

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 07 September 2021

Report Title

Update report on Bereavement Services including 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, Acting Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

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 including the contractual Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. It also includes the Dignity Funerals Annual Performance Report (APR) for 2020/21.

Recommendations

1. That Members note the content of this report.
2. That Members note the content of the Dignity Funerals Annual Performance Report for 2020/21.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Dignity Funerals Annual Performance Report 2020/21

Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Assessment Form

Appendix 3 Emissions Impact Assessment Form

Background Papers

Report to Improving Places Select Commission "Update report on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council" dated 8th September 2020.

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 Bereavement Services including the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

1. Background

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

- Actions set in relation to Dignity Funerals Ltd at the Improving Places Select Commission dated 8th September 2020
- The Annual Performance Plan for Dignity Funerals Ltd
- Council retained cemetery chapels
- The emergency pandemic response
- Digital Autopsies.

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 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council that Key Performance Targets are being met and Service Improvements are being made, this is documented each year by the production of an Annual Performance Report.

1.4 In March 2020, as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Response, a workstream was created to manage any increase in deaths due to the effects of the pandemic. This involved representatives from internal and external organisations who play a part in managing the deceased pathway. This partnership working ensured that any potential issues in the deceased pathway were recognised early and mitigations put into place.

1.5 On 15th March 2021, Rotherham commenced a six-month pilot for Digital Autopsies in conjunction with Coronial Services. The aim of the pilot 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 9th September 2020.

2.1.1 At the meeting, the Improving Places Select Commission set a range of actions in relation to the Dignity Agreement:

2.1.1.1 That progress in respect of digitisation of burial records be submitted in the next update.

2.1.1.2 That the next update be provided in 12 months, to include information on land use.

2.1.2 An update of actions taken is provided below:

2.1.2.1 The ongoing digitisation of burial records and redrafting of cemetery plans commenced in 2020. Progress is being made in line with Dignity's schedule, with an estimated completion date by 31st December 2022.

2.1.2.2 The update for information on land use required is included within this report at 2.2.2.3.

2.2 Update on the Annual Performance Report for Dignity Funerals

2.2.1 Key Performance Targets

2.2.1.1 Within the Annual Performance Report there are a total of 54 Key Performance Targets. Of these, 45 Key Performance Targets have been met (green) between the 1st of April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021. A key achievement to note, is that there are now no Key Performance Targets that have been classified as 'not met' (red) between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021.

2.2.1.2 There are **9** Key Performances Targets in progress (amber) between the 1st of April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021. These are:

KPT 4.2 All site road and footway surfaces to be maintained with a smooth, unencumbered surface.

The pathways and road surfaces at some sites have started to erode. Dignity have recently carried out condition surveys of all the 9 sites with contractual responsibility for maintenance falling to Glendale Services. Quotations to carry out the necessary repairs to ensure the pathway and road surfaces are of a good standard and are safe for cemetery users have been obtained.

Glendale Services will produce a 5-year maintenance plan incorporating repair plans and timelines for all necessary works. This plan will be made available by the end of December 2021.

Repair work to the central paths at Wath Cemetery has already been started.

Necessary temporary repairs have also been made at the worst affected sites prior to permanent works commencing.

Monthly site inspections are routinely carried out by Dignity and any emerging issues are immediately reported to Glendale Services.

KPT 4.3 All main access roads, paths and footways shall be kept clean in accordance with the Council's Requirements and weeds, clippings, and any similar material on roadways and pedestrian paths are to be removed.

Some sections of pathway have become overgrown at some sites, with grass and weeds encroaching, and moss becoming problematic in shady areas.

Recent site surveys have been carried out to assess the extent of the issue and additional equipment has been purchased by Glendale Services to assist in the spraying and removal of unwanted vegetation. Details of the improvement work planned will be incorporated into the 5-year maintenance plan which will be available by the end of December 2021.

Monthly site inspections are routinely carried out by Dignity and any emerging issues are immediately reported to Glendale Services.

KPT 4.4 Provide for the removal of water run-off and sewage from the site by ensuring that all drains, sewers, gullies, and on-site treatment is maintained free from obstructions and unpleasant or unreasonable odours.

