

Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 13 December 2022

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)

Ashleigh Wilford, Superintendent Registrar and Bereavement Services Contract Manager

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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 "Update report on the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council" dated 7th September 2021.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Name of Committee – Click here to enter a date.

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
 - Council retained 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 In March 2020, as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Response, a workstream was created to manage any increase in deaths because 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. The COVID Managing Deceased workstream was formally stood down on 15th March 2022 following the standing down of national data returns and local resilience forums both regionally and nationally.
- 1.5 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 7th September 2021
- 2.1.1 Members sought more details around the process by which Bereavement Services officers monitor the standards to which the contract is being fulfilled.

During the meeting on 7th September 2021 bereavement services officers advised committee that there were regular reports from the contractor which were then followed up with quarterly site visits by the officers, who performed visual checks. Any concerns around compliance were then addressed with Dignity to ensure compliance.

- 2.1.2 Dignity will address in a separate report to members, their annual performance report, service improvements and developments, including environmentally friendly burial options.

2.2 Management of the Dignity Contract

- 2.2.1 By utilising the mechanisms in place within the contract for performance management, Bereavement Services have been actively managing the contract, where performance failures have not been resolved within the rectification period, as defined in the contract for the severity level of the failure. The amount paid by Dignity so far is £232,935. A Report is being prepared for Cabinet to consider allocation of funds to carry out works that are outside the scope of the contract with Dignity.

- 2.2.2 As with the other aspects of the Service these matters will be contained in future reports to this Commission.

- 2.2.3 In addition, significant works have been undertaken to improve cemetery facilities with Dignity investing £400k in East Herringthorpe Cemetery alone. Further works have been identified for other cemeteries across the Borough and have either already commenced or been scheduled to be undertaken as appropriate. Dignity will report on this in more detail in a separate report to Members.

- 2.2.4 RMBC Bereavement Services have worked with Dignity and Glendale, Dignity's grounds maintenance sub-contractor, in order to produce a Five-Year Plan detailing improvement and development works across the cemeteries. Dignity will be accountable for the delivery of these service improvements and will update and refresh the plan on a rolling, annual basis. Performance will thus be 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.

2.3 Disused Cemetery Chapels

- 2.3.1 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.

- 2.3.2 All the chapels are in a poor state of repair and require varying levels of work to bring them to a secure, wind and watertight state, with considerable investment required to return them to a useable condition. A working group has been established with Asset Management which aims

to put together a rolling programme of funded chapel repairs, with the aim of bringing them back into use.

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

2.3.3 *Moorgate*

Moorgate chapel 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 chapel from view. Clear Perspex coverings were fixed over the windows to prevent any further damage from the elements and further quotes have been obtained to get the necessary roof repairs completed. The quotes obtained exceed the Bereavement Services existing maintenance budget.

Moorgate Chapel was designed by Samuel Worth in the 1800's. A visit was undertaken by Bereavement Services in September 2022 to the neighbouring Samuel Worth Chapel in Sheffield to learn from their experience of restoring and bringing back into use their own chapel. Additional work is being undertaken with the Council's Asset Management team to address the additional funding required for Moorgate Chapel.

2.3.4 *Masbrough*

Masbrough chapels had vegetation removed from the exterior of the buildings to reduce the risk of further damage from ivy in Spring 2022. The roots were treated to prevent regrowth. There has been noticeable nesting of Barn Owls in one of the chapels during spring and no works will be undertaken which will affect any nesting owls with all relevant guidance being followed and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 complied with.

2.3.5 *Haugh Road*

Haugh Road cemetery chapel had screening installed at the base of the tower to prevent birds getting in and nesting which was causing damage in the eaves and excessive bird mess. Guttering was repaired and replaced where necessary and self-sets removed from the roof of the chapel. There is some concern that the self-sets roots may have spread internally along the roof structure of the chapel which is not visible.

2.3.6 *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. These have recently had some minor repair works carried out to the guttering.

2.4 Cemetery Boundaries

- 2.4.1 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 some of these are below.

2.4.2 *Moorgate Cemetery*

Removal & disposal works scheduled for ground cover ivy from Obelisk & adjacent stone details to front boundary corner of the cemetery with No. 2 Woodfield Villa. This work includes wire brushing stone to remove remaining tendrils from the surface and leave tidy. This will be completed by 31st March 2023.

2.4.3 *Masbrough Cemetery*

Removal & disposal works scheduled for ground cover ivy from the stone wall on both sides. This work includes wire brushing stone to remove remaining tendrils from surface. Weathered areas of stone will be removed from the cemetery side of the wall. Patch repair to be undertaken with new and any reclaimed sandstone to match existing or alternative with prior approval. Pointing will be finished to match the existing. All works will be completed by 31st March 2023.

2.5 Digital Autopsy Contract

2.5.1 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.

2.5.2 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.

2.5.3 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.

2.5.4 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.

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

- 93% of all deaths requiring autopsy were done digitally, without the need for an invasive post-mortem being undertaken.
- 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 100%.

- 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%.

2.6 Death Management

- 2.6.1 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.
- 2.6.2 The Managing Excess Deaths Workstream was formally stood down following the wider regional and national death management cells doing the same. Good practices from this workstream were retained to support future excess death scenarios in the Borough.
- 2.6.3 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.
- 2.6.4 Whilst COVID-19 legislation and working groups regionally and nationally have disbanded, COVID has not gone away. Bereavement Services continues to monitor weekly death rates and total number of deaths where COVID is mentioned anywhere on the cause of death.
- 2.6.5 A smaller working group has been established of key services which are involved in the deceased pathway. This group intends to meet on a quarterly basis as standard to discuss any seasonal pressures or trends with a goal to prepare pro-actively for busy periods in the death management stream. Where appropriate the frequency of these meetings will increase.

2.7 Religious Awareness Training

- 2.7.1 Bereavement Services have worked in conjunction with community engagement to commission an external specialist provider, to deliver 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. To enable all staff and stakeholders to attend, a third session will be arranged in the New Year. Upon completion of this session, further sessions will be arranged with other faith leaders, at different Religious Buildings, throughout 2023. This will again be for both Council staff, stakeholders and partners involved in bereavement processes.
- 2.7.2 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.

- 2.7.3 Practical guidance is given to the bereaved after a death, which is often during very emotionally distressing times and is therefore harder for the bereaved to fully understand why certain processes are being undertaken and how this is done. This will be delivered in conjunction with partner organisations and RMBC Libraries service who have commenced with the 'Death Positive Libraries' initiative across the Borough.

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 Through proactive contract management, contractual performance management charges have been levied, where there has been a failure to comply with the contractual obligations. As detailed in 2.2. In addition, Dignity have made significant capital investments of over £400k in improvements, particularly at East Herringthorpe. Work is ongoing with Asset Management to identify funding for the disused chapels, which are the responsibility of the Council, including options to bring them back into use.

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 financial model.

Accountable Officer(s)

Ashleigh Wilford, Superintendent Registrar & Bereavement Services Manager

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	05/12/22
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	01/12/22
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	Click here to enter a date.

	Customer Services	
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

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