremated remains which are not claimed by a family member or nominated person will be scattered in a small designated and signposted wild area of the cemetery, in a woodland garden of remembrance. This means that we can ensure that ashes that are not claimed at the end of a lease period (5, 10 or 20 years) can be suitably laid to rest.

- 2.2.6 83.3% of respondents to the online survey agreed with this proposal. The WMCF also agreed, but highlighted that the Muslim community exclusively bury their deceased. Of those that disagreed information was provided that Roman Catholics generally invite families to inter or bury ashes rather than scatter them. High Wycombe Cemetery will continue to provide interment plots for ashes so this need will also be met by the combined use of the two sites.

- 2.2.7 The recommended approach is that scattering is provided in a small and clearly designated area of the site solely for remains that are not claimed at the end of a columbarium lease period. No other provision for ashes scattering will be made on the Penn Road cemetery site.

2.2.8 Vault/chamber burials

At High Wycombe cemetery the Council currently offers burials in concrete chambers. Concrete chambers have been a good option for this cemetery because of the steep made up ground on the site. At Penn Road cemetery, where the ground is mostly un-disturbed, level and flat, the Council would prefer to offer polypropylene vaults/chambers for families that would like their loved ones to be buried in a vault/chamber. Polypropylene vaults are used by a large number of cemeteries across the country and cater for a range of religious and cultural beliefs. They take up less space in the cemetery, can be installed at the time of burial (rather than in

advance) and are lighter which means they can be more easily installed with less labour required. They are extremely durable and can withstand pressures in excess of 3 tonnes so offer a strong solution to help avoid ground sinking and collapsing. They are also slightly cheaper than concrete vaults per unit.

- 2.2.9 66.7% of respondents to the online survey agreed with this approach. Of those that disagreed concerns included the placing of a non-organic, non-environmentally friendly material into the ground and adding additional costs to a burial and stated that the preference would be to provide a traditional shroud burial designed so that a shrouded body could not be harmed with the weight of soil. The WMCF response strongly disagreed with the proposal to use polypropylene vaults and stated that they do not wish to use them. They commented that they would ideally like to see organic materials used to secure the sides and top of a grave but that if the land conditions/geology at the cemetery were not appropriate to facilitate this then they would accept the use of concrete burial chambers (as is currently used in the High Wycombe Cemetery). If a concrete vault is to be used their preference is that they are buried at a depth so as to enable 10-12 inches of soil coverage on top of the chamber once sealed. In addition the WMCF support the proposal to enable shroud (un-coffined) burials but state a structure to protect the deceased must be provided and that this should ideally be constructed of hardwood or slate. They also commented that there should be the possibility to bury with a coffin, but requested that the provision was made to remove the lid of a coffin once the coffin is lowered in the grave, should the family wish this.
- 2.2.10 Adequate shoring is important to prevent grave collapse and ensure the health and safety of both those carrying out and attending a burial or visiting the cemetery. Where religious or cultural beliefs require the provision of shoring above the deceased (to create a vault) then the structural integrity of this relative to the ground conditions must also be considered. There are many cemeteries across the country that allow the use of wooden shoring alongside shroud burial to create a vault above the body of the deceased. However there are also some known risks associated with this, including grave collapse as the timber deteriorates and rots. This can pose a risk to the health and safety of operators of machinery carrying out maintenance in cemeteries, as well as for people visiting. There are also cemeteries that have completely moved away from the use of wood shoring for traditional shroud burials because of grave collapse, opting to use alternatives such as concrete chambers or polypropylene chambers/vaults. Currently there appear to be very few alternatives available on the market to concrete or polypropylene chambers that provide the required level of protection and loading capacity and that are more environmentally friendly.
- 2.2.11 A benchmarking exercise of Muslim burial provision was carried out across 17 cemeteries where there is a demand for this service and this information was

provided to and reviewed by the burial sub-group (Appendix 3). Of the 17 cemeteries reviewed 12 were providing traditional earth/shroud burials with wooden shoring, 2 were providing/enabling the use of brick built vaults, 3 offered concrete burial chambers and 2 were using polypropylene vaults/chambers (some cemeteries offer more than one of these options).

