



Report to High Wycombe Town Committee

Date: 26th March 2024

Title: **Penn Road and High Wycombe Cemetery Sunday & Bank Holiday Burial Service**

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Recommendations:

- a) The committee agrees in principle to the plans set out in the report to facilitate Sunday Burials from 1st July 2024, subject to officers agreeing suitable contractual provisions and costs.
- b) The committee approves the provision of Bank holiday burials (excluding Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day) from 1st July 2024.
- c) The committee agrees to extended burial times to allow burials up to a 3.00 pm November – January (inclusive) from 1st November 2024.
- d) The committee notes the officer costs and indicative contractor costs to provide a Sunday Burial service (and Bank Holidays) and that a new Fees and Charges schedule will be required to facilitate Sunday and Bank Holiday Burials to ensure that the cost increases are on a cost neutral basis. The new F&C schedule to be presented at the next meeting of the Committee.

1. Background

- 1.1 On 18th January 2022 High Wycombe Town Committee agreed the proposed burial arrangements for Penn Road Cemetery and recommended the approval for the proposed fees and charges for Penn Road Cemetery and High Wycombe Cemetery. At this meeting the Committee also considered the provision of a short-notice Sunday burial service for Penn Road and High Wycombe Cemeteries the outcome of which was to agree that Officers would maintain a watching brief on the extension and bedding in of the NHS Medical Examiner Scheme (which was scheduled to be implemented in 2022) and the provision models of all of the agencies involved in the death certification process.
- 1.2 Further updates on the extension of the Medical Examiner Scheme were provided on 4th October 2022 and 14th March 2023. At the HWTC meeting on 23rd January 2024

the Committee received the most recent update following the issue of Draft Regulations, for consultation, on 14th December 2023. Officers reported that progress remained slow and, although the scheme was to be implemented there was not yet an agreed date for when the Regulations would be brought into force.

- 1.3 On 8th March 2024, the Home Office announced a further delay to the scheme's implementation. This currently means that it would be extremely unlikely that any of the relevant certificates and paperwork would be issued during a weekend to facilitate a short notice Sunday burial soon.
- 1.4 Information about the death certification processes that needs to be completed prior to a burial taking place are set out in Appendix A for information.
- 1.5 Although at the current time it is extremely unlikely that the required paperwork would be released over a weekend to facilitate short notice Sunday burials, Members requested that Officers provided a report, to the next Committee meeting, setting out the costs and implications of providing Sunday burials, along with proposals for a Bank Holiday burial service and extended burial hours.

2. Main body of report

- 2.1 The Buckinghamshire Cemeteries Team consists of a manager and 3 Cemeteries Administrators, each working 37hrs per week 08.30-16.30hrs, Monday – Friday. The Team provides a burial service for 7 cemeteries across Buckinghamshire and, in addition to their contracted working hours, a short-notice Saturday stand-by service in the Wycombe area.
- 2.2 An Officer is available on standby and can be contacted on Saturdays up to 12.00hrs; if contacted they will arrange, and attend, a burial on a Saturday afternoon. There are several activities to be undertaken when a burial request is received. The first is to ensure that the death certification process has been fully completed, that the death has been Registered, a Certificate for Burial or Cremation has been issued and that the burial can legally take place. Death Certification is a multi-agency process (NHS, Medical Examiners/Coroners, Registrars) and these agencies primarily offer a Monday-Friday service. Numbers of Saturday burials remain low; a table of Saturday burials is set out in Appendix B for information.
- 2.3 The Cemetery Administrator on standby must ensure that the Council's Grounds maintenance contractor, Idverde, is available to attend the cemetery to prepare the grave, carry out the burial and undertake the backfilling process. Idverde are currently contracted to provide their services Monday – Saturday.

3. Sunday Burials

- 3.1 It would not be practical to expect the Cemeteries Administrators to work 7 days per week, therefore, given the limited staffing resources, extending the provision to include Sunday and Bank Holiday burials would require the creation of an additional

part-time Cemeteries Administrator post. The cost of the post including on-costs and management fee will be £19,873 p.a (full year).

