

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Thursday, 14th February, 2019

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); The Mayor (Councillor Buckley); Councillors Atkin, Birch, Buckley, Elliot, Fenwick-Green, Jepson, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Reeder, Mrs. L. Shears, Sheppard, Vjestica, Walsh, Whysall and Wyatt, Mrs. W. Birch and Mrs. L. Shears (Co-opted Members)

Councillor Hoddinott, Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, was in attendance for Minute No. 42 (Update report on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd. and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Cutts, Sansome and Julie Turner.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

39. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the press or public present at the meeting.

40. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications to report.

41. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20TH DECEMBER, 2018

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th December, 2018.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on Thursday, 20th December, 2018, be approved as a correct record.

42. UPDATE REPORT ON THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN DIGNITY FUNERALS LTD. AND ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Hoddinott, Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, presented an update on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd. and the Council as requested by the Select Commission at its meeting on 26th July, 2018 (Minute No. 11 refers). Louise Sennitt (Superintendent Registrar), Polly Hamilton (Assistant Director, Culture,

Sport and Tourism) and Nicola Cook (Dignity) were also in attendance to answer any questions by Members.

Management of the contract within the Council had changed significantly and had now moved from Licensing to being under the remit of Registrars where it now linked to other Registrar services and the Coroner's Office.

The report included information under the recommendations made at the July Select Commission as follows:-

Performance Management Framework

- There was a total of 54 Key Performance Indicators which had been RAG rated. 2 were red, 4 were amber and 48 were green
- There were 12 Service improvement targets of which 2 were red, one was amber and 9 were green
- A table of Key Performance Indicators and performance targets that had been met were set out in Appendix 1 of the report submitted

Project Liaison Group

- First meeting took place in November 2018 and planned quarterly throughout 2019
- Future meetings would consider additional burial space at Masbrough Cemetery, review of the Memorial Masons' Registration Scheme and a refreshed Equality Analysis

Multi-Faith Involvement

- The Superintended Registrar had joined the Rotherham Faith and Community Leaders Forum and had attended 2 meetings where Bereavement Services were discussed
- Progress reports and new issues identified for discussions would be future agenda items

Annual Performance Report

- Draft report received with the final documents to be submitted to the June Select Commission
- Detailed on the Performance Management Framework would be reported by exception

East Herringthorpe Chapel

- Extensive renovation works completed with the Chapel having been open for services since October 2018
- Open events held for Members, funeral directors, ministers, celebrants and other key partners to view the improved facility
- Christmas memorial service held on 1st December 2018 for those who had attended services in the temporary chapel during renovation works
- An Easter memorial service to be held on 28th April 2019 when the Chapel will be officially re-opened by the Mayor of Rotherham

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Catholic burials – it had been established that there was no shortage of spaces within the Borough
- Child burials – in Rotherham certain aspects of the burials were free and certain funeral directors (Dignity and Co-op) provided free funerals but the desire was to make sure it was fair and equitable for everyone involved. Theresa May had made a commitment quite a while ago around free child burials, however, the information had not come through and the promise not acted upon. Some clarity was required and the promise enacted would give a real clear steer
- Secure storage of the registers – different options had been considered but proved to be very expensive. An option currently being explored with Dignity's IT Department was that of scanning all the registers, provision of a computer system in the reception and the registers removed and stored securely off site. There was no longer a statutory requirement to update the paper copies providing there was an electronic record
- Planned periodic meetings with funeral directors – Dignity had invited all the funeral directors to a meeting on 25th March but as of yet had received no responses. Some did not feel there was a need to meet as they worked quite well with Dignity and preferred the 1:1 approach rather than a forum. A decision would be made at the end of February (the deadline for responses)
- Lighting on East Herringthorpe driveway – Dignity had not been aware of this issue but would look into it
- Blocked drains – there was always an issue with blocked drains and there had been many CCTV investigations carried out with another scheduled to take place quite soon
- Extended hours pilot - the pilot would allow an assessment to be of how successful it was before any contract amendment
- Memorial Masons Registration Scheme – any stonemason who erected a memorial in a cemetery needed to have the appropriate insurances and also be connected with the appropriate affiliation (NAM or BRAM). Currently this came under the purview of the contractors but would form part of the review as to whether it came back into the management of the Crematorium Office. Every year the stonemasons had to apply for a permit and had to have all their certificates/verifications/insurance to provide assurance that they were safe and should anything happen when fixing a gravestone they had the correct liabilities to protect

themselves, the public and any damage to headstones. A new stonemason in Rotherham wished to carry out works inside the cemetery which had never happened before in Rotherham and was less costly for families. Rotherham's Registration Scheme was very outdated and did not allow for this new practice. It had been agreed that the Scheme would be discussed at the Project Liaison Group with a view to it being updated and come into practice for when stonemasons registered next year