2.2.12 The Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management (ICCM) Code of Safe Working Practice for Cemeteries states that:

“the amount of shoring equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of excavation, soil type and weather conditions and the depth of shoring timbers...”

The soil type at Penn Road cemetery appears to be heavy clay with a large amount of flint throughout and layers of stone at depth. Initial observations are that the ground holds water (as would be expected with clay) and is fairly wet and heavy. Whilst this could be considered to be reasonably cohesive ground, the cohesive properties of heavy clay can be affected by weather conditions. The ICCM state that when considering shoring provision the properties of clay are such that hot, dry weather can cause the clay to dry and contract and lumps can break away. Contraction of clay can also cause shoring to loosen and fail. Wet weather can cause the clay to swell and again, give rise to lumps breaking away or complete collapse of the grave. Dry followed by wet weather can greatly increase this risk and the freeze/thaw action of frost increases the risk of a breakdown of soil structure. These are factors that must be considered when making arrangements for burial vaults/chambers as well as for grave digging.

2.2.13 The recommended approach for Penn Road Cemetery at this point is to price and offer both polypropylene vaults and chambers and concrete chambers as options. This supports and enables the timely opening of the cemetery as well as providing families of the deceased with choice at the time of burial. Provision will also be available for coffined and shroud burials without vaults/chambers where a family wishes to make that choice. In the meantime further discussions can take place with the WMCF as well as additional research into any other possible vault/chamber alternatives that may satisfy structural stability, environmental and health and safety requirements.

2.2.14 This approach will require the pre-purchase and installation of concrete chambers in one area of the cemetery. The chambers will need to be paid for from revenue budgets and recovered via burial income over the following years. Where concrete chambers are provided it will not be possible to bury them at a depth that allows 10-12 inches of ground coverage above the lid of the chamber. This is because they are installed in pre-dug trenches in a single run and then used in turn as required. Significant amounts of loose topsoil on top of the lids of the chambers is not stable

and presents health and safety risks to those attending funerals, it also hinders the effective sealing of the chamber at the time of burial. The chambers are designed to be installed close to the surface and then would generally be top-soiled and turfed around 12 months from the time of burial, as the section in use becomes full. The WMCF requested within their consultation response that adequate space was provided between chambers to prevent those attending funerals treading on the graves of others. If installed then the spacing allocated between concrete chambers should be the same as that which has previously agreed with representatives for the High Wycombe cemetery. The concrete chambers take up considerable ground space and increasing spacing between graves would reduce the amount of available space for burials over time, limiting capacity.

2.2.15 Shroud burials

A burial shroud is a cloth that is wrapped around a deceased person's body before burial. Shroud burials are customary in many religions, including in Christian, Muslim, and Orthodox Jewish faiths. As well as reflecting cultural and religious practices and beliefs, shrouds can be less damaging to the environment than traditional burials.

2.2.16 The Council proposes to offer shroud burials for those that would like them, either with or without a vault/chamber, dependent on requirements, health and safety implications and medical needs. The location and design of the Penn Road cemetery site means that shroud burials can be offered in a part of the cemetery that is away from nearby housing and rights of way.

2.2.17 All respondents to the online survey and the WMCF were in support of this proposal. The WMCF commented that they would like to see both the options of burial with, as well as without, a vault or chamber provided in a section of the cemetery solely designated for Muslim burials.

2.2.18 The recommended approach is that the cemetery makes provision for shroud burial both with and without a burial vault or chamber in all designated sections of the cemetery, including a Muslim burial section. As previously stated where a vault/chamber is requested to protect the body of the deceased then the options available will be dependent upon structural stability and health and safety requirements.

