

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 1 September 2010

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON  
MONDAY 5 JULY 2010 FROM 7PM TO 8.15PM**

*Present:- Alistair Auty, Chris Bowring, Michael Firmager, Norman Jorgensen,  
Jenny Lissaman and Stuart Munro*

*Also present:-*

*Neil Carr, Head of Neighbourhoods*

*Madeleine Shopland, Senior Democratic Services Officer*

**5. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence received.

**6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

**8. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions received.

**9. BURIAL REVIEW – UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Head of Neighbourhoods provided an update on the recommendations of the Burials Review undertaken by the Burials Task and Finish Group in 2007.

During the discussion of the item the following points were made:

- The Head of Neighbourhoods suggested that he circulate background information on the review. The Panel was informed that burials were not a statutory service and that Councils were only required to provide pauper burials.
- At the time of the review the Council's charges for the services it offered were much lower in comparison to other Berkshire authorities. Currently the fees charged by the Council were near the higher end of the charging scale and costs were covered.
- The Council controlled owned 2 cemeteries in the Borough, St Sebastian's Cemetery and Shinfield Cemetery. There were a number of other cemeteries in the Borough, owned by churches or Parish Councils. It was anticipated that Shinfield Cemetery would have capacity until approximately 2018. Parts of St Sebastian's were currently unused and consideration was being given to bringing this area into use. This in mind, it was anticipated that the cemetery would have capacity until approximately 2016 to 2018.
- Space available for burials and cremations was running out. A Member commented that cremation was becoming more prevalent. The Head of Neighbourhoods agreed and stated that although cremation burials required less land than standard burials, space available for burials of any type was becoming limited.
- The Task and Finish Group had recommended in 2007, that the recycling of grave spaces be considered. However, the Executive had felt that this was not appropriate for the Borough, at the time. Nevertheless, this could be revisited.
- A Member questioned whether consideration had been given to the sale of the Council owned cemeteries.

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- The Panel agreed that it was important that the Council talk to other neighbouring authorities with regards to potentially sharing services and land. It was noted that there was no crematorium in Wokingham. There were crematoriums in Reading and Bracknell Forest. Members felt that maximising space was integral.
- The Panel discussed the recommendation that consideration be given to the practicality of seeking planning s106 contributions from major development towards future burial provision. The Head of Neighbourhoods indicated that part of the negotiations for Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) would include burial provision. The Open Space Strategy which would cover the whole borough was currently on hold until clarification on funding, the SDL's and the Core Strategy was available. It was noted that investigations into utilising gaps and wedges in the countryside would also be affected by issues relating to the Core Strategy and the SDLs.
- As part of the original review the Task and Finish Group had contacted the Town and Parish Councils with regards to possible partnership working on burial provision. However, the response had been largely negative. Many Town and Parish Councils did not own any burial sites and those that did had little or no further space available. It was noted that the Mays Lane cemetery owned by Earley Town Council had capacity until approximately 2020 to 2025. The Head of Neighbourhoods indicated that Shinfield Cemetery abutted allotment land and that Shinfield Parish Council could be approached for informal discussions and their views on the possibility of a future land swap.
- In response to a question about the lifetime of plots, the Head of Neighbourhoods stated that the Council leased plots for 100 years. The Chair commented that once the cemetery was full the Council would still be responsible for the maintenance of plots but would no longer receive an income from them. This was a nationwide issue. Central government had recommended the reuse of plots as space was at a premium.
- The Panel discussed different faith burials. Both Shinfield Cemetery and Mays Lane Cemetery had areas which were dedicated to Muslim burials. Members were notified that non religious burials could also be carried out. However, demand for this service had been low.
- The Head of Neighbourhoods commented that there had not been any significant progress made in relation to developing a green burial site in the Borough, although there were several sites in Berkshire and there had been no demand from residents for such a site. There were some advantages to green burials, including income generation, less use of space and being kinder to the environment than standard burials.

**RESOLVED** That the action taken and comments on progress made since the previous update in February 2010 be noted and that a further update be provided at the Panel's meeting in February 2011.

## **10. POSSIBLE FUTURE REVIEW TOPICS**

The Panel discussed topics that they could potentially review throughout the year. It was noted that other topics could arise during the year.

- The Panel noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee would be meeting at the end of July and would be considering possible topics for review.
- It was suggested that the Panel review energy efficiency within the Council's buildings and monetary savings.
- Several Members suggested that subsidised travel be reviewed. The Chair indicated that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had considered this as a

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possible topic for review at their June meeting. A number of Members had felt that such a review would duplicate the work of previous reviews on concessionary travel tokens. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had agreed to reconsider possibly reviewing this topic following the completion of the Council's Local Transport Plan 3 and a clarification of the national picture. Some of the Panel suggested that home to school transport provision be reviewed.

- A Member proposed that the establishment of the Waterside Centre and subsequent handling of matters concerning the lease be looked at.
- The Panel briefly discussed the proposed nationwide public sector pay freeze for those earning over £21,000. It was noted that the Personnel Board would be investigating this issue further.
- It was suggested that the Panel may wish to look at the budget and be involved in the budget consultation process. The Panel questioned whether this would be an overly large topic. The Panel agreed that a review of elements of the budget would potentially add more value.
- A Member stated that the Council's website was difficult to navigate and that it was often difficult to find documents through the search function. The Panel was informed that a review of the website was in progress and that the Website Manager had offered to give a short presentation outlining the review and the work being undertaken.
- S106 protocol was suggested as a possible review topic. A Member commented that the process could be more transparent and that clarification needed to be given to Ward Members on how funds were allocated and decisions were made. This would be particularly important if SDL's were progressed.
- The Enforcement Policy, its operation and if any improvements could be made was suggested as a potential review topic.

*These are the Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel*

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