- Project Liaison Group minutes – it was not it would be a problem for these to be submitted to the Select Commission in future
- Timescale for the repair of pathways in Wath Cemetery – there was a priority list of all the pathways which would take a number of years to complete
- Short notice burials – it was a very mixed picture with regard to what other authorities provided. The provision of extended burial hours would put Rotherham in the top section of local authority provision
- Coroner's Office – regular meetings took place to discuss a range of issues including the bringing in of the Coroner's Office into Registrars. The Coroner would attend the wider community meeting to be held in March. There had been a review of the Terms and Conditions nationally of Coroner pay and out of hours' provision. At the present time there were no changes as far as Rotherham residents were concerned. The contract was managed jointly with Doncaster and there would be discussions in the next financial year about the out of hours provision. The extended hours pilot would not be impacted by the changes in Terms and Conditions. Rotherham's Coroner was really keen to work with the Council and ensure that the service was as seamless as possible for Rotherham residents at a very difficult time in their lives with no additional layers of bureaucracy
- Environmental friendly burial options – this was currently not a priority. Dignity had not received any requests so far for woodland burials or environmentally friendly burial areas
- Comments, complaints and compliments – it was very difficult for the Crematorium/Cemetery to survey families as they were not the ones having 1:1 contact with the families. It was important to be very mindful and extremely sensitive in how the issue of a survey was approached. Work had taken place last year with an independent company who had carried out an industry service surrounding everything people would want from a bereavement service. Once the format of the survey was complete it would be shared for the purposes of feedback

All complaints, comments and requests for service were reviewed as part of the new performance management measures on a monthly basis. They were monitored, recorded and reported back to the Cabinet Member

- Maintenance logs of toilet facilities – there was an expectation that chapel attendants would inspect the facilities between services and check the maintenance and cleanliness. There had been no complaints received regarding the toilet facilities in any of the cemeteries or Dignity related sites
- Cost of a plaque on a communal bench – feedback had been received that the cost was too high. Work was still taking place on the memorials the Council provided with discussions ongoing with regard to making it affordable for families
- Possible traffic issues impacting on the extended hours pilot – consideration had not been given as to the traffic on the surrounding road network which may impact upon the pilot. It would be monitored as part of the pilot and include discussions with Highways colleagues
- Communication with Vicars and parishes in the outlying areas of the Borough - the extension in burial times would be communicated through the Community Group as well as the meeting with community leaders, faith leaders, key stakeholders and partners. It would also be communicated to funeral directors who played a big part in helping families
- Bereavement Services – there were some areas that were not covered by Dignity and still had the traditional churchyards for burials and disposal of cremated remains for which the church authorities could only charge a low burial fee. The Authority had used to give a small grant to churches whom had no other sources of income but unfortunately it had been a reluctant budget cut some years ago. It was hoped that one day there may be an ability to revisit and provide some financial assistance for the services that were carried out on behalf of communities that did not have local authority cemeteries
- Role of funeral directors – it was hoped, through the Project Liaison Group, to discuss with funeral directors their expectations, timings and families' expectations. With everyone's co-operation further improvements could be made
- Disabled parking – there had been an issue during the chapel renovation works due to the strict one-way system in operation. It had not been an issue since the chapel re-opening and anyone parking in in the disabled bays outside the chapel would be asked

to move their vehicles by the chapel attendants

Resolved:- (1) That the report and the progress made in accordance with the Performance Management Framework be noted.

(2) That the 2018/19 annual performance report be submitted to the June meeting of the Select Commission.

(3) That the results of the pilot into extended hours be submitted to the Select Commission once known.

(4) That the extended burial time pilot include the issues raised at the meeting i.e. the possible impact of the traffic on the surrounding road network and the communication to churches in outlying areas of the Borough.

(5) That minutes from the Project Liaison Group be submitted to the Select Commission for information.

(6) That consideration be given to the submission of any complaints received in an anonymised format.

43. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING - THURSDAY, 7TH MARCH, 2019, COMMENCING AT 1.30 P.M.

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Thursday, 7th March, 2019, commencing at 1.30 p.m.