2.2.19 Burial plots for cremated remains (ashes)

At High Wycombe cemetery the Council currently offers burial plots for ashes and has a large area of available burial space for ashes. Penn Road Cemetery will offer columbarium for long-term lease which are memorials for holding cremated remains (ashes) but the Council is not proposing to offer specific burial plots for ashes at the moment (although ashes interments into an existing buried grave will continue). We will instead look to provide them at a future date, when and if required.

2.2.20 All respondents to the online survey were supportive of this proposal although one commented that burial plots for ashes may have been more appropriate than the provision of columbarium. The WMCF were also supportive but commented that the Muslim community exclusively bury their deceased.

2.2.21 Additional WMCF consultation feedback

The WMCF provided additional comments as part of their consultation response. These are provided at Appendix 2 and included a request to ensure that independent verification of the alignment of burial plots to Mecca is undertaken prior to the first Muslim burial at the site. This is something that the Council will work with the WMCF to facilitate.

2.2.22 They also requested that an open shelter be erected at Penn Road to cater for outdoor funeral services near the burial sites and that adequate parking is provided. Finally they advised that the WMCF is prepared to purchase a section of the cemetery for exclusive use by the Muslim community.

Parking provision for the cemetery was considered as part of the planning process and adequate provision has been made in accordance with planning requirements. The office building that has been erected on the site was designed with overhang to provide shelter for visitors in inclement weather. There are currently no proposals to erect further structures on the site. There are currently also no proposals to sell areas of the cemetery, or to pass the management of areas of the cemetery, to other organisations. The cemetery has been bought and developed with the objective of providing a Council owned and Committee operated multi-faith provision for the High Wycombe town area.

2.3 Children's burials

The Social Fund (Children's Funeral Fund for England) Regulations 2019 established a children's funeral fund (CFF) which provides funding for the fees charged for the burial of a child under the age of 18 or stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy, and for associated expenses. CFF funding is available regardless of the income of the child's parent(s), guardian or carer, but it is subject to eligibility criteria which also sets out what fees can be covered including rights of burial purchase and interment fees. The aim of the scheme is that burial and cremation services are provided to families free at the point of need, with authorities then claiming reimbursement from the Fund.

2.3.1 Local authorities can claim from the fund in all cases where the burial fees or expenses would be chargeable to a person involved in the organisation of the funeral if they would have been chargeable at the point that the Regulations came into

force. At Penn Road cemetery this means that all funerals for a child under the age of 18 or stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy will be provided free of charge at the point of need, and the costs recovered for this by the Council via the CFF.

2.3.2 High Wycombe Town Committee have historically subsidised children's burials at High Wycombe Cemetery offering them free, or in some cases at reduced cost where the burial has been for a child over the age of 14 or has taken place on a Saturday. As this approach was in force prior to the introduction of the Regulations this means that the Council is not able to claim from the CFF for these burial costs.

2.3.3 Given that the two cemetery sites will now operate as a combined cemetery facility, it is recommended that a uniform approach to children's burials is adopted across both the cemetery sites and that all burials for a child under the age of 18 or stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy are provided free at the point of need. This will mean that the High Wycombe Town Committee special expenses fund will continue to cover the costs of some child burials at the High Wycombe Cemetery until the capacity of these areas is reached. This is not a significant change on the current approach and will affect only a small number of families but will mean that we offer a consistent approach across the two sites that is in line with government guidance in this area.

2.4 **Fees and charges**

In December 2020 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published a report on their investigation of the funerals market following concerns that the sector does not sufficiently support customers to exercise choice at a time when they are under considerable emotional and social pressure. Whilst the report remedies are predominantly focused on steps that can be taken by funeral directors to improve visibility around pricing structures and commercial activities there are some underlying principles that are relevant to the Council when setting fees and charges for the cemeteries. This includes providing an itemised price list of frequently purchased products and services online for customers to easily access. A full list of the proposed fees and charges are attached as Appendix B within the Special Expenses Draft Budget Report presented to the Committee at this meeting. Once approved, these fees and charges will be made publically available on the Council's website.

