

 <b>REPORT TO EXECUTIVE</b>			
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT</b>			
Date of Meeting:		7th July 2003	
Public			
Key Decision:	Yes	Recorded in Forward Plan:	Yes
Inside Policy Framework			

**Title: BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW**

**Report of: Head of Environmental Protection Services**

**Report reference: EPS.40/2003**

**Summary: The Report provides the final outstanding portions of the draft Best Value Review of Bereavement Services**

**Recommendations: Members are requested to consider the Report and approve that it be forwarded for consultation to Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

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**1.**

## **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS**

1.1 The Best Value Review of Bereavement Services was originally presented to Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2002 as Report COS 80/02. At that meeting a number of points were identified which required the provision of further information and additional research regarding cost comparisons with other similar public and

private cemetery operators.

1.2 A subsequent Report, COS 163/02, was considered by Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2002. At that meeting the Director of Leisure Services addressed the majority of Members' previous concerns however certain issues still required further information. On receiving the Director's assurance that the outstanding areas would be addressed Members resolved that subject to the amendments being undertaken the Committee was satisfied with the draft Final Report and would forward the same to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. This Report addresses those reserved matters identified at the December meeting.

## **2. Reserved Matters**

### **1. Comparative Costs.**

Although information had been provided in the initial draft Best Value Review it was considered that further investigations should be made, particularly as regards the costs of grounds maintenance. Since December a considerable amount of research has been undertaken on comparative costs however great difficulties were experienced in obtaining detailed comparisons on funeral costs, particularly from private sector operators. The data obtained can be summarised as follows and supplements that contained in the original Review document which identified that on 2002 costs Carlisle was ranked 104<sup>th</sup> cheapest out of 242 crematoria. The additional data from private sector crematoria confirm that Carlisle is still providing good value for money. The 2002/03 charges for the following private sector crematoria have been obtained, all are owned by the same company however the price differences appear to reflect the level of demand for the individual Crematorium.

Dundee £375

Perth £370

Lancaster £315

Carlisle 2003/04 charge £305

Similar comparisons can be drawn regarding the costs for ancillary services such as entries in the Book of Remembrance. Costs from the same private sector crematoria for 2002/03 are as follows.

Private Sector Carlisle City Council

2002/03 2003/04

2 line entry £85 £32

5 line entry £170 £61.50

5 line + emblem £245 £88.75 5 line memorial

card £40 £34.50

Members' concerns were primarily focused on the comparative costs for grounds maintenance and the greatest research has been carried out in this area. Comparisons were sought with those authorities, which owned and operated a crematorium and had a similar area of maintainable land to Carlisle. These criteria are important in that grounds maintenance costs for Crematoria are relatively high and the maintenance of unused as well as used burial areas must also be taken into account. The following table identifies the comparative costs for those authorities which most closely resemble the situation at Carlisle. The figures are based on the 2001/02 Cipfa statistics.

LOCATION	HECTARES	COST PER HECTARE	TOTAL COST
Barnsley	54	£9,370	£506,000
Bournemouth	37	£7,432	£275,000
Middlesborough	44	£8,227	£362,000
Nottingham	46	£9,152	£421,000
Salford	52	£7,288	£379,000
Wolverhampton	55	£10,163	£559,000
<b>Carlisle</b>	54	£7,462	£403,000

As can be seen from the data Carlisle is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most cost effective in terms of grounds maintenance when compared with similar authorities. Overall it can be said that Carlisle provides a cost effective service both in terms of burial and ancillary services. The future costs of the service to the Council are being addressed in line with "The Price is Right" Government recommendations for the operation of Council services to secure a gradual reduction in the present levels of subsidy over future years. A significant improvement in this direction has been achieved through the price rises approved by Council for the current financial year.

2. A further concern of Members related to the future use of the Capital Fund, an Appendix had been prepared to cover this issue but had been omitted from the December report. Essentially, the Capital Fund will provide for the

much needed renovation of the Crematorium chapel during the current year. In future years it will be crucial to allow for the upgrading and repair of facilities and the eventual replacement of the existing cremators when they reach the end of their operational life.

3. Grave right terms were also to be addressed in this addendum report and it is proposed that Members consider the adoption of a variable term to cover periods of 30, 50, 75 or 100 years as opposed to the 50 year term currently offered. The charges to be based on existing 50 year term cost. Should Members agree to this proposal it can be added into the Improvement Plan to commence from 2004/05.
4. Information available to the bereaved has also been addressed particularly as regards those less able to afford funeral costs. Information has been sought from The Registrars Office and Social Security and specific leaflets are now made available where appropriate.
5. Ethnic Group Information. At the December meeting Members' attention was drawn to the need to adequately provide for all ethnic groups who may wish to use the Cemetery. Discussions with other Cemetery operators confirm that the Council may now have to provide a 7 day service to fully cater for the needs of all religious groups. More research and costing of this area will have to be undertaken particularly as it may be contrary to the Human Rights Act to impose any additional charge for services provided on Saturday or Sunday. Further investigation of this area is taking place and will be the subject of a subsequent report to Members.
6. In operational terms a number of changes have taken place at the Cemetery since December which have sought to improve general conditions. Letters have been distributed to those grave owners who are infringing the rules relating to unsuitable memorials and action to remove the worst of these has now taken place. This is particularly important as regards the Woodland Burial area where a number of complaints had been received. The co-operation of the public was much appreciated in removing many of the items giving rise to concern. Additionally arrangements have been made for the Dog Fouling Enforcement Officers to regularly patrol the Cemetery grounds to remind dog owners to clear up after their pets. In terms of grounds maintenance great efforts have been made to improve the working links with the Council's Grounds Maintenance Teams and this has resulted in much closer co-operation in the delivery of the service.
7. Overall this addendum to the original Best value Review Report attempts to both address the amendments requested by Members when the document was last considered in December 2002 and to confirm that the Council currently provides a cost effective and appreciated service to the residents of Carlisle District and beyond who use the facilities. The quality has again been formally recognised as being the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest performing in the Country compared with 3<sup>rd</sup> when the Review was originally presented for Members. As part of the long term proposals for Bereavement Services it is intended to work towards an Excellence Criteria Award as well as ensuring to provide a value for money service.

## **1. CONSULTATION**

1. Consultation to Date. Consultation with service users was carried out before finalising the plans for the Crematorium Improvements.
2. Consultation proposed.

Nil

## **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to receive the report as the final addendum to the Draft Best Value Review of Bereavement Services.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The addendum addresses the issues of concern raised when the Best Value Review was considered by Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2002.

## **3. IMPLICATIONS**

- Staffing/Resources – Nil
- Financial – The Improvement Plan appended to the original Best Value Review identifies that costs to the Council will be more effectively controlled.
- Legal – The Council as part of the Improvement Plan will have to investigate the future provision of 7 day services to meet the needs of ethnic minorities.
- Corporate – Nil
- Risk Management – Operational risks have been assessed and are recorded in the Council Risk Register.
- Equality Issues – The provision of a 7 day service is likely to be necessary to ensure equality.
- Environmental – The maximising of suitable areas for less intensive grounds maintenance will benefit the local environment.
- Crime and Disorder – Nil