Blocked drains have been reported across most of the sites via monthly site inspections. These are addressed and rectified by Glendale Services. Inspections of existing drainage has been incorporated into the recent site surveys carried out by Dignity and ongoing work will be included in the 5-year maintenance plan to be made available by the end of December 2021.

Rainwater goods and drains have become blocked around the crematorium chapel by tree roots. Quotations have been obtained by Dignity for the necessary work to clear them. Work is estimated to be completed by the end of December 2021.

Following reports that sections of the cemetery at Greasbrough Lane in Rawmarsh have been subject to water logging during winter months, due to periods of heavy rain, Council drainage engineers carried out an inspection of the site in February 2021. This included jetting out the current drainage system, uncovering a drain that had become buried

and which was causing flooding on the lower road, and making other suggestions to improve drainage. Since then, Dignity have installed new paths in the worst affected area to improve access, made improvements to the road drain and commissioned their own drainage survey. Drainage improvement work is planned to commence prior to winter 2021.

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

Customer surveys were put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this suspension period Dignity agreed to review the methods of survey used to increase customer engagement and response.

Following the review, the following improvements were made:

- Introduction of an online survey in addition to the original paper format.
- A four-week delay in issuing a survey rather than the previous two days after a service, out of consideration for the bereaved.

Customer surveys successfully re-commenced on 28th July, 2021.

An annual statement on customer satisfaction will be submitted as part of the APR 2021/2022 following this re-commencement of surveys.

Since the submission of the APR the status of this KPI has changed to Green.

KPT 9.1 The provision of environmentally friendly burial options.

An online survey was carried out early in 2021, consulting with members of the public and professionals to gain an understanding of the demand for such a service and what that service should include.

Although the return was relatively low the results were very positive (a summary of the results is included in the APR at Appendix 1).

The majority of responses showed a high interest in an environmentally friendly burial service being provided, with a preference for the option of being buried in both a meadow and woodland setting, burial in a simple shroud, in a plot for 1-2 people, and with a comprehensive burial package being offered by Dignity.

Based on the results of the survey and discussions with Dignity it has been identified that a pilot scheme would be the preferred option moving forward, to be incorporated at the cemetery on Greasbrough Lane.

Further work is underway to consider the detail of what will constitute an environmentally friendly burial site and how it will operate within an existing cemetery.

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

The redrafting of cemetery plans, and the digitised capture of registers were included as part of the memorial testing programme. This work was started in 2020 but was put on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions. The physical work was completed in April 2021 and now existing paper plans are being assessed to ensure accuracy between the updated burial records.

It is estimated that all works will be completed by the end December 2022.

KPT 10.4 Digitised capture of registers to be made available on the internet in line with agreed proposals.

The digitised capture of registers was included as part of the memorial testing programme. This work was started in 2020 but was put on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions. The physical work was completed in April 2021 and now ongoing work is taking place to update the digitised register.

It is estimated that all works will be completed by the end of December 2022.

KPT 11.2 Demonstrate compliance with the Council's Customer Care Standards through annual statements providing detail of outputs. Customer surveys successfully re-commenced on 28th July following improvements to the process. An annual statement on customer satisfaction will be submitted as part of the APR 2021/2022 following this re-commencement of surveys.

Complaints, requests for service and compliments to Dignity are logged and discussed at the monthly performance monitoring meetings. Problem areas are highlighted, and trends monitored for action.

Since the submission of the APR the status of this KPI has changed to green.

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

The Council have taken a lead, with support from Dignity and Glendale Services, on working with established friends' groups at Maltby, Wath and Moorgate and facilitating the formation of new ones at High Street, Haugh Road, Greasbrough Lane and Masbrough.

Regular meetings have been held with group members, local Councillors, and members of the public to establish what they require from their local cemeteries. Issues have been presented and suggested improvements have been discussed, and plans are being put in place to work towards these collaboratively.

Several very positive events have taken place, and more are planned to take place moving forward, with emphasis on the groups taking a lead supported by Bereavement Services.

Once these new groups are established and operating independently work will commence establishing groups at the remaining two sites of East Herringthorpe and Town Lane.

Since the submission of the APR the status of this KPI has changed to Green.

2.2.2 Service Improvement (SI) proposals

2.2.2.1 There are a total of 9 Service Improvement Proposals. Of these, 8 Service Improvement Proposals have been met (green) between the 1st of April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021.