2.4.1 As part of the work carried out by the burial sub-group a benchmarking and review exercise was carried out of current burial fees charged by neighbouring local authority areas (12) and this is attached as Appendix 4. Following the recent award of the grounds maintenance contract for the Wycombe area and a review of staffing structures for the Cemeteries Service, it is proposed that burial fees should increase in 2022/23 to cover increased costs incurred by the Service. Despite this, benchmarking indicates that the proposed fees for High Wycombe and Penn Road

Cemeteries remain lower than the majority of our neighbouring authorities, providing reasonable value for money to customers and families. Where burial costs include interment in a chamber or vault the price of providing this (chamber and contractor costs) is passed to the customer within the burial fee. If the purchase costs of these items increases to the Council in year then these fees may change slightly to reflect any price increase. Where a price increase directly relates to a physical item purchased on behalf of the Council that is then passed back to a customer this does not normally require formal approval and an in-year decision to increase burial fees where a chamber or vault price increase has occurred should be made at officer level, in conjunction with the Chair of the Committee, if required.

- 2.4.2 At the moment burial costs and cemetery fees and charges vary across Buckinghamshire operated cemeteries reflecting differences in the way that these cemeteries were funded and ran under the four legacy area district councils. The Crematoria & Cemeteries Service is working to harmonise operating arrangements (where possible) across the cemeteries and will look to align fees and charges for all the cemeteries as far as is possible for the 2023/24 financial period.

- 2.4.3 Columbarium pricing has been aligned to the memorial pricing in place at the council operated crematoria in order to provide some consistency across the service for customers and staff. This will be reviewed again for the 2023/24 period following their first year of use at Penn Road Cemetery.

2.5 **Saturday short-notice burial services**

The Islamic faith requires that burial takes place quickly and as soon as possible after death. Currently a short notice burial service is provided on a Saturday by the existing service structure arrangements in addition to the 37 hours working week. This means that an officer is available on standby and contactable on Saturday up until 12.00 hours and will make arrangements for, and attend, a burial on a Saturday afternoon. A standby rate is paid, whether or not the officer is contacted. If the officer arranges and attends a burial then an overtime rate is paid for the hours that they work which includes travel time.

- 2.5.1 The table below shows the number of burials that were carried out at High Wycombe Cemetery on a Saturday between 20-16 and 2021.

Year	Number of Saturday burials
2016	6
2017	8
2018	6
2019	7

2020	8
2021*	15
	Average: 8.3

*Note: the increase in Saturday burials seen in 2021 may reflect national Covid-19 related increases in death rates during this period.

2.5.2 In 2020 the identifiable cost of providing the Saturday standby burial service was £4228 which was subsidised by the High Wycombe Town Committee special expenses fund. This equates to £509 per funeral. In reality the costs were higher than this but the charging structure for the grounds maintenance contract in place during this period did not allow for the contractor standby and overtime costs to be easily identified as they were included within the normal contract charges framework. This has been addressed within the new contract. Whilst families requesting a funeral on a Saturday did pay an additional fee, the fee paid rightly offset the costs incurred by the Council for that funeral alone, but not the costs of having the Service available for 50 Saturdays throughout the year, whether or not it was required. This funding model for Saturday short- notice services remains in place within the proposed 2022/23 fees and charges, subject to there being no change to the existing cut-off times for standby, and the costs to the special expenses fund of continuing to provide this service are estimated to be £4,232 (based on receiving income for an average of 8 burials).

2.5.3 Within the WMCF consultation response the Council was asked to consider extending the cut-off time on Saturdays for a burial service from 12.00 to 14.00 hours. This is not considered viable because of the existing available staffing resource, the activities that must be completed prior to burial and the need to bury in good light and during cemetery opening hours. The staffing resource within the Service is currently based on an officer working on standby up until 12.00 hours 50 weeks of the year. Going forward this will be delivered within a very small team on rotation in addition to a 37 hour working week. The expectation is that officers will have to attend an afternoon burial on 7-8 occasions p.a. If this number were to increase significantly then additional resource would be required to effectively manage activities within the Service and ensure that staff had sufficient time away from work. When an officer on standby on a Saturday receives a short notice request for a burial that day there are a number of activities that have to be carried out. These include ensuring contractors are on site to undertake grave clearance, prepare the grave and carry out the burial as well as checking the statutory paperwork required and travel time to site for staff and contractors must also be factored in. While some burial services may only take an hour, other services are considerably longer and therefore a start time any later than 14.00 or 15.00 would not be viable, particularly during the autumn and winter months. For these reasons

extending the Saturday standby service cut-off time from 12.00 to 14.00 hours is not recommended.

