

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 10 December 2024

Report Title

Dignity Funerals – Annual Report 2023-24

Report Author

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-wide

Report Summary

This report provides an performance update on the contractual agreement between Dignity Funerals Ltd and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (The Council) for 2023-24.

Recommendations

- 1. That members note the contents of the report**
- 2. That members note the contents of the Annual Performance Report 2023-2024**
- 3. That members note the 5 Year plan**
- 4. That members note the Operational Plan**

List of Appendices included

Appendix A	Annual Performance Report 2023-24 (Submitted 15 April 2024)
Appendix B	5 Year Plan (Submitted 11 July 2024)
Appendix C	Operational Plan (Submitted 9 th September 2024)

1. Background

On 1 August 2008, The Council entered into a 35 year contract agreement with Dignity Funerals Ltd.

1.1 This agreement inport, removes responsibility for capital works and maintenance of East Herringthorpe Crematorium and Cemetery, along with 8 other cemeteries located through out the Borough to Dignity Funeral Ltd. The Council retain cemetery chapels, associated buildings and boundary walls in some cemetery sites.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an update relating to:

- Actions identified in Improving Places Select Commission 12 December 2023
- The Annual Performance review for Dignity Funerals relating to the Rotherham contract obligations.

- 1.3 The management of the contract is undertaken through Key Performance Targets (KPT's) and Service Improvements (SI) which are monitored monthly and The Annual Performance Report (APR) documents the progress for 2023-24 (**Appendix A** refers)
- 1.4 The APR was submitted in April 2024 and therefore this document covers any further updates from April 2024 to document submission.
- 1.5 The 5 Year Development Plan was requested by IPSC in 2018. The 5 year Plan is submitted for information and details the current position and future proposals (**Appendix B** refers)
- 1.6 The Operational Plan was requested by The Council to support the 35 Year Plan and detail the current burial position. The document details the position when submitted on 9th September 2024. (**Appendix C** refers).

2. Key Issues

2.1 Update on the improving Places Select Commission recommendation from the meeting dates 12th December 2023

2.2.1 Recommendation 7 - Customer Satisfaction Surveys/engagement

The details of returns are included in section 6 of the Customer Engagement details, relating to both voluntary compliments and customer satisfaction returns. Given the nature of the service, Dignity have made a decision not to have a chasing process for non-return of satisfaction surveys.

The additional process to enable feedback to be given via a QR code has experienced some technical difficulties in report collation, however the team are working hard to ensure it's landed from January 2025.

2.1.2 Recommendation 8 - Religious awareness training.

Dignity have been working with TASSIBEE Group (Training provider who specifically target socially excluded and disadvantaged Black and Ethnic Minority women) to ensure on going cultural awareness of need, including a full day training for the front line staff available on 9 October 2024.

This training was arranged following a number of discussion on suitable training matter, which has enabled on-going engagement with this group as a reference/guidance point.

A training needs analysis established that the muslim cultural awareness was the only area which required further religious awareness training.

2.2 Update on Annual Performance Report (APR) 1 April 2023 to 31st March 2024

The APR (included in pack) was submitted, in-line with contractual requirements on 15 April 2024. Below is an update on progress of the KPT which had not reached a green RAG rating at that point:

2.2.1 Performance review update April to November 2024

KPT	Priority	Planned Maintenance	RAG
2.2	Low	Carry out planned maintenance and asset renewal work in accordance with the Annual Maintenance Plan. Maintenance on going and monitored.	
Updates on 2.2		Work is ongoing with Dignity's Property Department to provide an Asset Management Plan and Annual Preventative Maintenance Plan. This will be a live document and will form part of the weekly and monthly performance management objectives for Dignity and Glendale. Grounds maintenance schedules have been submitted annually. The Asset Management Plan has been	

		subject to Capital approval. The date for submission is January 2025.	
4.1	Medium	All sites to be maintained in accordance with the agreed method statements and to a minimum standard, with particular attention being paid to, Grass Maintenance, Hedge Maintenance, Horticultural Features Maintenance, Arboriculture Work, Litter and Cleanliness, Pesticides.	
Updates on 4.1		Performance meetings are held with Glendale on a Monthly basis and operational discussions held daily. Glendale Live is a performance tool which is now shares with Dignity/Bereavement Officers to monitor/evidence grass maintenance works, hedge maintenance and path and grave top clearance. Weekly inspections by the Cemetery Supervisors are on-going, issues documented and submitted within 24 hours. Rectification is monitored in line with contract obligations. Detailed schedules for specific clearance/maintenance work is on-going. Consultation with specialised on bio-diversity and listed areas is taking place, including guidance from Historic England.	
4.2	Medium	All site road and footway surfaces to be maintained with a smooth, unencumbered surface.	
Updates on 4.2		Consideration of the extent of renovation and appropriate work required is ongoing Moorgate, Masbrough and Wath Cemetery, with the Capital expenditure included in discussions with The Council. The outcome of this is expected to be agreed by December 2024.	
4.3	Medium	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.	
Updates on 4.3		Glendale have demonstrated the ongoing trials of different methods of moss removal through-out the year to balance the environmental considerations in the area and also avoiding further damage to the paths by the use of more abrasive methods of removal to meet the contract requirements. Moss, Weeds removal and clippings are included in the scheduled activities of Glendale and demonstrated from a performance perspective through Glendale Live.	
4.4	High	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.	
Updates on 4.4		Drains are checked daily and are cleared of any obstruction or blockage that can be seen. Dignity have engaged civil engineering contractors to consider the position. All cemetery sites have full drainage surveys undertaken in 2024, results submitted to the Council. There are some remedial works which are currently being completed.	
9.1	Low	Provision of environmentally friendly burial options.	
Updates on 9.1		Greasbrough Lane, was initially identified as the preferred location, however test work confirmed the ground was not suitable for natural Burial. A further site has been identified at East Herringthorpe and although test digs proved positive the landscape work to meet the environmental requires are time preventative, a potential woodland area is currently being considered at East Herringthorpe.	
10.3	Low	Restoration of and redrafting of cemetery plans in line with agreed proposals	
Updates on 10.3		The cemetery plans have now been re-drafted in a digital format	
10.4	Low	Digitized capture of registers to be made available on the internet in line with agreed proposals.	
Updates on 10.4		Meetings were put on hold and re-commenced by new Business leader in May 2024. This is complete and went live on 1 st November 2024.	
12.1	Low	Submit Annual Charter for the Bereaved assessment by 31st January 2024	
Updates on 12.1		Annual Charter for the Bereaved Assessment to be completed and submitted.	
15.4	Low	Provision of an effective plan for systematic testing of all cemetery memorials and progress in accordance with agreed timescales. Testing protocols and procedures to being accordance with the Council's policy for the Management of Cemetery Memorials.	
Updates on 15.4		Memorial testing is required every 5 years. The process is currently under review within the Rotherham sites with a requirement to crosscheck data between Dignity and Glendale required. The aim of the review is to give a more accurate figure of memorials improvement and those outstanding. Training has been given to Dignity staff to unsafe banding to take place prior to a permanent fixed by a qualified person. A time scale of completion October 2025. This is being made a priority.	

