

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 08 September 2020

Report Title

Update report on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

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

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report has been requested to provide an update on the report presented to the Improving Places Select Commission on 19th December 2019 and to present the Annual Performance Report for the Dignity contract for the provision of Bereavement Services for Rotherham.

Recommendations

1. That Members note the content of this report.
2. That Members note the content of the Annual Performance Report.
3. That Members note the content of “Permanent Extension of Latest Burial Time at East Herringthorpe Cemetery” Officer Decision.
<https://modern.gov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s125442/Permanent%20extension%20of%20latest%20burial%20time%20at%20East%20Herringthorpe%20Cemetery.pdf>

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Dignity Annual Performance Report

Background Papers

1. Report to Improving Places Select Commission dated 19th December 2019.
2. Permanent Extension of Latest Burial Time at East Herringthorpe Cemetery Officer Decision Paper.

<https://modern.gov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s125442/Permanent%20extension%20of%20latest%20burial%20time%20at%20East%20Herringthorpe%20Cemetery.pdf>

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Not Applicable

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Update report on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

1. Background

- 1.1 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 enabled the transfer of significant risks from the Council to Dignity and 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 the risk in relation to cemetery chapels, associated buildings and boundary walls on some cemetery sites.
- 1.2 Since March 2018 the Regeneration and Environment Directorate has been working to improve performance monitoring of the Agreement. The performance management framework was refreshed, and regular monitoring and reporting arrangements have been put in place.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the progress made against the recommendations from Members, set out in the Improving Places Select Commission meeting on 19th December 2019.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 At the meeting 19th December 2019, the Improving Places Select Commission set a range of actions:
 - 2.1.1 That the decision regarding the future of the pilot and implications of the decision be reported back to Improving Places.
 - 2.1.2 That arrangements be made for a Member visit to East Herringthorpe Cemetery.
- 2.2 An update of actions taken in relation to each of the recommendations made by the Improving Places Select Commission in the meeting that took place on 19th December 2019 is provided below.
 - 2.2.1 On 16th March 2020, the recommendation to make the conditions of the out of hours burial pilot became permanent. With a commencement date of 1st April 2020, the latest time of burial, at East Herringthorpe cemetery, being 18:30 hours on a permanent basis, between 1st April and 30th September.

Implications were considered in respect of Finance, Legal, Human Resources, Children & Young People and Vulnerable Adults, Equalities and Human Rights, Ward Priorities and Partners.
 - 2.2.2 A meeting was originally arranged for Cllr Khan and Katherine Harclerode, Democratic Services, to visit East Herringthorpe Cemetery

on 23rd March 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures this visit was put on hold. An open invitation has been made to arrange another visit and Katherine Harclerode is now finalising dates with Bereavement Services.

Performance Management Framework

- 2.3 There are a total of 54 Key Performance Targets. Of these, 46 Key Performance Targets have been met (green) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020. A key achievement to note in met Performance Targets includes:

KPT 9.3 Provision of short notice burial facility 7 days per week in accordance with Council's Policies, general rules and regulations relating to the Management of its Cemeteries and Crematorium.

A short notice burial service is available 7 days a week, excluding Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Following a successful pilot, at East Herringthorpe cemetery to extend the latest burial time, this has now become permanent.

- 2.4 There are 2 Key Performance Targets not met (red) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020. These are:

KPT 9.1 Provision of environmentally friendly burial options.

Two potential sites for environmentally friendly burials have now been identified. One potential site has been identified at Barley Hall in Thorpe Hesley which is council owned land. The second under consideration is land within the planned expansion at East Herringthorpe Cemetery, which is included in the contract. Dignity had planned to complete a consultation exercise to gauge demand by June 2020, but this was put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Dignity are still working through the scope of this consultation and discussion with the Council will begin on the 8th of September to move forward. Following consultation, a briefing paper will be produced with a recommended option.

KPT 10.2 Secure storage for registers and records.

Secure storage was to be delivered and installed on site at the East Herringthorpe offices in March/April 2020 but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Contractors have now been scheduled in for delivery and installation of the fireproof units, week commencing the 17th August 2020. There will be a short transition period to set up storage correctly. Some older records are in a poor state and professional repairs have been completed where necessary. A programme of scanning and transcribing documents will commence when safe to do so and is expected to take approximately 2 years.

- 2.5 There are 6 Key Performances Targets in progress (amber) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020. These are:

KPT 3.1 All signs in the Facilities (including temporary signs) shall be clearly legible and illuminated (where relevant) and maintained in good order. All temporary signs shall be provided or removed promptly where appropriate,

such as maintenance operations, in accordance with the Council's requirements.

New signage commissioned for East Herringthorpe in November 2019. All work completed and signed off 28th February 2020. A 5-year rolling programme for all signage in other cemeteries has been implemented, with quotes for new entrance signs at all the other cemeteries currently being obtained. The Cemeteries Supervisor keeps an audit log of all cemetery signs including any graffiti damage. There are currently no signs requiring urgent attention.

KPT 3.2 All external light fittings to be working at all times.

A capital request of £12,300 was approved as part of the Council's capital programme to cover the costs of reinstating lighting on the driveway to the crematorium which is predominantly used by Funeral cars. New solar lighting was installed alongside the existing cast iron fixtures on 27th June 2020. This will be RAG rated Green in next year's performance report.

KPT 8.3 Provide annual statement on customer satisfaction levels including plan for improvements.

