

# Bereavement Services in Medway



September 2007

Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

# BEREAVEMENT SERVICES IN MEDWAY

## FOREWORD



Councillor Jane Etheridge, Chairman of the Committee



Councillor Teresa Murray  
Labour Group Spokesperson



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Liberal Democrat Spokesperson

On behalf of the Committee we are pleased to present the findings and recommendations of a task group set up to review Bereavement Services in Medway. The final report of the task group was presented to the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007 and represents the outcome of a review covering the delivery of services to the bereaved. The task group had a remit to review how the service is delivered currently and to bring forward options for improving the crematorium and burial facilities in Medway with options for longer-term service development. We hope this report will lay the foundation for provision of a modernised service which offers choice and dignity for our service users at such a sensitive and emotionally difficult time in their lives.

We extend thanks to the Members of the Bereavement Services Task Group, Councillors Etheridge, Harriott, Maisey, Wildey and former Councillors, Mr Luckhurst and Mrs Purdy. The Task Group worked hard and with real commitment to bring together such a comprehensive overview of the service and a clear set of recommendations. Thanks are also due to the officers who supported the Review

*Councillor Jane Etheridge (Chairman)*

*Councillors Teresa Murray and Sheila Kearney*

## **BEREAVEMENT SERVICES IN MEDWAY**

### **Executive Summary**

- 1 The Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 14 February 2006, agreed to set up a task group of five Members to undertake a review of cemeteries and the crematorium owned by Medway Council.
- 2 **The terms of reference of the review were:**
  - To review and harmonise cemetery regulations across all Council owned cemeteries reflecting the unitary status of Medway Council.
  - To consider possible options for improving facilities at the crematorium to meet current and future demand.
  - To review the way data is held and used regarding the mapping of grave space availability.
  - To consider the long term financial planning of the bereavement service.
  - To consider the issue of unsafe and broken gravestones and the national requirement to remedy the situation.
  - To investigate the options regarding mercury abatement equipment, taking into account legal requirements which will be in place by 2012.
  - To review current staffing levels.
- 3 The context in which the review was undertaken was to investigate the condition of the cemeteries and the services Medway Council was able to provide overall to the bereaved. The review looked at how the service could be taken forward, taking into consideration forthcoming legal requirements.
- 4 The Task Group met a total of five times. This included a site visit to the Medway Crematorium and Strood, Chatham and Rochester Cemeteries. The group was able to gather evidence and discuss issues affecting the service.

### **5 Recommendations**

Recommendations with a direct financial implication:

- i) That subject to authorisation from the licensing authority, mercury abatement equipment is fitted to enable the target level of 50% of cremations to be carried out in compliance with the Act by 2011 (as referred to in section 7 to the review report).
- ii) That subject to appropriate permissions from the local planning authority, Medway Crematorium enlarges one chapel and its car park by 2011.
- iii) That officers make arrangements for the digitisation of all maps and records.
- iv) That Cabinet notes and endorses the action to be taken by the Director of Community Services to increase administrative resources by two posts to

enable the delivery of higher quality standards, particularly for registration and bereavement services.

- v) That the Cabinet is recommended to agree the business plan set out in Appendix 1 to the review report which sets out 13 recommended pricing policies and proposes a programme of improvements and increases in the staffing establishment of the service. These proposals, to be funded by a combination of prudential borrowing, contributions made to the Environmental Surcharge Fund and from increases to the fees and charges made for burials and cremations. Fees and charges are approved by Council.
- vi) That the Service actively pursues an additional amenity for woodland burial.
- vii) That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Community Services to adopt harmonised guidance, rules and regulations across all cemeteries in Medway as set out in appendix 2 to the report.

Recommendations to be investigated further by officers:

- viii) That officers are instructed to commence working towards compliance with the Charter Standards and Excellence Criteria promoted by the Institute of Crematorium and Cemetery Management
- ix) That officers are instructed to set up systems of public and stakeholder consultation and seek advice from the National Federation of Cemetery Friends in setting up local groups and a forum.
- x) That a mechanism is introduced for providing a gardening service for service users wishing to pay a fee for grave maintenance.



