



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Agenda item
17

PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT

Date of Meeting: 1st September 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 60/03

Summary: The report contains the observations of Community and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the revisions and updated Improvement Plan for the Bereavement Services Best Value Review.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note the report, Improvement Plan and observations of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and agree that they be forwarded to Council for approval as an addendum to the initial Best Value Review.

Contact Officer: Richard Speirs

Ext: 7325

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 The initial Best Value Review was considered by Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2002 (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. A subsequent Report, COS 163/02, was considered by Members of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 3rd 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 Executive.
- 1.2 Report EPS 40/03, attached hereto as Appendix 1, was presented to Members of Executive on 7th July and to Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 17th July 2003. The Report addressed the previous points of concern and presented a revised Improvement Plan. The relevant minute for that meeting is attached as Appendix 2. The Members of Management Overview and Scrutiny also considered the report at their meeting on 14th August the minutes for which are attached as Appendix 3.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Consultation to Date. The amendments and revised Improvement Plan have been considered by both Overview and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 2.2 Consultation proposed. Nil

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the report, Improvement Plan and observations of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and agree that they be forwarded to Council for approval as an addendum to the initial Best Value Review.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable the final approval of the Bereavement Services Best Value Review.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – The provision of 7 day services will have resource implications.
- Financial – The Improvement Plan 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

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REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT

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.

Contact Officer: Richard Speirs

Ext: 7325

1. 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 6th 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 3rd 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

2.1 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 104th 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 2002/03	Carlisle City Council 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
Middlesbrough	44	£8,227	£362,000
Nottingham	46	£9,152	£421,000
Salford	52	£7,288	£379,000
Wolverhampton	55	£10,163	£559,000
Carlisle	54	£7,462	£403,000

As can be seen from the data Carlisle is the 3rd 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.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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.

- 2.7 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 2nd highest performing in the Country compared with 3rd 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.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.3 Consultation to Date. Consultation with service users was carried out before finalising the plans for the Crematorium Improvements.

- 2.4 Consultation proposed.
Nil

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4. 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.

5. 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

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
1	Standards of Grounds Maintenance	<p>OBJECTIVE To maintain existing standards whilst minimising costs by a further 5% over 3 years.</p> <p>ACTION A programme of limited extensions to conservation areas will be prepared and implemented.</p>	Continuing high standards of maintenance & high levels of user satisfaction.	September 2002	September 2005	Additional conservation areas identified with maintenance reduced accordingly.
2	Dog Fouling	<p>OBJECTIVE To reduce complaints received about dog fouling in the cemetery. By 50% over 3 years</p> <p>ACTION New signs to be erected at all entrances. Disposal facilities to provided at all exits. Dog Fouling Enforcement Officers to Include cemetery grounds in their patrols.</p>	Reduce offence to visitors, improve visual amenity of grounds.	July 2002	July 2005	Signs erected, disposal points via litter bins provided, Enforcement Offices patrolling as part of routine duties.

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
3	Grave Ornaments	<p>OBJECTIVE To reduce the volume of this material (measured by the percentage of graves affected) by 50% over 3 years.</p> <p>ACTION The Council will address issues where rights of ownership agreements are being broken by the use of unsuitable ornaments etc.</p>	Improved appearance of cemetery. Reduced offence to some whilst remaining sensitive to the wishes of others.	July 2002	July 2005	Press campaign resulted in positive support for proposal. Grave owners notified of problems and asked to co-operate in removal of unauthorised materials. Positive response and noticeable reduction in numbers of unauthorised materials.
4	Mercury Emissions	<p>OBJECTIVE To be in a position to comply with the EPA Regulations from within Bereavement Services capital fund.</p> <p>ACTION Charges to be increased to allow for greater contribution to the improvements fund so that the cost of works can be met from that source when needed.</p>	Ability to comply with anticipated EPA Regulations			Implementation awaits publication of timetable by Central Government

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
5	Charges and Costs	<p>OBJECTIVE To meet the aims of the Government's "The Price is Right" advice to ensure a more realistic cost basis for Bereavement Services</p> <p>ACTION The Council will, over a period of time, reduce the levels of subsidy for the provision of Bereavement Services to place them on a closer alignment with other providers.</p>	A more realistic pricing structure comparable with other providers.	April 2003	July 2006	Initial phase of cost re-structure completed to ensure that charges more accurately represent the cost of provision
6	Period of Grave Right Purchase	<p>OBJECTIVE To defer "filling" of the cemetery and to cover real costs by reducing period of grave sales</p> <p>ACTION The option of purchase for a range of periods will be offered.</p>	Users will be able to select the most appropriate purchase period.	September 2002	April 2004	Variable grave right period developed for consultation and approval.

