

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Improving Places Select Committee – 12 th December 2023
Report Title
Report from Dignity Funerals Limited on 2022-2023
Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
Report Author
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Ward(s) Affected
Borough- Wide
Report Summary
This report provides an update on the contractual agreement between Dignity Funerals Limited and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. It includes the Dignity Funerals Annual Performance report (APR) for 2022-2023
Recommendations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members note the content of this report 2. Members note the content of the Dignity Funeral Limited Annual Performance Report 2022-2023 3. Members note the Five-Year Service Development Plan
List of appendices included
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five-year service development plan. Rotherham Crematorium and Municipal Cemeteries managed by Dignity with subcontractors Glendale on behalf of Rotherham Council 2. Dignity Funerals Limited Performance Report 2022-2023
1. Update report on Bereavement Services within the Agreement between Dignity Funerals Limited and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 this report provides updates on the progress made in relation to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions set in relation to Dignity Funeral Limited at the Improving Places Select Commission dated 7th September 2021 - The Annual Performance Plan for Dignity Funerals Limited 1.2 On the 1st August 2008, the Rotherham Council entered a 35-year contractual agreement with Dignity Funerals Limited for the provision of Bereavement Services for Rotherham. This agreement saw Dignity take on responsibility for the capital works and maintenance of East Herringthorpe Cemetery and Crematorium along with the maintenance of eight other municipal cemeteries located throughout the borough. Rotherham Council retained cemetery chapels, associated buildings, and boundary walls on some cemetery sites 1.3 Dignity provides annual assurance to Rotherham Council that that Key Performance targets are being met and service improvements are being made and are documented in the Annual Performance report.
2. Key issues
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Dignity is required to maintain hard and soft landscaping including roads and footpaths, grave areas, memorial gardens, arboriculture, and all horticultural features. During the period significant improvements have been made to all cemeteries and Dignity has worked with its contractor, Glendale, to develop a five-year development and improvement plan. The driveway and footpaths at East Herringthorpe Cemetery have been resurfaced to improve access, safety and general appearance of the site.

<p>All existing drainage at East Herringthorpe Cemetery has been repaired and a new drainage system has been installed within the Muslim burial section to prevent the reoccurrence of historic groundwater issues in this area.</p>
<p>2.2 Dignity is committed to assessing customer satisfaction levels to agreed targets. The customer engagement log is regularly updated and shared with the Rotherham Council at monthly meetings.</p> <p>To improve reporting a revised customer survey was developed during July 2022. Information boards have been installed in every cemetery to encourage feedback from customers. Dignity has proactively engaged with Friends of Cemetery Groups and the Muslim community to better understand their needs.</p> <p>Serious complaints are referred to Rotherham Council within 1 working day.</p>
<p>3. Expansion update</p>
<p>3.1 Dignity submitted planning applications in September 2022 for the expansion of the Wath and East Herringthorpe cemeteries to satisfy the future needs for burial space.</p> <p>Wath Cemetery requires expansion for opening in 2023 so Dignity and Rotherham Council are agreeing the terms of the modelling currently and Dignity will commence the procurement and tendering process for the development whilst the planning process proceeds.</p>
<p>3.2 Both planning applications received positive pre-application approval earlier this year.</p>
<p>3.3 Planning consent for East Herringthorpe is still under consideration.</p>
<p>3.4 planning permission was granted at Wath in October 2023. Works now to commence on landscaping and preparing site ready for 2024.</p>
<p>4. Capital investment</p>
<p>4.1 In 2023, Dignity have invested heavily at East Herringthorpe, Greasbrough lane, Greasbrough Town Lane, Haugh Road and Maltby to make significant improvements to the driveway and footpaths to improve the access, safety and appearance for visitors. Improvements ongoing at Wath, Masbrough and Moorgate Cemetery.</p>
<p>4.2 An additional £250,000 has been invested in the in the Muslim burial area of the cemetery to improve access, provide land drainage and create tombs to improve the facilities provided to this community. This development was completed, however Dignity are continuously looking to improve the area through further landscaping. Working alongside the Muslim Community, work will commence in Spring 2024</p>
<p>4.3 Dignity are also considering investing in new cremator equipment at the East Herringthorpe site. Site visits to consider proposals taking place in December 2023.</p>
<p>5. Service improvements</p>
<p>5.1 Removal of additional fee for weekend burials</p> <p>In common with other cemetery operators across Yorkshire, there has traditionally been an additional fee in Rotherham if a family required a burial at a weekend. This was intended to cover the overtime rates of the gravediggers and to pay for the Cemetery Supervisor to identify the burial site and oversee any practical requirements during the service.</p> <p>Dignity has reviewed its cemetery prices in Rotherham, and after consulting the Rotherham Council and local community, has decided to waive the additional fee of £481 and absorb the extra costs. Dignity has also offered a refund for any grave owner that has previously paid the additional weekend fee from when Dignity entered the contract on 1st August 2008.</p>
<p>5.2 Extension to last burial times</p> <p>Improvements to services have also been introduced to assist those whose religious beliefs require a deceased persons to be buried within 24 hours of their passing. The last burial time of the day has been extended to 6.30pm.</p> <p>Portable lighting will be made available to maintain the safe conditions for visitors when burials take place during the late afternoon or early evening during the autumn and winter.</p> <p>We hope that this will provide additional capacity to meet this need from local residents and ensure loved ones can be buried within 24 hours. Dignity have also introduced, alongside the Muslim Community, grave covers which allow for graves to be dug prior, to negate logistics and time issues previously experienced. These were introduced in July 2023 and have received a positive response from the Muslim Community.</p>
<p>5.3 Provision of a natural burial ground</p> <p>An area of Greasbrough Lane Cemetery has been identified to provide a natural burial ground for those that want this option. Test digs were conducted for the suitability of the area. Once completed, a meadow area was created. Due to ground conditions, certain shrubs that were planted failed, however, the seeded meadow was a success and wish to improve on that Spring 2024 alongside future planting. This area will be a very welcome addition for the community. Renewed marketing campaign will commence in Spring.</p>

6. Friends Groups and Communities	
5.1	Diversity and inclusion are integral parts of our business, and we are happy to seek ways to ensure our crematoria and cemeteries are inclusive and welcoming for all faiths and beliefs.
5.2	Monthly meetings have taken place with all Cemetery Friends groups. By working closely with the community, plans have been put in place to provide an improved service provision based off Community feedback.
5.3	Special meetings and invites have been granted to Dignity to visit several Mosques. These meetings were invaluable and have created a good working relationship with the community and a positive platform to build upon.
5.4	Dignity's Central Operations Centre in Sutton Coldfield is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to assist with any public enquiries and funeral arrangements if required.