

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 12 December 2023

Report Title

Annual Bereavement Services Report

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides an update on the Council's Bereavement Services management of the contract between Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and Dignity Funerals Limited.

Recommendations

1. That members note the content of this report.
2. That members also review the annual report from Dignity Funerals Limited alongside this report and note the content thereof.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Equalities Screening Assessment
Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Report to Improving Places Select Commission "Annual Bereavement Service Report" dated 13th December 2023.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Annual Bereavement Services Report

1. Background

1.1 This report provides updates on the progress made in relation to:

- Management of the Dignity contract
- Capital Projects
- Disused cemetery chapels
- Council retained cemetery boundaries
- Digital autopsy contract with iGene Ltd
- Death management

1.2 On 1st August 2008, the Council entered into a 35-year contractual agreement with Dignity Funerals Ltd (Dignity) for the provision of bereavement services for Rotherham. This partnership saw Dignity take on the responsibility for capital works and maintenance of the East Herringthorpe cemetery and crematorium along with the maintenance of the eight other municipal cemeteries located throughout the Borough. The Council retained cemetery chapels, associated buildings, and boundary walls on some cemetery sites.

1.3 Dignity is required to provide annual assurance to the Council that Key Performance Targets (KPTs) are being met and Service Improvements (SIs) are being made, this is documented each year by the production of an Annual Performance Report (APR).

1.4 On 16th September 2021, following a successful six-month pilot, the Council implemented a contract for Digital Autopsies provided by iGene Limited, in conjunction with Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council and Coronial Services. The aim of the Digital Autopsy process is to improve efficiencies in the autopsy process and to improve the service which bereaved families receive.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Updates on the Improving Places Select Commission recommendations from the meeting dated 13th December 2022

2.1.1 **Recommendation 1;** the report was noted.

2.1.2 **Recommendation 2;** feedback from Members was noted.

2.1.3 **Recommendation 3;** That an all-member session be convened to facilitate a further dialogue around improvements to Service delivery in the five-year plan. **This took place on 23rd March 2023.**

2.1.4 **Recommendation 4;** That Bereavement Services and Dignity work together to better demonstrate how equalities duties are adhered to in contract management and operational delivery. Dignity submitted their Equalities Impact Assessment in February 2023; Bereavement Services

manage the contract in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity policies.

2.2 Management of the Dignity Contract

- 2.2.1 By utilising the mechanisms in place within the contract for performance management, Bereavement Services continue to levy a number of financial penalty charges to Dignity Funerals Ltd where performance failures have not been resolved within the rectification period as defined in the contract for the severity level of the failure.
- 2.2.2 These are gradually decreasing as Dignity make improvements to their performance and the overall standard of the cemeteries.

2.3 Capital Projects – Bereavement Services

- 2.3.1 In March 2023, Cabinet granted approval for Capital Works to several Council retained assets in the cemeteries. Further approval is required for additional capital allocation due to changes in costs of materials and labour since the estimations were made. This section outlines current progress on capital works and estimated dates of completion.
- 2.3.2 *East Herringthorpe Cemetery* – An independent report on the existing facilities and cemetery standards is being sought by Bereavement Services for those of the Islamic faith requiring a burial and its findings will be reported to committee members where appropriate. The review did not take place in June 2023 as had been arranged, further work is underway to re-arrange the review in 2024.
- 2.3.3 *Maltby Cemetery* – The historical Lychgate at the cemetery entrance was restored by specialist contractors in July 2023 with restoration works being high quality and much appreciated by residents. The installation of a perimeter fence will be completed by 31st March 2024.
- 2.3.6 *All Cemeteries* – Granite benches will be installed in cemeteries across the borough. These benches will give the public a place to sit and reflect on their loved one's life and provide a place to rest for the elderly or infirm as they pass through the cemeteries.
- 2.3.7 *Greasbrough Lane Cemetery* – A perimeter fence will be installed along the top boundary of the cemetery to enhance the security of the cemetery by 31st March 2024.
- 2.3.8 *High Street Cemetery* – Significant works to improve the cemetery site commenced in October 2023 will see repairs to two of the stone walls, installation of a fence for safety along the bottom retaining wall and access improved to the cemetery at the point where an 'A' frame gate is currently situated. These works are to be completed by 31st March 2024.