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a short life Task Group to investigate the provision of Bereavement Services in Medway. The original membership of the group was:-

Councillor Etheridge – Conservative  
Councillor Harriott – Labour  
Councillor Luckurst – Liberal Democrat  
Councillor Maisey – Conservative  
Councillor Purdy – Conservative (Chairman)

A change of membership occurred in May 2006 when Councillor Wildey replaced Councillor Purdy as Chairman.

The review was supported by Paul Edwards, Bereavement and Registration Services Manager and Liane Dell, Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

## **1.2 Background**

Members received a report regarding the future of Bereavement Services at the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 February 2006. It was agreed that it would be appropriate for a short life task group to be formed to look at the Service as a whole and investigate how the Service could be taken forward in the future.

## **1.3 Terms of reference**

Members of the task group agreed the following terms of reference for the review:

- (i) To review and harmonise cemetery regulations across all Council owned cemeteries reflecting the unitary status of Medway Council.
- (ii) To consider possible options for improving facilities at the crematorium to meet current and future demand.
- (iii) To review the way data is held and used regarding the mapping of grave space availability.
- (iv) To consider the long term financial planning of the bereavement service.
- (v) To consider the issue of unsafe and broken gravestones and the national requirement to remedy the situation.
- (vi) To investigate the options regarding mercury abatement equipment, taking into account legal requirements which will be in place by 2012.
- (vii) To review current staffing levels.

## **2. National perspective on bereavement services**

- 2.1 The way in which society looks after the deceased and bereaved and the way funerals are carried out is a hallmark of its civilisation. In Medway the Council's Bereavement Services provides a key service in providing dignified and appropriate services for the deceased and bereaved. Annually the service cremates and buries over 3000 people. The provision of such

services is vital not just for the dead, but also for the living who must be given the opportunity to remember and grieve. In addition, the greenspace that it provides is integral to the local landscape.

- 2.2 The principal aims of the service are to provide facilities and services of the highest quality to address the loss of human life, without error or insensitivity; meet religious, secular, ethnic and cultural needs and provide justifiable and robust reasons for refusing any specific request.
- 2.3 In 2001 the Secretary of State published the Government response to the Eighth Report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee regarding cemeteries and this report raised concerns over the lack of burial space and lack of direction within the industry.
- 2.4 The report made 41 recommendations in total. It recognised:
  - the cultural value of such amenities;
  - the need for choice and a fitting environment that is professional, caring and sensitive;
  - the historical, environmental and amenity values;
  - their significance in urban renaissance; the need to devote substantially more resources;
  - the need to set up (Government) advisory groups;
  - the need to maintain a long term source of income;
  - the importance of the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration (IBCA) Charter for the bereaved; encouraging friends groups; and
  - the need for a standing inspectorate.
- 2.5 The IBCA Charter and its excellence initiatives provide wide ranging standards including the need to offer choice, a proactive approach to consultation; effective training plans; effective ground maintenance with appropriate planning procedures; published standards and regulatory frameworks and it sets out certain rights and needs for the bereaved.

### **3. Bereavement Services in Medway**

- 3 Following the formation of Medway as a unitary authority on 1 April 1998, a reorganisation of Bereavement Services also occurred, combining Rochester and Gillingham's Cemeteries and a Crematorium. This shift and the process of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CTT) within the Service had an impact on staffing structures. The Service was also given responsibility for all funerals under the Public Health Act 1946.
- 3.2 There have been approximately 175,000 burials within Medway Council's 4 Council cemeteries and these cemeteries are located in:
  - Chatham, Maidstone Road - opened in 1924
  - Gillingham, Woodlands Road – opened in 1907
  - St Nicholas, Rochester, Maidstone Road – opened in 1856
  - Strood, Cuxton Road – opened in 1883
- 3.3 Medway Council also owns and manages the Crematorium at Bluebell Hill. This facility combined with the cemeteries covers approximately 100 acres of

land and there are approximately 10,000 memorials leased by the service. The crematorium was first opened in 1959 and has carried out approximately 115,000 cremations in this time putting Medway Crematorium in the top third for the numbers of cremations that have taken place nationally.