Dignity completed a customer satisfaction survey carried out between May 2019 and March 2020 which saw a very low response rate. Only 4 responses received from the memorial client survey which is insufficient to conduct an analysis and 14 responses received from the crematorium survey. This data has been submitted to Bereavement Services. Trajectory (the company used) advised at least 100 responses would be required to make it statistically meaningful. Customer surveys have currently been put on hold due to Covid-19 pandemic. Dignity will inform the Council when they plan on recommencing these surveys, however during this suspension period Dignity will be reviewing the methods of survey used. The next Performance meeting will include a proposal and timeline for the next consultation process.

KPT 10.3 Restoration of and redrafting of cemetery plans in line with agreed proposals

Existing paper plans are being assessed to ensure accuracy between existing burial records and redrawing. Digitisation of the plans will be part of the memorial testing programme (KPT 15.4) which will commence in mid-September 2020.

KPT 15.4 Provision of an effective plan for systematic testing of all cemetery memorials and progress in accordance with agreed timescales. Testing protocols and procedures to be in accordance with the Council's policy for the Management of Cemetery Memorials.

Work to begin "topple testing" to check the structural integrity of headstones was due to commence in April 2020 by a team based in London but was put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Work will re commence in mid-September 2020.

KPT 16.2 Evidence of consultation with, and support, to Friends groups within each cemetery site (where appropriate).

No communication has taken place since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. New, Council lead, focused engagement with the various groups is being planned to commence in September 2020.

Contact will be made with representatives from each group via email, introducing the new Bereavement Services staff. There will then follow organised site visits to each cemetery beginning in September 2020 with key members of each group, Bereavement Services and Dignity staff as required. This will give an opportunity to discuss issues arising and planned engagement moving forward. This work will feed into actions at the monthly Dignity performance meetings in support of service improvement planning.

Service Improvement Proposals

2.6 There are a total of 9 Service Improvement Proposals. Of these, 7 Service Improvement Proposals have been met (green) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020.

2.7 Key achievements to note in met Performance Targets include:

SI 7 It is proposed to ensure that periodic liaison meetings take place with funeral directors, starting in January 2018.

During the Covid Pandemic, regular communication was established with local Funeral Directors, including daily contact to gather body storage data and to discuss issues and developments made at the Managing the Deceased Workstream. Regular meetings took place with the whole group to involve them in the pandemic planning process and discuss issues and procedure in a more formalised manner. Good working relations have been established and will continue to improve as Bereavement Services develops.

2.8 There is 1 Key Service Improvement Proposal not met (red) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020. This is:

SI 5 Options identifying suitable land for burials will be produced during Spring 2018 and presented to members to consider for future action.

As part of the recovery plan from the Managing the Deceased Workstream a decision was made to review the availability of burial space at all our cemeteries.

A project group was established 23rd April 2020 consisting of Bereavement Services, Dignity, Asset Management and Legal Services to review previous work completed in 2008 and 2018 to identify existing land within contract or available new land to increase burial capacity across Rotherham.

As part of this, a new appraisal exercise will be conducted by Asset Management to look at suitable sites for a new cemetery in Maltby. This appraisal exercise will include planning, legal comments, ground investigation, site investigation and Ward Member consultation.

All sites under review will be included in a paper detailing proposed options for expansion at each of the cemetery sites.

- 2.9 There is 1 Key Service Improvement Proposal in progress (amber) between the 1st of April 2019 and the 31st of March 2020. This is:

SI 9 Turning Circle Masbrough Cemetery. Bringing the turning circle back into use.

A site meeting has taken place with Bereavement Services, Green Spaces and Dignity on the 5th August 2020. Initial clearing of the turning circle has been completed by Dignity and quotes are being obtained by Green Spaces to install new railings and gates around the area. Legal are to ascertain who is responsible for the costs. There is an ongoing issue with Japanese Knotweed at the site requiring potential specialist treatment, which may delay developments.

2.10 Dignity's Involvement in the Emergency Response to Covid-19

It is worth noting that Dignity were involved in the emergency response to Managing the Deceased throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This included:

- Attendance at workstream meetings
- Engagement with Funeral Directors
- Responding to changes in legislation and Government advice relating to new ways of working, the closure and reopening of cemeteries and burial grounds, changes to the delivery of funerals to accommodate increased demand.

Workstream partners are currently reflecting on the experience of the last few months and producing a plan for the year ahead which takes account of the learning to date. This will also inform the improvement journey for Bereavement Services and new actions will be incorporated into the current contract monitoring process.

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 (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

- 6.1 This report introduces no additional financial or procurement implications. The Council's Capital Programme has funded the new solar lighting at East Herringthorpe. The revenue cost implications arising from the officer decision

to permanently extend burial times at East Herringthorpe have been contained within the approved revenue budget for this Service.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

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 introduces no specific implications in relation to Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 Issues relating to Faith burials are being addressed via the Project Liaison Group.

10.2 The Equality Analysis process will be progressed via the Project Liaison Group.

11. Implications for Partners

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

12. Risks and Mitigation

12.1 Risks relating to the Agreement are monitored via the performance management framework.

12.2 Financial risks are monitored via the Council's annual review of the finance model.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Polly Hamilton Assistant Director, Culture Sport and Tourism.

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive		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)	Stuart Fletcher	10/08/20

Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	John Crutchley	11/08/20
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	Click here to enter a date.

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