- 2.3.9 Dignity continues to make investments in the cemeteries themselves and will report on this in more detail in a separate report to members.
- 2.3.10 Dignity have produced a Five-Year Plan detailing improvement and development works across the cemeteries for cemetery and crematorium assets in scope of the contract. Dignity will be accountable for the delivery of these service improvements and will update and refresh the plan on a rolling, annual basis. Performance is regularly monitored in the monthly performance meetings chaired by Bereavement Services and reported formally on a quarterly basis to the Internal Officer's Group and Project Liaison Meeting.

2.4 Disused Cemetery Chapels

- 2.4.1 When the contract was entered into with Dignity in 2008, the Council retained full responsibility for the municipal cemetery chapels located at Moorgate, Masbrough, Haugh Road Rawmarsh and Greasbrough Town Lane cemeteries.
- 2.4.2 All the chapels are in a poor state of repair and require varying levels of work to bring them into a secure, wind and watertight state, with considerable investment required to return them to any useable condition. A working group has been established with asset management which aims to put together a rolling program of chapel repairs, funding and bringing back into use.

The detail below provides specific information relating to each of the chapels:

- 2.4.3 *Moorgate*
Moorgate chapel remains in a state of disrepair. In October 2023, slate guards were fitted to ensure that slates falling from the roof did not fall to the ground below causing damage or injury. The chapel is in the process of application to become a listed building.
- 2.4.4 *Masbrough*
Masbrough chapels had slate guards fitted in October 2023, to ensure any falling slates did not fall to the ground below causing damage or injury.
- 2.4.5 *Haugh Road*
Haugh Road cemetery chapel has also had slate guards fitted. Self-set trees remain an issue for this chapel due to the proximity of trees to the chapel making the risk for self-set trees on the building higher than other areas. A decorative part on a gable end has come loose due to the roots of a self-set growth and works to re-stabilise this have been arranged.
- 2.4.6 *Town Lane*
These chapels remain in a better condition than the other chapels and would require considerably less investment to return them to a useable state.

2.5 Cemetery Boundaries

2.5.1 East Herringthorpe, Wath and Town Lane boundaries are all maintained by Dignity Funerals Ltd on behalf of the Council. The Council retained some aspects of boundaries in other cemeteries at the commencement of the contract and updates with regards to these at each cemetery are below.

2.5.2 *Moorgate Cemetery*

Obelisk and stone walls have been cleared of Ivy Growth. Probation services have been undertaking community payback work at the cemetery and have assisted greatly with reducing overgrowth at the cemetery.

2.5.3 *Masbrough Cemetery*

Dignity have removed considerable amounts of invasive ivy from the stone walls on site. This has revealed some repair works that the Council will need to carry out in 2024.

A section of wall under Dignity's responsibility has collapsed and will require rebuilding.

2.5.4 *Maltby Cemetery*

Perimeter fence and lychgate covered at 2.3.4.

2.5.5 *High Street Cemetery*

Boundary wall repair work covered at 2.3.7.

2.5.6 Work to repair the wall between the church and the cemetery is underway in line with works detailed at 2.3.7. The railings along the front boundary of the cemetery have been sanded, repaired where necessary and repainted.

2.5.7 *Haugh Road Cemetery*

Flaking paint has been removed on railings and re-painted. Missing railings have been re-instated to prevent unauthorised access out of hours.

2.5.8 *Greasbrough Lane Cemetery*

Covered at 2.3.6 in respect of the boundary line fence installation. Flaking paint to be removed on main iron gates and re-painted as part of the capital works.

2.6 Digital Autopsy Contract

2.6.2 A Digital Autopsy (DA) pilot began on 14th March 2021 for a period of 6 months. The contract was awarded to iGene London to provide a Digital Autopsy service to conduct digital post-mortem examinations. This pilot was deemed successful and so RMBC joined the existing contract between iGene and Doncaster MBC.