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
7	Re-use of Grave Space	<p>OBJECTIVE To defer "filling" of the cemetery</p> <p>ACTION Monitor progress of pilot projects relating to re-use of grave spaces.</p>	To ensure an adequate resource within existing burial grounds.	April 2003	July 2006	Government pilot studies into grave re-use will influence future policy and practices.
8	Alternative Income Streams	<p>OBJECTIVE To reduce net costs of service by making best use of property assets.</p> <p>ACTION Examine market potential of property assets around the Richardson Street cemetery for appropriate commercial lettings. Investigate fund raising schemes operated by other Authorities and consider their relevance to Carlisle.</p>	Increased income to offset costs. Convenient service availability for cemetery users and visitors.	September 2002	April 2004	Potential markets being identified, costs of office relocation being obtained.

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
9	Crematorium Improvements	<p>OBJECTIVE To respond to public demand for improvements to waiting facilities and associated areas.</p> <p>ACTION Pursue present capital programme to completion by 2004</p>	Improved service quality, comfort and access for mourners.	September 2002	January 2004	Plans approved following public consultation, works scheduled to commence 30 th June 2003.
10	Service Organisation	<p>OBJECTIVE Provide seamless service provision from the customer's perspective</p> <p>ACTION Arrange for joint team meetings between the Bereavement Services and Grounds Maintenance staff.</p>	Improved communication for the customer and clearer accountability.	January 2003	Ongoing	Changes to client/contractor split have improved working relations and effectiveness of service delivery.

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
11	Annual consultations	<p>OBJECTIVE To improve communication with and involvement of service users in the planning and operation of the service.</p> <p>ACTION Annual consultation meetings with Clergy, undertakers and other interested parties.</p>	Opportunity for continuous improvement in response to public comments.	September 2002	Ongoing	Initial meeting held to approve proposals for Crematorium Chapel improvements. Planning for follow up meeting on completion of alterations.
12	Publicity	<p>OBJECTIVE To increase public awareness of the decisions they will need to make and the range of options available when dealing with a bereavement.</p> <p>ACTION Wide distribution of information through advice agencies, solicitors offices etc. Improve use of media to heighten awareness of bereavement services.</p>	Increased customer satisfaction arising from greater knowledge and ability to make appropriate choices.	September 2003	Ongoing	<p>Leaflets produced and circulated to appropriate advice agencies, solicitors and registrars offices.</p> <p>Extensive media coverage obtained regarding developments and proposed improvements.</p>

Bereavement Services Best Value Review – Improvement Plan

Ref.	Issue	Improvement	User Benefits	Start Date	Target	Progress to Date July 2003
13	Paupers Funerals	<p>OBJECTIVE Ensure that clergy are available to officiate at all paupers' funerals.</p> <p>ACTION Ensure that the Chaplain to the Council is informed of all such events.</p>	To ensure that all funerals benefit from appropriate religious attendance.	September 2002	Ongoing	Arrangements made for pauper's funerals to have appropriate religious attendance.
14	Ethnic Minorities	<p>OBJECTIVE Ensure that all ethnic groups have appropriate bereavement facilities.</p> <p>ACTION Investigate requirements and provide appropriate facilities.</p>	Ensure equality of provision for all.	September 2003	Ongoing	Discussions held and facilities provided for specific religious groups. Further discussion planned regarding timing of services.
15	Electronic Service Delivery	<p>OBJECTIVE Enable funeral directors to book services 24 hours, 7 days.</p> <p>ACTION Update computer system to provide automated electronic booking service.</p>	Improved service.	September 2002	January 2004	System installed, data records being transferred and staff trained.

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF
THE COMMUNITY OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 17 JULY 2003**

**COS.69/03 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW
REVISED IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

With reference to the Executive Decision EX.140/03, the Head of Environmental Protection Services submitted Report EPS.40/03 which addressed a number of issues raised as part of the Best Value Review. The Executive had received the report as a final addendum to the Best Value Review and the report was referred to this Committee for consideration and for submission to the City Council.