- 3.4 There is a deficit budget for 2007-2008 for the cemeteries of £304,582.00 however this is balanced with a surplus budget for the crematorium of £370.364.00 giving the service overall an approximate surplus of £65,000.
- 3.5 The number of burials and cremations which have been carried out are shown in the table below:

| Year        | Number of cremations | Number of burials |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2004 - 2005 | 2663                 | 353               |
| 2005 – 2006 | 2812                 | 393               |
| 2006 – 2007 | 2775                 | 342               |
| Average     | 2750                 | 363               |

- 3.6 In respect of the facilities at the crematorium there has been very little improvement carried out since the crematorium was first opened. There has been some paving work, replacement cremators and related Environmental Protection Act work carried out in the early 1990's. The last major project was a toilet refurbishment programme. Although this improved the overall standard and finish, this did result in a decrease in the number WC's. The chapels have also been repainted.
- 3.7 Lighting around the crematorium is restricted to car parks and there is a little bit of lighting around the chapel. Better lighting would enhance appearance and allow later service times if required.
- 3.8 Lighting in the chapels is to a 1960's style, catafalques (pedestal for a coffin) are aging and the cloister areas are poorly lit and in need of repair.
- 3.9 Improvements have been made to the sound and music system, but the public are becoming more discerning in their choice of music and how it is delivered: the external PA (Public Announcement) system is inadequate for large services.
- 3.10 Members of the task group visited all of the Council's cemeteries and the crematorium to look at the buildings and the facilities available.
- 3.11 Although the cemeteries and crematorium were generally well presented, the task group identified the following areas of concern:
- The crematorium chapels are rather small for modern requirements;
  - Registers, records and maps, which are in daily constant use, are old, in poor condition and not readily accessible;
  - Cemetery regulation and maintenance standards are not consistent across the cemeteries and some bereaved had elected to erect unpermitted memorials which often uses a proportion of the land in front of a headstone to create an unpermitted grave area;

- Staffing is under resourced to deliver a high quality modern service;
- Although the Service generates a monetary surplus there is insufficient investment;
- The reduction of staffing levels at the cemeteries has been a contributory factor in vandalism and a reduction in standards.

#### **4. Changing Expectation**

- 4.1 Changes in the expectations of service users continue to have a profound impact upon services.
- 4.2 Service users wish to exercise greater freedoms and choice, whether it is through the provision of music during services, the choice of memorial or specific locations for burial and cremation.
- 4.3 The ease of communication means that service users contact Bereavement Services, through e-mail, e-forms, telephone, fax and in person. It is estimated the service receives over 20,000 telephone calls and 350,000 visitors annually. This rise in communication has had a significant impact upon the workload of Bereavement Services.
- 4.4 The range of memorials has increased by 300% in the last four years; some memorials can cost in excess of £1000.
- 4.5 Many visitors now require a much higher level of personal service and interaction than was originally intended. Some private providers are able to offer a more flexible service and more modern facilities making their businesses more customer focused; such as offering longer slots for services.

