

WRITTEN ANSWERS FOR COUNCIL

21ST OCTOBER, 2015

Agenda Item 18 – Members’ Questions to Advisory Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen

(8) Supplementary Question from Councillor Cowles - Referred to the share price of Dignity which had doubled and bonuses had been paid out. He had also looked at why the company were doing so well and when comparing simple funeral costs Sheffield was 27% cheaper, Barnsley was 19% cheaper and 16% cheaper in Rotherham if Dignity were not used. If other services were added on the gap increased significantly. Some of the other processes employed were not particularly as comforting as one might have wished and asked was the Advisory Cabinet Member aware of their other business practises being used.

Answer – The contract between the Council and Dignity Funeral Services Ltd requires Dignity to deliver all bereavement services that were previously provided by the Council. The Council has, however, retained ownership of all assets that are now maintained and managed by Dignity.

The contract has seen Dignity invest over £3 million in bereavement services in Rotherham. The service and facilities available to Rotherham residents are far better than they have been at any point in the past. It is extremely unlikely that these improvements would have been made without the investment by Dignity.

In addition to delivering bereavement services in Rotherham, Dignity Funerals Limited are also involved in the delivery of several other projects and services throughout the United Kingdom. Dignity’s activities in Rotherham, therefore, represent only one element of the company’s national operations. The company has an annual turnover of in excess of £230m – the operations in Rotherham contribute only a relatively small part of this. For the purposes of clarification, the company responsible for the delivery of services in Rotherham is Dignity Funerals Ltd. This company is not a PLC and, therefore, any shares in the company have no financial value.

Whilst it is true that the fees that are charged to customers have increased since the contract commenced, the fees compare favourably with those of close neighbours. It is, however, difficult to draw direct comparisons between services as the exact nature of the services provided varies from Council to Council.

The table below provides information on the fees charged by other Councils and allows a rough comparison to be made with the fees charged in Rotherham (these figures do not include any fees/charges added by funeral directors in relation to the services they provide).

	Charge for adult cremation	Charge for child cremation (less than 16 years)	Charge for Adult Burial ¹	Charge for child burial (in a child plot)
Rotherham	824	0 ²	1981	0
Barnsley	693	231	1582	243
Sheffield	650	96	2440	1855
Doncaster	725	415	2088	725

Notes:

- ¹ There are differences in relation to the length of time that the exclusive right of burial is purchased for. In Rotherham the right is for 100 years, in Barnsley it is 99 years, Sheffield is 90 years and Doncaster 75 years.
- ² There is no charge for the cremation of a child (less than 16 years). However, a nominal charge may be made for a container for the ashes.

It is not clear what Councillor Cowles is referring to when he suggests that costs are 19% cheaper in Rotherham if Dignity are not used. However, for the avoidance of doubt, it is not possible to arrange a burial into a Council cemetery or have a cremation at East Herringthorpe Crematorium unless Dignity are used to provide the service.

The Advisory Cabinet Member is unaware of any inappropriate business practices being undertaken by Dignity Funerals Limited. The Advisory Cabinet Member would like to request that Councillor Cowles pass on any information regarding questionable business practices so that she may ensure that the matter is investigated.

(11) Supplementary Question from Councillor Reynolds - A previous article in the Rotherham Advertiser referred to the Traffic Regulation Order being illegal and asked if this was going to be re-looked at as part of the decision making process.

Answer - Following the implementation of the one-way system in Bramley village centre a clerical error was found in the traffic regulation order that had been made for the scheme. The error related to the description of the direction of the one way system with the traffic regulation order describing that the one-way system should operate in a north-west bound direction, when the one-way system was always required to operate in a south-east bound direction. Consequently a traffic regulation order was made in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to correct the description of the direction of the one-way system. The traffic regulation order currently in place therefore corresponds with the scheme operating in Bramley village centre.

The decision to correct the error in the one-way order was made by the Former Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development Services at their meeting on

Monday, 30th March, 2009 9.00 a.m. The decision of the Cabinet Member is recorded in the minute of the meeting here:-

<http://modgovapp/documents/g6741/Printed%20minutes%2030th-Mar-2009%2009.00%20The%20Former%20Cabinet%20Member%20for%20Regeneration%20and%20Development%20Ser.pdf?T=1>

The decision was that the Cabinet Member resolved:-

That Option One, to retain the one way system on Main Street, and the cycle lane, together with the amendments as outlined in Paragraph 7.6.2 of the submitted report, and as shown in principle at Drawing No. 126/17/TT30 (Appendix G to the submitted report), be endorsed and the error in the current Traffic Regulation Order be corrected.

The attendance of members at the meeting is shown on the attendance list here <http://modgovapp/mgMeetingAttendance.aspx?ID=6852>

In addition Councillor Thirlwall and Ms. S. Ellis were present for consideration of the item on the Bramley Traffic Management Scheme.

The above decision was the subject of the call-in process and was considered by the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee on 28th April 2009, the call-in was not upheld. Subsequently the Traffic Regulation Order was amended following the process outlined above.