- 2.6.3 Digital Autopsy means the conducting of a post-mortem in a computerised environment using digital tools. Because the cause of death can be established quickly, usually within 48 hours, the deceased's body can be released to families more quickly than the traditional invasive method. It is also less distressing for the grieving family than the traditional method.
- 2.6.4 To date, the Digital Autopsy service has been positively received by professionals and it is delivering faster decision-making on Coronial cases and significantly reducing the number of invasive post-mortems required. It is important to note that some deaths must be investigated by an invasive autopsy due to the circumstances surrounding the death so there will never be a 100% success rate in Digital Autopsy utilisation.
- 2.6.5 The management of the Digital Autopsy is overseen by the Superintendent Registrar & Bereavement Service Manager of RMBC in partnership with Doncaster MBC representatives including the Senior Coroner for Doncaster and Rotherham jurisdiction.

The most recent performance statistics for the Digital Autopsy Service for Rotherham are;

- 81% of all deaths requiring autopsy were done digitally, without the need for an invasive being undertaken. A further 15% were resolved by combination of the digital scan and toxicology results.
- Pathologists are required to report the findings of an autopsy within 24 hours to the Coronial Service. The key performance target (KPT) for this is a target of 80%. The current achievement against this KPT is 96%.
- The service provider (iGene) is required to undertake the digital autopsy on a weekday as soon as possible but in any case, within 48 hours of notification from the Coronial Service to the service provider. The current achievement against this KPT is 100%.

2.7 Death Management

- 2.7.1 Bereavement Services oversee the management of death management in peak periods following the disbanding of the wider COVID emergency response workstream formed to manage excess deaths in the Borough 2020-2021.
- 2.7.2 On a monthly basis Bereavement Services collate mortuary capacity usage figures from the public mortuary at Rotherham Hospital, funeral director mortuary capacity usage and the numbers of burials and cremations available including total used at Rotherham Crematorium and municipal cemeteries.
- 2.7.3 The death management working group is made up of representatives from the following services; RMBC Registration & Bereavement Services, Dignity, Public Health, Hospital Mortuary, Integrated Care Board, Hospice, Medical Examiner and Senior Coroner.

2.8 Religious Awareness Training

2.8.1 Bereavement Services have worked in conjunction with community engagement to commission staff training sessions on faith-based practices and requirements around bereavement. Two successful staff facing events have taken place at Ridge Road Mosque and were attended by Council staff, coronial staff, other faith leaders, and Dignity and Glendale staff. Further sessions will take place periodically.

2.8.2 In addition to training for staff and professional stakeholders, training and guidance will be provided for the public to create a better awareness of different legal requirements and processes that need to be followed following the death of a loved one. This will help inform the public about Registration, Medical Examiner and Coronial practices and create a better understanding of why and how these duties are required to be undertaken. This will be undertaken in 2024 once further information about the statutory Medical Examiner service has been released by central government.

3. **Options considered and recommended proposal**

3.1 This is an update report. Members are asked to note progress made and comment on any issues arising.

4. **Consultation on proposal**

4.1 This is an update report. There is no proposal for consultation.

5. **Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

5.1 This report is for information only; no decision is requested.

6. **Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

6.1 This report introduces no additional financial or procurement implications other than those highlighted at 2.2.

7. **Legal Advice and Implications**

7.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

8. **Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

9. **Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 This report has no specific implications in relation to Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The Equality Screening Analysis is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 10.2 There are no Equalities or Human Rights Implications identified.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) has been completed setting out the potential impacts on emissions and how these can be addressed, refer to appendix 2 of this report.
- 11.2 The gaps identified within the CIA will be progressed via the Project Liaison Group.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 This report introduces no additional implications for partners or other Directorates.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Risks relating to the Dignity Funerals Contractual Agreement are monitored via a performance management framework and Annual Performance Report.
- 13.2 Financial risks relating to the Dignity Funerals Contractual Agreement are monitored via the Council's annual review of the finance model.

Accountable Officer(s)

Bal Nahal, Head of Legal, Registrars and Bereavement Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phillip Horsfield	04/12/23
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.

The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services	Click here to enter a date.
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance - Councillor Alam	Click here to enter a date.

Report Author: Ashleigh Wilford, Superintendent Registrar & Bereavement Services Contract Manager

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