#### **5. Buildings and land**

- 5.1 The Council needs to ensure value for money; but equally service users must be provided with the best possible service available.
- 5.2 The current level of asset management, repairs and renewals is insufficient to meet the current and future needs of the service. Sufficient budgets need to be in place so programmed maintenance can take place.
- 5.3 The Task Group made specific references to the disposal of land and buildings and to the need for more appropriate memorials, a larger chapel and better parking. The business case, set out in appendix 1, proposes that two out of the four dwellings situated within cemeteries grounds could be disposed of to realise capital specifically for developing the Service. A rental income is collected from tenants living at these properties and the total annual income is shown within the business plan in appendix 1. If the properties were to remain within the Council's portfolio then these would need to be brought up to the decent homes standard by 2011. These properties have not yet been surveyed. Therefore, the cost of bringing these properties up to the decent homes standard is not yet known, although it is likely to be in the region of between £15,000 and £20,000 per property. If Members wish to pursue the disposal of these properties then further work would be needed to



be carried out by officers to investigate the Council's legal position due to the properties being rented by long-standing tenants. Some Members believed that it might be better to retain the buildings for rent.

- 5.4 The Task Group considered the facilities available and concluded that more modern forms of memorialisation could be offered that might provide choice and be more easily maintained; that there was scope to extend and modernise at least one crematorium chapel and to provide better car parking facilities. It would be necessary to take into account not only the sensitive nature of the crematorium, but also to ensure any works should be sympathetic to the architectural merit.

## **6. Standards**

- 6.1 The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order of 1977 allows burial authorities (Medway) to make regulations for the proper management of its cemeteries. The regulations currently in place refer to Gillingham Borough Council and Rochester Upon Medway City Council. Officers advised that these need consolidating to provide consistency and reflect modern needs and aspirations. Model regulations are set out in appendix 2.
- 6.2 The Charter for the Bereaved sets out a range of minimum standards that the Institute of Burial and Cremation Management recommend. These include such matters as:
- defining the rights of every individual, and therefore sets out standards for burial, cremation, memorials, equalities;
  - seeking to increase choice;
  - seeking to increase participation and education.

Further information regarding the Charter can be found on the Institute of Burial and Cremation Management's website [www.iccm-uk.com](http://www.iccm-uk.com)

- 6.3 The Task Group was advised that Medway Bereavement Services should ideally be working towards complying with the IBCA Charter and seek formal accreditation as these assessments provide a national ranking.

## **7. Mercury and Environmental Matters**

- 7.1 Cremation of those with mercury-based fillings leads to mercury being released into the atmosphere. Mercury is a toxic heavy metal and exposure has been linked to damage to the brain and nervous system as well as links to fertility problems. Crematoria are seen as one of the biggest producers of this metal into the atmosphere within the UK.

Legislation requires that owners of crematorium make arrangements to abate (reduce through filtration) the production of mercury. The target is a reduction of 50% by 2012. This target may be achieved by:

- providing abatement equipment to a number of cremators;
- closure of the crematorium
- sharing the 'burden' with other crematoriums – this means that 50% of the crematoria across the UK have equipment fitted.

- 7.2 Providing abatement equipment is an option for Medway. No detailed surveys have been undertaken, but current (national) estimates suggest that it might cost around £250,000 per cremator. Medway has four cremators and in order to achieve the 50% target at least two cremators must be updated requiring expenditure of approximately £500,000. No allowances have been made for providing new cremators.
- 7.3 Members considered the closure of the crematorium, but this is not a realistic proposal as members of the public have already bought into the service and this would also be upsetting for families which have used this long-standing service.
- 7.4 Burden sharing is a system of monetary transfers between crematoria that provide mercury abatement equipment and those that do not. This system managed by an independent body that is being formed (called CAMEO). Essentially all crematoria belonging to the organisation pay in a sum of money based upon the number of cremations carried out annually and the proceeds are then divided up between those that have provided equipment. This is seen as a way in which the industry is policing itself and demonstrates to Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) that progress is being made and it rewards compliance. There is no track record for this scheme and Members felt that currently this was not an option for Medway's crematorium although the scheme should be regularly monitored.
- 7.5 DEFRA has shown concern over the slow progress in crematoria moving to provide equipment and has recently announced that if progress is not made it will start compelling the larger crematoria to provide the equipment. Current estimates are that 35% of crematoria might be expected to meet the full costs. Medway Crematorium would fall into this category.
- 7.6 The Task Group concurred that Medway should provide mercury abatement equipment and a budget proposal is given in Appendix 1. This assumes a 50% minimum level of compliance being required.

