

Crematorium and Cemeteries

Portfolio Holder:

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Reason for the report

To inform the Scrutiny Committee of the opportunities and current/future challenges that exist within the cemetery service that is within the Environment Directorate. The report outlines the current approach to addressing these challenges, as well as the future plans being devised while we continue to provide a high level of service to residents during, what is often, a stressful and difficult time in their lives.

The report outlines the Service's approach towards ensuring the following:

- Future burial capacity that meets all residents needs
- Ensuring a consistent approach to memorials and headstones at all graveyards
- The risk of flooding at cemeteries
- Ensuring the service meets the needs of all the residents in terms of access/out of hours burials
- Ensure upgrade of cremators in a timely manner for continued compliance with legal requirements

Further detail and narrative for each of the above is provided in the summary, below with discussions points and recommendations for member consideration in the closing recommendations section.

SUMMARY:

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham Council manages seven cemeteries and one crematorium, which is situated with Hollinwood Cemetery and serves a population of around 240,000. During 2022, 470 full interments, 151 cremated remains interments and 1,726 cremations were carried out.

The table, below, highlights some facts and statistics for each cemetery site:

	Opened	Size (Acres)	Interments	Memorials
HOLLINWOOD	1889	26	37116	5808
CHADDERTON	1857	31	102753	11090
GREENACRES	1857	35	109556	12601
FAILSWORTH	1887	8	19113	3598
LEES	1879	6	11229	2012
CROMPTON	1891	14	16424	3168
ROYTON	1879	7	20435	3114
TOTAL			316626	41431

- 1.2 The cemetery service provides burials out of normal working hours, covering weekends, Bank Holidays, and evenings (until dusk). During 2022/23, 33 evening and 33 weekend / bank holiday burials took place.

2 Current Position

2.1 Improvements

Hollinwood Crematorium has recently undergone extensive resurfacing works through section 106 funding to enhance the area around the Crematorium Chapel and under the porte cochere to ensure residents waiting to attend funerals and the funerals arriving have a positive experience.

2.2 Issues

2.2.1 Burial Capacity

Currently, there is 39 years of remaining burial capacity borough wide, and we are aware that we need to ensure future capacity.

Chadderton Cemetery has land that can be developed, potentially adding a further 20 years of burial space. In addition, the Service is currently working with Planning Services to identify other sites that could be developed to provide future burial capacity. It is important to identify these sites as part of the Local Plan.

Once suitable sites have been identified, there will be a requirement to undertake initial design and planning work to enable this land to be utilised as a burial site. This work will include necessary assessments (ecological/hydrological etc.) as well as regulatory and planning compliance.

The same approach will be undertaken at other sites boroughwide where additional land has been identified but requires development and assessment before use. The Service will ensure sites are brought into use in a timely manner so that there is capacity moving forward.

2.2.2 Memorials

All placement of memorials and headstones must be agreed to by Oldham Council and there is a criteria that must be met – this relates to the size/dimension/materials and fixing methods of the stonework and any planting on graves. However, there are instances in which permitted sizes have been exceeded. This has resulted in access problems to ensure maintenance and has, on occasion, also prevented visitors to adjacent graves from being able to access the area.

In order to address the above, guidance and requirements regarding all memorials has been revised. The revised guidance also clearly stipulates enforcement options for securing compliance where the stonework/dimensions or fittings exceed the agreed limits. The revised/proposed regulations are attached in **Appendix A**.

It is proposed, that, once agreed (a consultation exercise to take place in the near future), these standards will apply to all new gravesites and will be clearly communicated to all funeral directors, organisations and individual grave owners as will the fact that any memorials that fail to comply will be removed and the grave owners charged for the costs of removal.

2.2.3 Flooding

There is a national problem around standing water across all areas after periods of heavy rain. Understandably, this is also an issue in some of our cemeteries where, after prolonged or heavy rain, there is some standing water over graves. The water does dissipate relatively quickly but this issue has been raised over recent years.

In order to improve the surfacy hydrology, the Council has undertaken repair of culverts, improved highway drainage, and more recently, introduced additional drainage channels between graves to allow water to dissipate (Crompton, Greenacres and Chadderton Cemetery). Although an understandable concern, digging of ground for new graves while there has been heavy rain hasn't shown water ingress or saturated soils at depth. This reaffirms that the problem is mainly surface water related.

Nonetheless, we are mindful that as climate extremes become more frequent, the issue of standing water/flooding at gravesites is likely to become an issue. The Service will continue to monitor ground and water conditions and undertake reasonable and practical steps to mitigate problems when they arise.

2.2.4 Out of hours access and fees

The Service provides out of hours access for burials, and this option is available for all residents of Oldham. However, it is mainly used by the Muslim community given the religious requirement to bury the deceased as soon as practically and legally possible. As a result, the Service works close with Muslim Funeral Services in Oldham to ensure a timely and suitable provision.

Where out of hours access is needed (evenings, weekends & bank holidays), this does carry an extra charge to cover the costs of service provision outside of normal working hours. The out of hours fees charged by Oldham are commensurate with the works completed and comparable regionally. Based on current figures, Oldham is the 4th cheapest, with 6 other authorities in Greater Manchester charging more for out of hours access.

2.2.5 Cremators

The Crematorium's 3 cremators are nearing the end of life and due to be replaced in the next 2-5 years. This is to ensure they continue to operate efficiently and to comply with legislative requirements for mercury abatement. This replacement programme will have to be carefully managed to ensure service provision and capacity, both to meet resident and budget needs. A separate report outlining the course of action as well as timelines for replacement is currently being produced and will go through necessary consultation before procurement/replacement can commence.