2.2.2.2 Key achievements to note in met Performance Targets include:

SI 9 Bring the turning circle back into use at Masbrough Cemetery. The turning circle site has been cleared of excess vegetation, the tarmac cleared, and the circular kerb stones uncovered.

Cemetery Wardens now open and close the pedestrian and vehicle gates every morning and evening to allow access and for vehicles to turn around. The land in front of the gates has been re seeded and wooden bollards have been installed to protect graves on either side.

This has been a positive outcome for cemetery users.

2.2.2.3 There is 1 Key Service Improvement Proposal not met (amber) between the 1st of April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021. This is:

SI 5 *Overall expansion plan for cemeteries.*

A review of the availability of burial space at all cemeteries has been undertaken. (This data is contained in the APR at Appendix 1)

After reviewing this data, a paper to Asset Management Board in January 2021 outlining proposed future plans for each of the following cemeteries and identifying areas for expansion where required:

East Herringthorpe

East Herringthorpe currently has 4 years of operational use remaining on currently developed land. A suitable expansion area has been identified on site that will provide approximately a further 10 years of operational use.

Ground's suitability testing, environmental and ecological surveys have been completed and basic plans have been drawn up. Subject to planning application approval, work could be completed on site by Spring 2023.

It is worth noting that there is further undeveloped land on site that would give many more years of operational use when required.

Wath Upon Dearne

Wath has approximately 3 years of operational use remaining. Additional land has been identified within the contract adjacent to the existing site which would give approximately 20-25 years further use.

Ground's suitability testing, environmental and ecological surveys have been completed and basic plans have been drawn up. Subject to planning application approval, work could be completed on site by Spring 2023, not accounting for any potential delays.

Greasbrough Lane

Greasbrough Lane has approximately 3 years of operational use remaining, but undeveloped land on site would provide approximately a further 40-50 years of operational use.

Work has been completed to allow vehicle and pedestrian access from the main highway to the new area, gates have been installed and the start of paths have been put in place.

Town Lane

Town Lane is only available for the reopening of graves. Although a potential area for expansion adjacent to this site had been established within the contract, it was thought due to its proximity to residential dwellings and the need to remove mature trees, it would be better to explore options at alternative sites.

With undeveloped land being available at Greasbrough Lane close by, it was agreed no further action would be taken at this site.

Haugh Road

With a new burial area being opened around the cenotaph on site, giving approximately 10 more years operational use and Greasbrough Lane being close by with undeveloped land, it was agreed no further action would be taken at this site.

Maltby

Maltby has approximately 7 years of operational use remaining, but due to demand for this site, work is ongoing to identify appropriate land.

Masbrough

Masbrough has approximately 2 years of operational use remaining but has the potential to provide many more on undeveloped land on site. Due to the ground investigation works required and very little demand for burials on site, a decision was made to take no further action at this time.

Moorgate

Moorgate has only 1-2 years remaining of operational use, but due to low demand for burials, previous failed exercises to identify expansion land and it being only 3 miles from East Herringthorpe cemetery a decision was made to take no further action at this time.

High Street

Due to the age of Rawmarsh High Street Cemetery and there being no previous requests for burial, this cemetery has been left to return to nature with no requirement for expansion.

Dignity is in discussion with Glendale Services to improve maintenance and access at this site. Plans will be incorporated into the 5-year maintenance plan to be made available by December 2021.

2.3 Council Retained Bereavement Services

2.3.1 Disused Cemetery Chapels

- 2.3.1.1 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, Greasbrough Town Lane cemeteries.
- 2.3.1.2 All the chapels are in a poor state of repair and will 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.
- 2.3.1.3 A recent ecology survey has been undertaken on all of the chapels to check for the presence of nesting birds and bats with a further dusk

emergence survey recommended prior to any major repair works taking place.

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

Moorgate

Moorgate chapel has recently had many years of ivy and excess vegetation removed from its exterior, which had grown up the walls and on to the roof, obscuring the beautiful chapel from view. Clear Perspex coverings have been fixed over the windows to prevent any further damage from the elements and quotes have been obtained to get the necessary roof repairs completed this financial year.

Bereavement Services are working with the Friends of Moorgate Cemetery and interested members of the public to explore applying for additional funding to bring the chapel back into use as a community managed asset for the local area.

