

Bereavement Working Party
7th December, 2006 at 5.00 p.m.
Conference Room No. 1, Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes

NOTES

Present: Cllr. K. Morley (Chair), Cllr J. Swift, Cllr. L. Redhead, Cllr. M. Lloyd-Jones, Mrs. M. Carter, Mrs. D. Philbin, Mr. G. Cookson, Rev. R. Jones, Rev. P. Beetham, Rev. D. Gait, Rev. M. Greenstreet, Rev. M. Eaton, Rev. V. Schofield, Mrs. C. Smith, Mr. K. Austin, Mr. P. Lowry (F Dooley Funeral Service), Mr. A. Molyneux (Co-Operative Funeral Services/S Rigby Funeral Service) Mr. P. Harris (Davis McMullan Funeral Service)

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr. J. Downes, Mr. D. Carter (Halton Memorial Services), Rev. J. Leffler, Rev. P. Skirrow, Deacon M Wynn, Reverend Father Kelly, Rev. Father Redmond, Rev. Fr. Fox, Mr. M. Findlow (Findlows Funeral Services)

2. Minutes of Last Year's Christmas Meeting

The Minutes of last year's Christmas meeting was agreed as a true record.

3. Matters Arising from last year's Christmas meeting held on 7th December 2005 (which would not be covered elsewhere on this Agenda)

Rev. Gait asked whether any progress had been made with the Braille sign for outside the Crematorium Chapel. MC informed the Group that to date, no further progress had been made. Rev. Gait is to make further enquiries on our behalf.

4. Christmas and New Year working arrangements for Halton's three cemeteries and Widnes Crematorium

MC informed the Group of this year's Christmas and New Year working arrangements which are as follows :-

Closed for funerals on Monday, 25th December 2006, 26th December 2006 and Monday, 1st January, 2007.

Wednesday, 27th December 2006/Tuesday, 2nd January 2007

First available burial time 1.00 p.m. (1 interment) or 2.00 p.m. (2/3 interments).

Normal service at Widnes Crematorium

Thursday, 28th December/Friday, 29th December 2006

Normal working arrangements

Saturday morning burials for 9th/16th December will be offered subject to the availability of staff. No cremation/burial services will be available on Saturday, 23rd December, 2006.

5. General feedback from/to clergy and funeral directors

Oversized graves and charges

This issue was a concern for all funeral directors in attendance. MC reported to the Group that in the current year to date, out of 236 burials which have taken place only 13 incurred the extra charge due to large coffin sizes being brought for burial.

A discussion on this issue followed, and there was a general consensus of opinion that the extra charge be added for coffins over 30" wide. Cllr. Morley agreed to discuss this matter with the next relevant meeting of the Council before the new charges for 2007/2008 were set.

PH commented that when a Runcorn resident is cremated at Walton Lea Crematorium and the family wish to have the person's remains interred in Runcorn Cemetery, they are charged £150.00 as opposed to £75.00 had the cremation took place at Widnes Crematorium.

A discussion on this subject took place and MC advised the Group that most authorities have the same charging scheme when the Borough's cremation facilities are not used.

Burial times

AM informed the Group that burial times at Warrington and St. Helens Cemeteries were available from 10.00 a.m. on Monday mornings and asked if this facility could be made available at Halton's three cemeteries.

GC informed the Group of possible problems that could occur if this was introduced at Halton, and it was agreed that MC speak with the relevant Authorities to discuss their present working arrangements which enabled them to carry out such early funerals on a Monday.

Extra charges for cremation services after 2.30 p.m.

The funeral directors asked that the additional charge for cremation services after 2.30 p.m. be included in next year's cremation charge. MC informed the Group that this charge was necessary due to the overtime payments being paid to crematorium staff to complete the cremation process by the end of the working day.

Due to the small numbers of cremation services being held at Widnes Crematorium it was felt that this extra charge was necessary to offset the costs of late services. However, Cllr. Morley agreed to review all cremation charges but emphasised that the service needs to run efficiently.

It was agreed that amendments to the Crematorium working arrangements could work quite well and some funeral directors felt that this would not cause too many problems in making funeral arrangements.

New Cremation Forms B and C

MC informed the Group that it was now a new requirement locally (although many other authorities in the Country were already adopting this) for all doctors who complete cremation forms B & C to add their GMC registration number to the form. A letter has been sent to all surgeries, hospitals and funeral directors informing them of this requirement, and the funeral directors expressed some concern that forms would be returned if the GMC number was omitted. MC informed the Group that problems would only be encountered in the interim and that all parties would work together to ensure its smooth introduction.

Time for future meetings of the Group

MC informed the Group that a request had been received from a member of the clergy to re-arrange the time of future meetings of the Group. However, everyone present favoured the current arrangements and it was agreed that future meetings would be held at the normal time of 5.00 p.m.

Completion of burial and cremation paperwork

MC informed the Group that incomplete paperwork for burial and cremation services were being received from funeral directors and asked that paperwork is checked prior to submission. It was agreed that the situation be monitored and a letter sent out to funeral directors who regularly submit incomplete forms.

Late arrival of funeral services

MC asked funeral directors to telephone Bereavement Services Office to inform them of late arriving funeral services. DP agreed to issue all funeral directors with the Department's mobile telephone numbers for use when the Cemetery land-line is engaged. All parties agreed to co-operate.

MC informed the Group that since the introduction of the hourly time slots at the Crematorium, some funeral directors were not arriving at the Crematorium at their agreed time and were sometimes arriving 20 minutes late. The agreed hourly appointments were introduced to prevent following funerals having to queue when a previous service overrun a little, and not for funerals to continually arrive late.

It was agreed that the situation be monitored and letters sent to funeral directors who regularly do not keep to their agreed appointment time without prior notification of their late arrival.

Any other suggestions

AM informed the Group of his concern over the size of cremated remains caskets permitted for the Sanctum 2000 overground vaults, as there had been a few instances where all the cremated remains did not fit into the casket. GC informed the Group that this was a rare occurrence and that the size of casket permitted is determined by the size of the interior of the vault. The current cremulator is now due for replacement and it was hoped that the new machine would reduce the cremated remains more finely which would help to alleviate the current problem.

6. Any other business

Rev Jones made enquiries regarding the portable shelter at the Crematorium. MC informed the Group that there had been problems with it and that it was currently away for repair. It was envisaged that it would be back in operation early February.

Enquiries were made regarding the proposed cemetery extension plans and Cllr Morley advised the Group that work on this was continuing. Further information would be cascaded in due course.

7. Date and time of next meeting

Thursday, 6th December, 2007 4.30 p.m. for 5.00 p.m.-Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall.