

REPORT TO: Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 23 January 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Health and Community

SUBJECT: Risk Management Strategy for safe headstones

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek Members' support for the revised Risk Management Strategy for Safe Headstones.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) the Operational Director for Health & Partnerships be requested to agree the revised Risk Management Strategy for safe headstones in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Environment, Leisure and Sport.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Many members will be aware that the Council has had a headstone safety strategy for approximately six years. For the last few years there have been only minor changes to this strategy, but a significant change is now necessary for a number of reasons including:
- The reluctance of many owners to have unsafe headstone memorials refitted to the latest standards
 - The findings of a recent Ombudsman report, which was critical of the approaches to this problem taken by a number of council's up and down the country (though it should be stressed, not Halton)
 - The identification of a relatively cheap, effective and unobtrusive method of temporarily making headstones safe
 - The allocation of capital monies to fund a major project to temporarily make-safe a large number of headstones in the Council's three cemeteries
- 3.2 A copy of the revised Risk Management Strategy for safe headstones is attached as Appendix 1 to this Agenda Item. The amendments to the wording of the document are highlighted in both red font and italics (so they should be discernable even if reproduced on a mono printer).

3.3 The main changes to this strategy document can be summarised as follows:

Section 1 The inclusion of an additional requirement to contact grave-deed owners wherever possible to advise of the condition of a specific headstone and any action taken or about to be taken to combat the danger

Section 2 Sees the inclusion of the terms high, medium and low risk, as appropriate, for each category of headstone and the inclusion of the provision to temporarily make headstones safe, for Category 1a and Category 1 headstones. Additionally, a new category of headstone has been created for those headstones temporarily made-safe.

Section 3 The reference to the re-cementing of joints has been removed, as this is no longer recognised as an appropriate solution to the problem.

Section 4 Again, the reference to re-cementing has been deleted (as above).

Section 7 There is a new section 7 which indicates that due to their small size, headstones of 610 mm (2 ft) in height or smaller are considered to be outside the scope of this strategy.

3.4 The Head of Risk and Emergency Planning has been consulted with regard to the above revisions.

3.9 Note that the second recommendation in this agenda item is based on the delegated authority agreed by the Executive Board Sub Committee on 4 February 2003.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Risk Management Strategy for safe headstones forms the basis of the Council's policy for managing the safety of headstones in the Council's cemeteries.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no additional financial implications flowing from this report. Existing financial implications are addressed via capital monies. It is anticipated that this new strategy will enable the Council to address, as far as is possible for any Burial Authority, the problems associated with unsafe memorial headstones in cemeteries.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 There is always a risk that some grave owners will not appreciate the Council's intervention, but this risk is minimal as the method adopted for temporarily making headstones safe is the most unobtrusive method available. There would be a far greater and more serious health and safety risk without a safe headstone strategy.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 There are no equality or diversity issues flowing from this report.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.