
**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2002**

COS.163/02 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW – FINAL REPORT

Pursuant to Minutes COS.153/02 and COS.80/02, there was submitted the draft final report in respect of the Bereavement Services Best Value Fundamental Performance Review. The report identified the key service issues arising from the Review and included an Action Plan for improvement.

The Chairman made reference to comments made by the Committee at its meeting on 6 June 2002 and questioned whether they had been taken on board.

The Director commented upon the action taken to address those issues as follows:

**Service Standards -
Grounds Maintenance**

There was a need for formal consultation with Carlisle Works to develop working relationships.

Formal consultation had been allowed for by way of joint meetings with the staff at Carlisle Works (point 12 of the Improvement Plan refers).

Cost comparisons for the Grounds Maintenance aspect of the service should be undertaken with other Local Authorities;

In order to satisfy the competition element of the Review, consideration needed to be given to market testing the Grounds Maintenance aspect of the Bereavement Service.

Information as regards cost comparisons had been provided at Appendix 14. Market testing would require to work within the confines of the organisational review.

Specific targets existed within the Improvement Plan for the reduction of dog fouling in the Cemetery.

There was no easy way in which to monitor improvement in that area, other than through public satisfaction (i.e. if fewer complaints were received).

Financial -

Capital Fund (Section 5.3 refers)

Members had asked that the Director of Leisure and Community Development include further detailed information on the future use of the Capital Fund.

An appendix regarding the above had been prepared but had been omitted from the report.

Members also considered that there should be information included on the support and grants available for people on lower incomes in relation to arranging funerals.

Such information needed to be added to item 17 of the Improvement Plan and the Director was happy to do that.

Asset Management –

Grave Rights

Members considered that investigations could be made into a lesser reduction in the term of grave rights and the possibility of differential pricing for various items.

Members' attention was drawn to Section 8.4.2 of the report, in particular, the recommendation that an option of purchasing a grave for a shorter period whilst retaining the 50 year period for those who preferred it. That issue had been addressed at point 8 of the Improvement Plan.

A Member further requested that a sliding scale be introduced and the Director indicated that he would take that on board.

Potential Income Streams (Section 8.4.4 refers)

With regard to potential income streams, the Director of Leisure and Community Development was asked to investigate whether other Local Authorities operated any schemes which may be suitable for operation in Carlisle.

The Director was not aware of any such schemes, but suggested that the Head of Property Services be requested to test the market.

Operational (Section 8.5.1 refers)

The Best Value Officer indicated that the Carlisle Works Ground Maintenance Team and the Bereavement Services Team operated separately, which meant that there was no joined up service for users. Investigations should be made into formal negotiations with Carlisle Works to improve the service.

Formal consultation had been allowed for by way of joint meetings with the staff at Carlisle Works (point 12 of the Improvement Plan refers).

Whilst Members did not believe that the City Council wished to outsource the Bereavement Services, it was agreed that, for the sake of completeness in the Best

Value Review, comparison information should be sought. (Section 8.5.2 refers)

Comparative information had been provided at Appendix 16.

Funeral Service Provision –

Quality Assurance Scheme (Section 8.6.1 refers)

Members considered that it was worth exploring the development of a Quality Assurance Scheme to develop a local charter mark on quality criteria for the provision of funeral services.

Members' attention was drawn to the Extract from a report by The Office of Fair Trading and template which had been circulated by the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer.

There was a need to further investigate that issue.

Ethnic Group Pricing (Section 8.6.3 refers)

The Best Value Officer indicated that there was also an issue in the provision of funerals for people with certain religious beliefs where there was a requirement for a burial to take place within 24 hours. If this meant that a weekend service was required then the costs charged by the City Council were greater than for a weekday service. The Director of Leisure and Community Development undertook to investigate how other Local Authorities approached this issue.

Comparative information had been provided at Appendix 17. The Director considered that the present policy was not discriminatory.

Advice

It was agreed that detailed information on arranging funeral services should be distributed to Advice Agencies and Solicitors' offices.

That issue required to be added to the Improvement Plan.

The Director then undertook to amend the report as necessary.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the amendments outlined above being undertaken, this Committee was satisfied with the Bereavement Services Best Value Review Final Report and would forward the same to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.