Recommendations

The key areas of work, outlined above, will follow Council processes and additional reports/consultation will take place with relevant departments and stakeholders, internal and external, before appropriate sign off. However, it is requested that the Scrutiny Committee Members:

1. consider the main areas of concern around burial capacity and the proposed course of action
2. consider the approach towards a consistent policy for memorials and headstones moving forward
3. discuss the proposed compliance led approach towards memorial stones
4. note of the programme of works and interventions with regards to flooding, out of hours access / fees and the cremator replacement programme

Appendix A

MEMORIAL WORK

4.1 PERMISSION TO PLACE MEMORIAL

No memorial, vase, cross or tablet is allowed to be placed on any grave without written consent of the Manager of Cemeteries and Crematorium.

Memorials may only be erected over graves for which exclusive rights of burial are granted.

No ornamentation other than those set out above and subject to consent therein mentioned will be permitted.

4.2 APPLICATION FOR TO ERECT A MEMORIAL

Prior to work commencing, an Application for Memorial erection must be completed by both the grave owner (or his authorised representative) and the monumental mason.

The completed form should be handed in to the Registrar or his representative at least two weeks before the permit is required.

No monumental mason will be allowed to commence work without a signed permit.

Only Registered Memorial Masons will be permitted to work in the Cemeteries.

4.3 MATERIALS FOR MEMORIALS

Only granite, marble, hard natural stone and permitted hardwoods may be used in the construction of memorials. Artificial stone of any type will not be permitted.

Any photograph of the deceased person must not exceed 6 inches in any dimension and must be permanently attached to the memorial.

4.4 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MEMORIALS

Memorials will be erected at the sole risk and liability of the registered grave owner or his representative.

The responsibility for memorials is that of the grave owner or other authorised person, however, the Council reserves the right to take any action as it deems necessary in accordance with Section 1.5 of these regulations.

4.5 MEMORIALS AND FOUNDATIONS: TYPES AND SIZES

All permitted memorials are limited to lawn type headstones or simple marker stones or wooden crosses and therefore will not exceed:

Headstone sizes:

3 feet or 900 millimetres in height
3 feet or 900 millimetres in width
6 inches or 150 millimetres in thickness
not less than 3 inches or 75 millimeters in thickness.

All memorials exceeding 18 inches in height will be required to have a concrete foundation, which will be installed in accordance with the current guidelines in force, issued by the National Association of Monumental Masons and be fitted with the recommended ground anchor and dowels to accommodate the size of the memorial.

4.6 IDENTIFICATION OF MEMORIALS/GRAVE AREA

The section, square, row and grave number must be cut in or plated onto all memorials, in a position readily visible after erection.

The mason's name, title or other such information shall only be permitted on the back of memorials in letters no larger than one half inch.

4.7 GRAVE SURROUNDS

Grave surrounds are permitted subject to them being built of materials in accordance with Section 4.3 of these regulations, excluding wood and any other material.

The dimensions allowed for kerb surrounds are as follows:

LAWNED (GRASSED) GRAVE AREAS

3 feet or 900 millimeters in width.

18 inches or 450 millimetres from the front of the memorial N.B. Both measurements include surrounds.

This size is to allow for access to maintenance equipment that will maintain the lawned grave areas. The area of 450 millimetres surrounds are the responsibility of the grave owner to maintain.

The Council reserve the right to remove any kerb surrounds that have fallen into disrepair.

NON LAWNED GRAVE AREAS (Areas not maintained by the Council)

3 feet or 900 millimetres in width

6 feet or 1800 millimetres in length.

Non lawned areas are not maintained by the Council and no access is required for maintenance equipment. All graves with surrounds of 1800 millimetres in length are the responsibility of the grave owner to maintain.

The Council reserve the right to remove any kerb surrounds that have fallen into disrepair.

4.8 REMOVAL OF MEMORIAL

No memorial can be taken down or removed, for any purpose whatsoever, without the permission of the Manger of Cemeteries and Crematorium or his representative, and/or (b)

the grave owner. Unless for safety purpose or to demonstrate correct fixings have been installed.

4.9 ADDITIONAL INSCRIPTIONS ON MEMORIALS

All additional inscriptions must obtain a permit prior to work commencing.

Any memorials removed for an additional inscription or further interment, must be re-fixed with a ground anchor to National recommended standards.

Where memorials are fully inscribed and where additional inscriptions are required, this can be accommodated on an additional plinth, which should be placed at the base of the memorial within the grave surround area.

No other additional planting area will be permitted.

4.10 ACCEPTANCE OF MEMORIALS

The Council reserves the right to reject memorials that are not of the required standard, are not erected by a Registered Memorial Mason or that are not identified by the correct grave number (see Section 4.6).

SECTION 5. GENERAL ON-SITE WORK

5.1 All memorials must be conveyed into or through the cemetery in such a manner as to cause no damage to roads, pathways and grave areas and in a safe manner.

5.2 All spare building material or rubbish arising from the work should be removed, to the satisfaction of the Cemetery Manager.

5.3 All work should be carried out in such a manner befitting that of a cemetery and without causing interference or interruption to interments or mourners or other visitors and in accordance with Section 2 (Admission of Visitors) – of these regulations.

5.4 All work must be carried out during the normal working week - Monday to Friday - and during the normal working day, unless previously agreed by the Council.