2.2.2 Service Improvement (SI) Proposals

SI 1 Wath and Herringthorpe Expansion Plan

Dignity have provided a detailed plan to the council and are waiting on The Council for a time and date to review the proposal.

SI 2 Provide an on site Florist/Refreshment facility at East Herringthorpe

Dignity have provided a detailed plan to The Council for site improvements, and the provision Of this facility is included within that submission. Dignity is waiting to hear back from The Council for a time and a date to review this proposal.

SI 3 Demolish Old block at East Herringthorpe

Linked to SI 2

SI 4 Green Flag Status for East Herringthorpe

The submission target date for this ward is 31 January 2025. Following research and advice a number of bio-diversity activities, customer engagement work and wild life and flower surveys were required for success and therefore this work has been completed prior to submission. The site is on-target to achieve the submission date.

SI 5 Childrens Memorial Area

Significant work has been undertaken to improve this area, trees have been removed to enable light for plant growth. The memorial and paths have been cleaned and capital expenditure agreed for the installation of a butterfly tower for memorial plaque.

Dalton Trinity Croft Primary School have planted snowdrops to promote a sustainable approach to flowers in the area and will return in March 2025 to sow the wild flower garden to attract more insects etc to the area and maintain the 'Butterfly garden' theme. This garden can be used for children ashes scattering if families request.

In addition, the Letter to Heaven post box has been purchased and will be erected in this area when the works are completed, January 2025.

SI 6 Dedicated childrens burial section for the Muslim Community

Liaison with the Community is continuing to establish what the Community would require. Additional discussions with TASSIBEE group members and NHS Chaplains is on-going to ensure need and availability are able to be accomodated.

SI 7 Installation of Letters to Heaven post boxes at all cemeteries

This project is on going and the pilot at East Herringthorpe will be in place January 2025. It is hoped that the letters can be written on seeded paper which then will be planted in the respective cemeteries.

3. Dignity assurance of Contract Development

3.1 Capital expenditure consideration

Dignity has provided The Council with a detailed investment plan for how building development can be achieved to improve the cemeteries and amenities on site, which is estimated to cost between £1.5-£2.0m.

3.2 Weekend staffing and visitor engagement

Following a review of customer need, a business case was submitted to engage a staff member for the period the cemeteries are open at the weekends, commencing in July 2024.

The feedback from decision has been very positive, enabling discussions and guidance on all sites and weekend engagement with the Friends of Groups' activities.

The staff member has been on hand to deal with several emergencies including visitor illness where an ambulance was called and assisting Police with missing person searches.

3.3 Social responsibility within the Community

A scoped project to widen engagement with as many members of the community as possible commenced in June 2024. All councillors with Dignity cemeteries within their wards received an invitation to meet and discuss any developments and engagement work, along with regular discussions with neighbour co-ordinators in the respective areas.

Attendance at memory cafes and faith events has commenced with the Dignity team throughout the Borough to offer both support, understanding and expectations of the wider community.

Work has also commenced to identify where Dignity can support areas of the community with activities, an example being discussion with Herringthorpe Primary School to support sensory garden maintenance and also help plant 400 trees received via a grant but with no installation funding.

A long-term project to offer support to young people experiencing bereavement has commenced, initially as a pilot with two schools. It is envisaged that wider understanding of burial/cremation activities, along with engagement in the cemeteries, initially through environmental, activities linked to the school curriculum will offer an opening which can be developed further.

3.4 Private gardens and memorial options for Rotherham families

The private gardens within East Herringthorpe have always been popular with the community, work is on-going to ensure the offer ensures affordability for all families.

Large memorials plots are available, along with the development of smaller, lower cost options which have been very popular. An investment on two new towers offering smaller plaques purchase will increase the affordability for ashes scattering from January 2025, along with a children specific butterfly garden memorial.

Dignity's commitment to the Rotherham Community continues to achieve good feedback from users and all engaged with the service and it is hoped the proposed developments will show both the commitment and on-going ability to manage the specialised activities, which Dignity are leaders in the field, activities and undertake successfully across the Country across 45 crematoria and over 600 funeral homes.