

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 12 July 2018

**Lead Member / Officer:** Lead Member for Housing, Regulation and the Environment  
Head of Highways and Environment

**Report Author(s):** Works Unit and Streetscene Manager  
Streetscene Manager (North)

**Title:** Update regarding management of Denbighshire County Council's Cemeteries

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## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. This report provides an update for Members on the residual capacity within the council's cemeteries, and it outlines the risk areas with regards to future burial capacity. The report also covers a proposed cemeteries fee increase, and outlines the current maintenance regime (and management policies) for all council controlled cemeteries.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To provide Members with information on the remaining burial capacity within the council's cemeteries, and to outline the current maintenance standards and management policies that are in place for our cemeteries. An analysis of approximate years remaining for new burials at each cemetery is attached at **Appendix 1**. A proposal to increase burial fees to bring Denbighshire's fees in line with neighbouring authorities is attached at **Appendix 2**. The maintenance specification for our cemeteries is attached at **Appendix 3**. Our current policies in relation to management of cemeteries is attached at **Appendix 4**. A previous feasibility study undertaken in 2004, designed to explore the future cemetery provision, is attached at **Appendix 5**.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee:

- 3.1. considers whether a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group should be established to consider the issue of future capacity in council cemeteries;
- 3.2. confirms its support for the existing policies relating to the management of the council's cemeteries; and
- 3.3. supports the proposals to increase burial fees to bring Denbighshire's fees in line with neighbouring authorities.

## 4. Report details

- 4.1. The cemeteries currently owned by the council were inherited during local government reorganisation in 1996. The council does not have a statutory duty to provide its own cemeteries but has powers to do so, if it so chooses under current legislation. In 2004, an Environment Scrutiny Committee working group considered the possibility of new cemetery provision. The scrutiny working group had identified two potential new cemetery sites, and the total work costs at both of these sites was more than £950,000 each at 2004 price levels. The estimates did not allow for land acquisition costs. The option of developing new cemeteries was not pursued at that time, mainly on the grounds of cost.
- 4.2. The residual capacity within the council's cemeteries (as at May 2018) is summarised in **Appendix 1**, together with an estimate of future burial rates. The long term trend towards cremation has been taken into account. At the moment there is no problem with overall capacity (i.e. across the county as a whole), however in the medium term (5 to 10 years) a number of cemeteries will reach capacity for new burials.
- 4.3. One of the council's largest cemeteries (in Rhyl) is now closed to new burials and it is likely to represent a significant cost for the authority to provide new cemeteries for individual towns as and when the existing cemeteries become full, with suitable land not always being available in the areas required.
- 4.4. An analysis of the detailed figures indicates that Rhuddlan cemetery will be the next cemetery to reach capacity in approximately 8 years, probably followed by Ruthin. When these cemeteries are full, additional demand will be placed on the council's remaining cemeteries.
- 4.5. In Prestatyn and Llangollen, much of the spare capacity is on land that is currently used for grazing, and/or consists of undeveloped fields. New infrastructure works would therefore be required if these areas were to be developed to provide additional cemetery capacity (e.g. drainage works and the construction of new paths). However, the scale of these works will be far smaller than the development of completely new sites. Further works will be necessary in order to determine the cost of developing the two existing areas to the necessary standard. A previous feasibility study undertaken in 2004, designed to explore the future cemetery provision, is attached at **Appendix 5**.
- 4.6. The council's burial fees need to be reviewed to bring them in line with neighbouring authorities. It is important to maintain Denbighshire's burial rates at a comparable price to those of neighbouring authorities, both to maintain income at a reasonable level and to discourage burial in Denbighshire becoming the cheaper option and the associated additional demand this would place on our burial capacity. Proposals for new fees are outlined in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.7. Maintenance of the grass in Denbighshire cemeteries is currently completed by contractors. The specification for all seven cemeteries is for the grass to be cut a height of between 20mm to 40mm on the basis of ten occasions a year at a

frequency of once every 3 weeks as outlined in the maintenance specification in **Appendix 3**.

- 4.8. Our existing policies in relation to management of our cemeteries are included in the Cemeteries regulations, as outlined within **Appendix 4**.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

- 5.1. No decision is sought, and the management of cemeteries does not explicitly contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

- 6.1. The report contain no proposals that would place an additional cost burden on the service budget. However, there is a potential to generate additional income through the suggested increase in burial fees. Any works to develop new additional sites will come at an additional cost, (value not known at this stage). There will be no impact on other services. An indicative cost, based on a previous assessment carried out in 2004, can be viewed within **Appendix 5**.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

- 7.1. No decision is being sought via this report, so no WIA has been undertaken at this stage.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

- 8.1. The purpose of this report is largely to consult with Scrutiny.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

- 9.1 It is important that services regularly review fees and charges and where possible and appropriate, recover the full cost of service provision, in line with the council's corporate policy.

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

- 10.1. The main risk is for the authority to be unable to provide burial provision for its residents in the medium to long term. The authority needs to decide whether to continue to provide this as a service to residents as there is no statutory obligation to do so.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

Section 7.2.3 of the Council's Constitution specifies that Scrutiny may consider any matter that affects the Council's area or its inhabitants, whilst Section 7.4.1 states its powers with respect to policy development and review.

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