## **8 Task Group Evidence Gathering Sessions**

The Task Group met a total of five times. This included a site visit to the Medway Crematorium, Strood, Chatham and Rochester Cemeteries. The group was able to gather evidence and discuss issues affecting the service. The substance of Members' discussions is set out below and this demonstrates how the group agreed their final recommendations.

### **8.1 Service Standards**

Members considered feedback from a questionnaire that had gone out to service users asking them what they would like at cemeteries.

Members noted that currently there was a difference in regulations between cemeteries in Gillingham and Rochester and a set of regulations needed to be drafted from the two current sets of regulations, including the regulating of headstone heights. It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to make

many changes to those graves that were already in place, although this could be more achievable with unpermitted graves. It was noted that some objects placed by visitors personalising graves. It had been removed and grass laid over some graves.

## 8.2 Crematorium Facilities

The group discussed facilities at the crematorium and areas that could be improved, these included;

- Memorial space/memorial wall
- the car park
- changes to the chapel
- lighting
- music system/pa system outside

Costings for these were considered as part of the outline business plan as shown in appendix 1.

## 8.3 Grave space availability

The task group was informed that 15 % of people were buried and the rest cremated. Graves can be cleared after 100 years and headstones could remain. Most of the cemeteries have been digitally mapped. Records show the depth that bodies have been buried.

## 8.4 Long Term Financial Planning

The Task Group noted that the Service does makes a surplus. However, a renewal programme was needed to purchase new vehicles and further consideration needed to be given to the charges made to the public using the Bereavement Service.

It was agreed that the outline business plan covered this element of the business.

## 8.5 Memorial Safety

Members noted that the Bereavement and Registration Services Manager would like to introduce regulations regarding memorials and possible insurance to look after memorials.

## 8.6 Mercury

Members were advised that the preferred option would be for abatement equipment in the cremators to remove more than 50 % of mercury thereby achieving over and above the required level (see section 7 of the report)

## 8.7 Staffing Resources

The group discussed pressures on staff and acknowledged that two more administrative staff would go some way to ease the pressure experienced by

staff currently. Appendix 1 shows how two new posts could be funded and the current staffing structure is shown at Appendix 3. A suggestion was made regarding providing some areas of service on the Internet although it was recognised that most people prefer a personal service.

Members identified that increases in workload; rising expectations; new legislation, guidance and initiatives would have an impact upon the service. The management of memorials and grave ownership, mapping, wider engagement with stakeholders and initiatives such as Charter Mark status could not be achieved without building in additional capacity. Indeed additional resource is necessary just to keep pace with the increase in workload that has occurred since the crematorium opened.

The service aspires to delivering a high quality service that meets the expectations of customers and operates in a sensitive and competitive environment. To provide such a service requires adequate resources and the addition of two further Bereavement Services Officers would help meet this need.

## **9 Site Visits**

### **(i) Strood cemetery**

- Some kerbstones along paths were broken or had been knocked over. Members discussed how much these cost to maintain.
- Many graves were in disrepair.
- Members questioned whether flower beds should be kept or grassed over considering it was possible that drought orders could be imposed in future years.
- Grass strimmers damage headstones and consideration should be given to alternative forms of grass cutting equipment and looking at lawn sections and memorial removal schemes.
- The chapel is in good condition, although weeds need to be removed from guttering. The current budget does not allow for an adequate programme of maintenance.
- It might be possible to use some wasteland currently used as the storage area as a car park.
- A suggestion was made to lay concrete sections with headstones / burials to be placed on either side.
- Members considered whether people should be able to reserve specific areas of the cemetery for burials as graves then appear randomly in the cemetery. This then makes it harder for graves to be placed in rows later on.
- Signage positions could be better placed.