- 3.2 Officers are currently in discussions with Idverde about the provisions of services for Sundays and at the time of writing this report we don't yet have full details of the provisions. It is likely that for Idverde (or sub-contractor) to provide a Sunday Burial service, it will cost in the region of £15,600 pa (full year).
- 3.3 Providing that the Committee agree to funding for the new Officer resources and the Contractor provisions (and costs) are finalised, then the team will be able to start the recruitment process, finalise the contractual position and write up and agree the policy and procedures to facilitate Sunday burials to start from **1st July 2024**.
- 3.4 The new fees and charges will be submitted to the next scheduled Committee meeting in June 2024.

4. Bank Holiday Burial Provision

- 4.1 Bank Holiday provision has not previously been considered for various reasons, mainly low demand, and religious reasons. However, Officers have undertaken consultation with Idverde and can confirm that a burial service can be provided on four Bank Holidays per year (this excludes Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day) but this will be at an additional cost of £1,462p.a. The costs for the Cemeteries Administrator are captured within the new costs for Sunday burials.
- 4.2 Again, considering the recruitment process, the need to amend the Cemetery Rules & Regulations and the fee setting requirements it is anticipated that a likely commencement date for a Bank Holiday service would be 1st July 2024.

5. Cemetery Opening Hours and Burial Times

- 5.1 Burial times are mainly dictated by the important consideration to the safety of visitors and staff whilst within the cemetery grounds. In addition to the time taken for the burial service itself, adequate time must be allowed for safely completing the backfilling process and any subsequent prayers. Whilst some burial services are completed within an hour, others take longer and as the process for backfilling the grave and mourners exiting the cemetery must be undertaken in good light conditions.
- 5.2 Additionally, the working hours of the Cemeteries Team and the Grounds Maintenance Contractor are a consideration and the need to travel between offices/ depots and the cemetery sites are a factor that must be considered. Therefore, burial and cemetery closing times have been agreed to reflect these considerations.
- 5.3 As a reminder the Cemetery Rules and Regulations, agreed at HWTC on 8th March 2022, allow for burials to be undertaken Monday to Saturday and these rules will

need to be changed and presented to the Committee for approval at the next Committee meeting in June.

6. Sunday & Bank Holiday Burial Fees

- 6.1 If the decision is made to provide a Sunday and Bank Holiday burial service, the fees and charges would need to be changed to reflect the increased costs.
- 6.2 Until the contractual processes have been agreed along with confirmation of pricing from the contractor it has not been possible to provide the new fees and charges for the committee to agree. The additional costs will have to be spread across the other users of the service to maintain the cost neutral approach adopted by the committee. However, in order to understand the likely impact the **indicative** fees and charges are set out in Appendix C for information and these are subject to minor change.

7. Legal and Financial Implications

- 7.1 Legal - changes to the Cemetery opening or burial times require amendment to the Cemeteries Rules and Regulations which are approved by Cabinet as an Executive Decision. The schedule of Fees & Charges applicable for Sunday and Bank Holiday Burials would need approval prior to burials taking place from July 2024.
- 7.2 Financial – existing staffing resources within the Cemeteries Service cannot support the provision of additional Sunday and Bank Holiday burial services because they can't be expected to work seven days a week, which means that an additional staffing resource would be required to provide the service.
- 7.3 These costs have been reviewed and recalculated based on current salary of a part time G2 officer which will be £19,873 pa (for a full year, on costs). Indicative contract costs for providing a Sunday Burial Service are in the region of £15,600 pa.
- 7.4 The cost of providing a Bank Holiday burial service (4 days), is £1,462 p.a. in addition to the above.
- 7.5 This equates to an indicative total cost of £37,146 p.a. for a Sunday and Bank Holiday service that the committee would need to funded spread across the overall fees and charges for the cemeteries.

8. Corporate Implications

- 8.1 Creation of, and recruitment to, an additional Cemeteries Administrator position would be required.

9. Next steps and review

- 9.1 Subject to approval of the recommendations the team will start the recruitment process for the new Cemeteries Administrator
- 9.2 Contractual provisions will be finalised.
- 9.3 New Fees & Charges document will be developed and submitted to the next Committee for approval. An EQuIA will be needed in advance of that decision.
- 9.4 The Rules and Regulations will be updated and submitted to the next Committee for approval.
- 9.5 Sunday Burials and Bank Holiday Burials expected to commence from 1st July 2024 subject to the resources and contractor being in place to facilitate the services.
- 9.6 It is expected that the provision of these new services (Sunday Burials and Bank Holiday Burials) will be reviewed after 6 months and reported back to the Committee early in 2025.