Masbrough

The Masbrough chapels have recently had some repair work carried out, involving the removal of years' worth of excess vegetation, fixing of damaged and missing roof tiles and a general tidy. Further repair work is planned this financial year.

A new 'friends of' group is currently being formed for Masbrough lead by Bereavement Services, with support from a local Councillor and interested members of the public. One of the key topics for discussion at the first planned meeting is the plans for the two chapels, along with potential opportunities for external funding to bring the buildings back into use.

Haugh Road

The Haugh Road chapels have recently had some repair work carried out, involving the removal of excess vegetation and self-set trees from the roofs, and the removal of pigeons and the replacing of damaged anti bird mesh from openings on the central tower. Further repair work is planned this financial year.

A new 'friends of' group is currently being formed for the three cemeteries in Rawmarsh, involving local Councillors, the Parkgate Historical Society, members of the Friends of Rawmarsh and Parkgate Greenspaces, Council Officers, and members of the public.

Discussions have already taken place around the restoration of the chapels and the idea of bringing them back into use as a community space. Once the group has become established external funding to support any planned use of the buildings will be explored.

Town Lane

These chapels are in a better condition than the other chapels and would require considerably less investment to return them to a useable state. They have recently had some repair work carried out to the gutters, with more work planned this financial year.

There are currently no active friends of group for this cemetery, but work will be undertaken by Bereavement Services to attempt to establish one as soon as possible with an emphasis on preservation of the two buildings.

2.3.2 Emergency Response to Covid-19

- 2.3.2.1 A workstream was set up at the start of the pandemic for Managing the Deceased and included representatives from Registration and Bereavement Services, National Association of Funeral Directors, Coronial Services, Dignity Funerals, Legal Services, Equalities, Emergency Planning, Public Health, Communications, Finance, Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group, and Public Mortuary Managers. This was led by the Culture Sport and Tourism service.
- 2.3.2.2 The workstream created as part of the emergency response to the pandemic and the predicted increase in deaths as a result. The workstream was highly effective, working in partnership to quickly identify and address potential issues within the deceased pathway, to identify mitigations required and take informed decisions on the actions required. Given this, the additional mortuary storage at Rotherham District Hospital did not need to be utilised due to the efficiencies through the pathway that were achieved and the implementation of many easements in the Coronavirus Act 2020 in effectively identifying and circumventing any potential delays. There were only a small minority of exceptions where delays were experienced.
- 2.3.2.3 This workstream held its most recent meeting on 19th May 2021 where it was agreed, in line with the South Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum, that it would go into hiatus and be reactivated if concerns arose from any of the service areas that might necessitate action. Daily surveillance reports from the District Hospital are monitored, including daily death registration numbers, to identify at a very early stage when services may need to be on standby and ready for additional pressures. Monthly monitoring of mortuary capacity and availability at the crematorium and cemeteries continues alongside a monthly circulation of the current position on each of the triggers and thresholds within the deceased pathway used as a further indicator to any potential actions required.

2.3.2.4 The Registration Service played a key role in managing excess deaths throughout the pandemic by upskilling existing staff to register deaths alongside training a number of additional staff members from other service areas. Death registrations have been prioritised throughout the pandemic and due to easements in the Coronavirus Act 2020 helped improve processes making the death registration duty much more efficient. This was reflected in performance statistics published by the General Register Office for England and Wales showing, despite a much higher number of registrations of deaths undertaken in year, Rotherham showed an improvement of 4% annually against the statutory key performance target for deaths to be registered within 5 days.

2.3.3 Digital Autopsy Pilot

2.3.3.1 A Digital Autopsy 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.

2.3.3.2 Digital Autopsy means conducting 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.

2.3.3.3 To date, the pilot has been positively received by professionals and it is delivering faster decision-making on Coronial cases.

2.3.3.4 An evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken to assess the benefits of Digital Autopsies which, once complete, will be used in the decision-making process for if the service is to continue.

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.

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

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed setting out the key equality issues, refer to appendix 2 of this report.

10.2 The gaps identified within the EIA will be progressed via the Project Liaison Group which consists of both Council and Dignity representatives.

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 3 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.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Zoe Oxley, Acting 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)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
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.

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