2.6 Sunday short-notice burial services

2.6.1 Committee members and the WCMF response also asked officers to review and price the option of a short notice Sunday burial service for High Wycombe and Penn Road Cemeteries. It is difficult to predict with certainty the likely demand for a short notice Sunday burial service but given the additional costs to families associated with undertaking a Sunday service, it is considered that 3 burials p.a. is a realistic number to work with at this point in time.

2.6.2 If the decision is made to provide this service the following fees and charges would be proposed (note the costs of providing this service would not be covered by the fee income that would likely be received and this is covered in more detail at 2.6.8):

Burial type (*fees are doubled for non-residents)	Burial fee (note cost of burial includes purchase of burial rights + interment with chamber/vault if required)
Purchase of burial rights - adult*	£821
Purchase of burial rights - child*	£0
purchase of burial rights - cremated remains*	£500
Sunday adult interment - new grave	£641
Sunday child interment - new grave	£0
Sunday cremated remains interment - new grave	£285
Sunday concrete burial chamber Interment - new grave	£1,028
Sunday burial chamber interment	£1,056
Sunday burial vault interment	£1,241

2.6.3 Registration Services, Coroners Service and NHS Medical Examiner Services

When considering the provision of an extension to the short notice Saturday burial service and/or the provision of a Sunday service, cost is not the only relevant factor. Consideration must also be given to the registration of the death process, medical examiner scrutiny and the need for coroner intervention and whether these services are readily available at weekends to support extending the current burial provision.

2.6.4 All deaths must be registered and this is carried out by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The registration must be accompanied by a medical certificate cause of death (MCCD) which has to be completed by a doctor involved in the care of the deceased person and reviewed by a medical examiner. It is already very difficult to get deaths registered at the weekend due to the lack of

availability of doctors and medical examiners to write and review the MCCD. The Registrar's service do not provide a routine weekend service to register a death and where a service is provided on exception the Council pays a standby and overtime cost to Registration staff for this which is funded from Registration Service budgets.

- 2.6.5 The Medical Examiner Service is operated by Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust and is currently a non-statutory service. However in February 2021, the government published 'Working together to improve health and social care for all', a white paper which includes provisions for medical examiners to be put on to a statutory footing. During 2021/22, the role of these offices is being extended to include all deaths, wherever they occur, including in community settings and GP practices. This will involve scrutiny by a medical examiner of all deaths in England, apart from those that are referred to the coroner, and will mean that MCCD forms will not be issued for any death until that scrutiny has taken place. The Medical Examiner Service currently operates a Monday to Friday Service, in addition the morgue is not open to release the deceased at the weekend.
- 2.6.6 In addition in some circumstances a death must be reported to a coroner who will investigate the death in certain situations including when:
- the person's doctor had not seen them in the 28 days before they died or immediately afterwards
 - a doctor had not looked after, seen or treated the person during their last illness (in other words, death was sudden)
 - the cause of death is unknown or uncertain
 - the death was violent or unnatural (for example, suicide, accident or drug or alcohol overdose)
 - the death was in any way suspicious
 - the death took place during surgery or recovery from an anaesthetic
 - the death took place in prison or police custody
 - the death was caused by an industrial disease.
- 2.6.7 In some cases the coroner will need to order a post-mortem, in which case the body will be taken to hospital for this to be carried out. A death reported to a coroner cannot be registered until the coroner's investigations are complete and a certificate has been issued allowing registration to take place. Currently the Buckinghamshire Council Coroner's Service provides a Monday to Friday service for burials carried out in England, with no weekend service provided.