### **(ii) Rochester cemetery**

- This is the worst cemetery for vandalism.
- Members discussed improving the first memorial as you enter the cemetery, such as removing trees that surround it and adding plants.

- Areas with trees needed more management and some planting of new trees may be appropriate.
- Some headstones need refixing according to modern standards.

### **(iii) Chatham cemetery**

- There are temporary signs in the children's section instead of headstones. Members queried how long is considered temporary and how long these could be left. They also discussed whether a special case is made for children's graves.

### **(iv) Woodlands cemetery**

- This cemetery is a good model and it would be worth considering using the standards at this cemetery when considering overall regulations and standards for the others.
- War graves are really neat and tidy.
- Members discussed whether those that were cremated and then their ashes buried should be allowed to take up a whole grave space or should we restrict size or provide a separate well laid out burial area for this purpose.

Members noted in general that the Bereavement and Registration Manger would like an approved list of stonemasons with better systems of regulation and control and that there was a £5 charge for small signs stating that a grave was family maintained.

### **Medway Crematorium**

- There are now 2 gardeners in post rather than 4 as there had been previously. A head gardener had been responsible for managing planting schemes, tree felling and other ancillary works.
- Cozenton Nurseries sometimes bring people up to help out in the grounds. This was to provide them with work experience and the assistance was greatly appreciated, but the workers have to be closely supervised and this has a resource implication.
- There is a volunteer that also helps out in the grounds and it was agreed that a letter is sent to thank the volunteer for their help.
- The plan of St Nicholas cemetery should be restored.
- Records in the archives at the Crematorium were beginning to be put on computer. Although this was a slow, time consuming process and it was recognised that there would be benefits from having the records and maps in a digital format.
- 30% of cremations are of people from outside Medway.
- Currently there were 10,000 floor level plaques at the crematorium. Discussion took place around these and it was suggested that a slide system with brass plaques could be introduced.

- Discussion was held around extending the car park and one of the chapels and how this could best be achieved.
  - The furnaces are regularly re-bricked and it is estimated that one cremator is re-bricked annually.
  - Some discussion was held around mechanisms for financing modernisation and improvement programme.
- 9.1 Following the visits Members received a PowerPoint presentation, which demonstrated some of the problems within Medway's cemeteries and areas of good practice, as well as photographs of cemeteries belonging to other authorities. The following pictures show some examples.
- 9.2 Evidence for the review was taken from Paul Edwards, Bereavement and Registration Manager and the review was co-ordinated by Liane Dell, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator.



## Photographs



Strood Cemetery: This photo clearly demonstrates a typical broken memorial which is unsightly and dangerous.



Rochester - St Nicholas Cemetery: Dilapidated memorial stones which have become overgrown and poorly maintained.



Chatham Cemetery: Children's Section  
Non-permitted memorials – the Task Group recognised the particular sensitivities with children and babies.



Hillingdon, London - Northwood Cemetery: This demonstrates how attractive a controlled baby section can look.





Medway Crematorium: Floral tributes.

The Task Group recognised problems with the numbers and nature of tributes being left at the crematorium. Flowers are mostly wrapped in plastic which will not biodegrade.



Gillingham -Woodlands Cemetery: Tree maintenance has been limited. There have been no safety audits of any trees. Trees can damage memorials, provide hiding places and can be dangerous if not maintained.





Gillingham - Woodlands cemetery: It is essential to provide high standards of grounds maintenance to ensure that graves are treated with respect. Poor standards lead to complaints and damage. The removal of old memorials assist long-term maintenance and help reduce costs.



Strood Cemetery: non-permitted graves quickly fall into disrepair. These are not always attractive and can be dangerous. The liability for its removal inevitably falls to the Council. Fencing such as this can foul and damage grass-cutting equipment.



Hillingdon, London - Northwood cemetery: regularisation of memorials to specified standards assists grounds maintenance and visual amenity.



Hillingdon, London - Northwood cemetery: providing landings and fixing of memorials gives control and ensures better adherence to health and safety standards.





