

**Bereavement Working Party
6th December, 2007 at 5.00 p.m.
Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall**

A G E N D A

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Minutes of Last Year's Christmas Meeting**
- 3. Matters Arising from last year's Christmas meeting held on 7th December, 2006 (which would not be covered elsewhere on this Agenda)**
- 4. Emergency Planning**
- 5. Christmas and New Year Working Arrangements for Halton's three Cemeteries and Widnes Crematorium**
- 6. Headstone Safety**
- 7. General feedback from/to clergy funeral directors**
 - Cemetery charges for Runcorn residents who choose not to use Widnes Crematorium**
 - Availability of interment times/funeral delays**
 - Signing of Indemnity forms and the cost it incurs**
- 8. Any other business**
- 9. Date and time of next meeting**

**Bereavement Working Party
6th December, 2007
Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall**

MINUTES

Present: Councillor M. Lloyd-Jones (Chair), Councillor Mrs. L. Redhead, Councillor Mr. G. Swift, Councillor P. Murray, Mr. J. Downes, Mr. J. Tully, Mrs. M. Carter, Mrs. D. Philbin, Mr. G. Cookson, Mr. S. Webster, Rev. R. Jones, Rev. M. Greenstreet, Rev. V. Schofield, Rev. M. Eaton, Rev. C. Gordon-Farleigh, Father P Fox, Mr. K. Austin, Mr. P. Lowry (F Dooley and Son Funeral Service), Mr. M. Findlow (Findlows Funeral Service) Mr. P. Harris (Davis McMullan Funeral Service)

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor K. Morley, Father W. Redmond, Rev. J. Leffler, Rev. J. Hayes, Canon D. Gait, Mrs. C. Smith, Mr. E. Wynn-Jones (Moar and Butler Funeral Service)

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 2006 (which would not be covered elsewhere on this Agenda)

Rev Jones asked whether the portable shelter at the Crematorium had now been restored and if it was suitable for use. Confirmation of this was given. He also asked for an update on the Cemetery extension to which JD gave the Group an update on the present position.

4. Emergency Planning

SW attended the meeting to give the Group an update on the current position regarding a possible Flu Pandemic, and circulated a Briefing Note for information. His briefing was aimed around Bereavement Services and he informed the group that Flu was now the number one health risk to the country.

He advised of the plans that were in place in Halton and stressed the importance of the need to plan for 25%, 35% and 50% attack rates. He suggested to the Funeral Directors and the Clergy that they should consider putting Business Continuity Plans in place for their particular service and stressed the need for sharing information.

A discussion followed regarding mass gatherings and funeral services and SW advised the group that no definite answer could be given as to when the disease will strike, but suggested that a Working Group be

set up between people present at this meeting to discuss the matter further.

SW also answered questions from the Funeral Directors in relation to infection control when collecting Deceased persons from hospitals, etc.

5. 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 25th and 26th December, 2007 and 1st January, 2008.

Monday, 24th December 2007 – normal working arrangements apply.

Thursday, 27th December 2007 – normal working arrangements for Widnes Crematorium. Burial services to commence from 1.00 p.m.

Friday, 28th December, 2007 – Normal working arrangements apply.

Monday, 31st December, 2007 – normal working arrangements apply.

Wednesday, 2nd January 2008 – normal working arrangements apply for Widnes Crematorium. Burial services to commence from 1.00 p.m.

Saturday 22nd/Saturday 29th December 2007 and Saturday, 5th January 2008 – burial services will be offered at no extra charge subject to staff availability.

6. Headstone Safety

JD gave an update on the current Headstone Safety policy adopted by the Authority. He informed the group of the significant progress which has been made with this issue and of the way individual complaints were handled.

7. General feedback from/to clergy & funeral directors

- **Cemetery charges for Runcorn residents who choose not to use Widnes Crematorium**

JD informed the Group that Local Government finance is under pressure and that the last three years have proved very difficult, forcing Councillors to make some very tough decisions.

Widnes crematorium is a very under used facility and some of the income generated is used to subsidise the cemetery provision.

As the bereaved are consumers, it was felt that if the funeral director inform the family of the various options open to them

prior to arranging the funeral, it would enable them to make an informed choice.

Mr. Harris asked that this matter be put before the relevant Council committee for discussion and JD informed him that an item would be put before the next Policy and Performance Board. As there is a public forum, he advised Mr. Harris that he may attend if he wished.

Rev. Gordon-Farleigh suggested that an across the board fee of say £120.00 be implemented.

- **Availability of interment times/funeral delays**

Mr. Harris informed the group that on three occasions he had had to wait 10 days for a burial service. A discussion followed regarding the booking of funeral services and the difficulties sometimes experienced by all parties.

Mr. Lowry informed the Group that in nearby cemeteries, Monday morning service times were available, and that this option was not available at Widnes. JD informed the group that the introduction of flexible working patterns would allow this to take place in Halton, along with late afternoon service times if required.

The general opinion of the funeral directors was that the earliest burial time that would be required on a Monday morning would be 10.30 a.m.

- **Signing of Indemnity forms and the cost it incurs**

Mr Harris was very unhappy with the fact that Runcorn residents had to travel to Bereavement Services Office, Widnes to sign an Indemnity form when the Grave Deed could not be produced, and asked why HBC could not adopt the more relaxed approach of some burial authorities in this regard.

JT informed the Group of the legalities of the signing of Indemnity forms, and the reasons why every effort is made to ensure that the right person is buried in the correct grave. It was felt that the fee of £42.00 was a fair cost given the administration tasks involved in completing such forms.

DP informed Mr. Harris that if an elderly or infirm person could not travel to Widnes to sign the form, arrangements could be made for a member of the Bereavement Services team to travel to the Funeral Directors premises for this purpose.

At this time, HBC would not be altering the procedure for the signing of Indemnity forms.

8. Any other business

Mr. Findlow expressed his concern over the tipping area to the side of Section 31 in Runcorn Cemetery. It was agreed by all parties that it was not an ideal situation and GC informed the Group that quotations have been received to create a formal tipping area.

JD informed the group that the current mound of soil would be levelled in the near future.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next Christmas meeting of the Group will take place in Conference Room 2, Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes on Thursday, 4th December, 2008 at 4.30 p.m. for 5.00 p.m.