Mr Speirs reported details of further work which had been undertaken to address the issues and concerns raised by this Committee in respect of:

- Cost comparisons for a number of activities and bereavement services.
- The future use of the Capital Fund to improve the Crematorium facilities.
- A review of Grave Rights Terms.
- Information available to the bereaved, particularly in relation to funeral costs.
- Ethnic group information on the implications of services requested on a Saturday or Sunday on religious grounds.

The Portfolio Holder commented that this report was part of a tidying up exercise to address a number of issues which had been raised by this Committee when they had considered the final report.

Mr Speirs also submitted a revised Improvement Plan outlining progress to date in each improvement objective and setting out clear areas for improvement and targets for achieving those improvements.

Mr Speirs then answered a number of Members questions in relation to comparative costs of Bereavement Services with other local authorities, capital investment in the Crematorium including the need to financially plan to replace the Cremators. He also answered a number of questions and discussed with Members aspects in relation to the maintenance of the Cemetery and Crematorium grounds and the need to maintain current high standards.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be accepted and referred to the City Council in accordance with the necessary procedures

(2) That the Executive be made aware of the Committee's concerns regarding the financial implication arising from the need to replace Cremators. It was suggested that if Business Units were allowed to keep a proportion of any additional income they generated in order to invest in services then any additional income arising from Bereavement Services could be added to the Capital Fund which was being established for the replacement of Cremators.

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 14 AUGUST 2003**

OSM.50/03 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW

With reference to Minute COS.69/03, the Head of Environmental Protection Services submitted report EPS.51/03 containing the original submission to, and the observations of, the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding additions and alterations to the Bereavement Services Best Value Review, as originally requested by this Committee.

There was discussion on the use of the Capital Fund to improve Crematorium facilities. The Head of Environmental Protection Services outlined improvements which had taken place and work which would be necessary on the cremators to improve emissions levels. The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a report to that Committee on the work required on the cremators and on the funding of future service improvements.

RESOLVED – (1) That, in accordance with the protocol for Best Value Reviews, the revisions and Action Plan to the initial Best Value Review of Bereavement Services be approved.

(2) That the Committee are satisfied that the Review is complete and that the original Review together with the amendments set out in report EPS.51/03 be forwarded to the Executive for comment and then referred to the Council for approval.

(3) That the Head of Environmental Protection Services report to a future meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work required on the cremators and on the funding of future service improvements.

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2003**

**EX.204/03 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW (Key
Decision)**

Portfolio Environment, Infrastructure and Transport

Subject Matter

To consider a report from the Head of Environmental Protection Services (EPS.60/03) submitting the observations of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the revisions and updated improvement plan for the Bereavement Services Best Value Review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had approved the revisions and Action Plan to the initial Best Value Review of Bereavement Services, was satisfied that the Review was complete and had asked the Head of Environmental Protection Services to report to a future meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work required on the cremators and on the funding of future service improvements.

The Executive were being given the opportunity to comment on the Improvement Plan.

Summary of options rejected

None

DECISION

That the report of the Head of Environmental Protection Services, the Improvement Plan and the observations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted and the matter be referred to the City Council for approval as an addendum to the initial Best Value Review.

Reasons for Decision

To enable the final appraisal of the Bereavement Services Best Value Review.

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 14 AUGUST 2003**

OSM.50/03 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW

With reference to Minute COS.69/03, the Head of Environmental Protection Services submitted report EPS.51/03 containing the original submission to, and the observations of, the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding additions and alterations to the Bereavement Services Best Value Review, as originally requested by this Committee.

There was discussion on the use of the Capital Fund to improve Crematorium facilities. The Head of Environmental Protection Services outlined improvements which had taken place and work which would be necessary on the cremators to improve emissions levels. The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a report to that Committee on the work required on the cremators and on the funding of future service improvements.

RESOLVED – (1) That, in accordance with the protocol for Best Value Reviews, the revisions and Action Plan to the initial Best Value Review of Bereavement Services be approved.

(2) That the Committee are satisfied that the Review is complete and that the original Review together with the amendments set out in report EPS.51/03 be forwarded to the Executive for comment and then referred to the Council for approval.

(3) That the Head of Environmental Protection Services report to a future meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work required on the cremators and on the funding of future service improvements.