2.6.8 Cemeteries Services resources

Existing staffing resources within the Cemeteries Service cannot support the provision of an additional Sunday short-notice burial service. The team is very small and provides a Monday to Friday service across all the Buckinghamshire Council operated cemeteries. The team also provides the Saturday short notice standby service in the Wycombe area within existing resources. This means that in order to provide a Sunday short-notice service an additional staffing resource would be required at a cost of £24,935 p.a. (based on receiving income for an average of 3 burials p.a.). This figure includes both Council staffing costs and the optional yearly Sunday standby contractor cost within the new grounds maintenance contract for the Wycombe area (it does not include additional costs to the Council of providing Registration Services at weekends which have not been factored in to this pricing, but arguably should be and would increase costs further). This equates to a subsidised service cost to the special expenses fund of £498.70 a week on 50 weeks of the year for a service that is likely to be used on very few occasions, particularly given that the arrangements in place for registering and scrutinising a death are not in place to support the service.

- 2.6.9 Given these factors it is **not recommended** that a short-notice Sunday burial service is provided at this time. However it is recommended that officers maintain a watching brief on this as following the extension and bedding in of NHS medical examiner services to all deaths (which is scheduled to be implemented in 2022), provision models may change.

2.7 Cemetery Rules and Regulations

The formation of Buckinghamshire Council has brought together responsibility for the operation of a number of cemeteries across the Council area. The Service is currently working to bring together the management of the cemeteries service into a single team which will create more resilience within the service and should deliver a more consistent experience for users and customers across Buckinghamshire. Cemeteries operated by Buckinghamshire Council currently operate to legacy council cemetery rules and regulations. Officers will seek to harmonise, as far as possible, the Penn Road Cemetery Rules and Regulations with those in place for other cemeteries operated by the Council, recognising that there will need to be site specific requirements for each cemetery. Where possible the Penn Road Regulations will reflect those in place at High Wycombe Cemetery to ensure consistency across the two sites. The review of Rules and Regulations will include a recommended change to allow kerb sets to graves in the existing Muslim sections at High Wycombe Cemetery.

- 2.7.1 Officers are dependent on the Committee agreeing the types of burial that will be provided at the Cemetery to enable the setting of the new rules and regulations.

Given this it is likely that the recommendation of the rules and regulations for Penn Road Cemetery for approval will come forward to the Committee at the meeting of the 8th March 2022. Once the Committee have recommended the proposed rules and regulations for approval these will then be brought forward as a Key Decision.

3. Next steps and review

- 23rd February – Budget paper at Full Council with proposed fees and charges
- 8th March 2022 proposed Cemetery Rules and Regulations provided to Committee for recommendation to approve
- March 2022 (date TBC) Key Decision to approve cemetery Rules and Regulations

4. Other options considered

N/A – activities are required to enable opening of Penn Road Cemetery and ensure sufficient burial provision for the future

5. Legal and financial implications

Cemetery fees should cover the costs of the provision of the service on a full cost recovery model basis. Cemetery Rules and Regulations must be in place prior to operation to ensure that it operates in accordance with legislative and council requirements.

6. Corporate implications

- 6.1 Improving the environment – the recommended approach is that the Council move away from the use of concrete burial chambers and seek to use more sustainable and environmentally friendly burial types where, and if, this is possible given health and safety implications.
- 6.2 Property – input is required as part of fee setting to ensure that ongoing land depreciation and maintenance costs over time are factored in to cost recovery.
- 6.3 Equalities – an equalities impact screening assessment has been carried out and is attached as Appendix 5. This will continue to be reviewed and updated at regular intervals as the arrangements for the Cemetery progress through the decision making and implementation process.
- 6.4 HR – N/A
- 6.5 Climate change – as above



6.6 Sustainability – as above

6.7 Data – N/A

6.8 Value for money – the recommendations within this report reflect value for money considerations

Key documents: none