Ashford in Kent: Woodlands Cemetery



## 10 Terms of Reference

The Task Group considered each of its terms of reference in turn.

### (i) **To review and harmonise cemetery regulations across all Council owned cemeteries reflecting the unitary status of Medway Council.**

It was agreed that people want to be given choices when it comes to memorialisation. However, on occasion graves are personalised inappropriately and in an uncontrolled way which can lead to health and safety issues and a general deterioration of appearance. Once maintenance ceases or unsuitable materials are used, the Council is in the difficult position of having to arrange for clearance. The alternative is to leave them but this becomes unsightly and creates difficulties for grounds maintenance. Members were advised that when there had been a greater staff presence in the cemeteries there was better control and policing of cemeteries, regulation of memorials, planting and visitors behaviour.

It was suggested that a group could be formed and be part of The National Federation of Cemetery Friends to help conserve the cemeteries. This group would also provide presence at the cemeteries which may also help to police it. If this was pursued further officers would need to seek advice from the National Federation of Cemetery Friends on methods used in other areas to establish a group within Medway. Further information on the federation can be found at the following website [www.cemeteryfriends.org.uk](http://www.cemeteryfriends.org.uk)

### (ii) **To consider possible options for improving facilities at the crematorium and cemeteries to meet current and future demand.**

The mercury abatement equipment would cost in the region of £500,000. The group agreed that it was necessary for this work to be carried out.

Funding sources for improving the facilities overall were outlined in the business plan, this included:

- Reviewing rents from properties on cemetery land
- Retaining surpluses currently generated
- Consider the possibility of selling these properties

It was also noted that cremation fees had already been increased for 2006/2007 for the specific purpose of providing a fund for the provision of abatement equipment. It was thought that there was still some scope to increase fees further in order to carry out improvement measures across the cemeteries and crematorium.

Members considered whether the Bereavement Service should be set up as a separate business unit or as a Trust however it was agreed that this was beyond the scope of the group at this time.

The group agreed that the cemeteries should be improved and discussed ways of improving their overall appearance, dealing with broken graves in a sensitive manner and as well as any changes to cemeteries. Despite the sensitivities, this work was necessary, if improvements were to be made to the cemeteries. It was agreed that it was important to have media support for any action that the Council took, therefore discussion would be held with the Communications department regarding this.

Buildings, fences, walls and hard surfaces also required attention across all of the sites and needed regular maintenance if standards were to be raised.

(iii) **To review the way data is held and used regarding the mapping of grave space availability.**

During the site visit to the crematorium office the group had identified poor quality maps, registers and other paper records that were in daily use by all staff. It was agreed that having these records digitised would preserve historical records, provide better access for staff, give better audit information and deal with the health and safety issues of lifting heavy registers. It was estimated that mapping of grave space availability would cost in the region of £50,000. The group agreed that mapping should be a priority.

(iv) **To consider the long term financial planning of the Bereavement Service.**

The business plan detailed this aspect of the Service and Members referred to the document. The group concurred that the service to the user needed to improve and therefore long term financial planning was key to making the needed improvements.

There were issues regarding a lack of trained gardening staff at the cemeteries and crematorium. The group suggested that Cozenton Nurseries could provide help with horticultural work at the cemeteries and the crematorium. It was recognised that although such help might provide some useful support, there were issues around supervision and training.

(v) **To consider the issue of unsafe and broken gravestones and the national requirement to remedy the situation.**

The group considered that there could be a need for an approved list of stonemasons for future memorials. This way a standard could be set for the quality of the memorial.

In order to deal with the graves that had already fallen into disrepair it was agreed that these needed to be either removed or repaired. It was suggested that letters were sent to relatives informing them of broken headstones and allowing a certain amount of time for them to respond. It was also suggested that those with unpermitted graves were also

written to explaining that these needed to be removed. Signs should also be placed on the graves to say that grave clearance will be taking place.

Graves that have been cleared would be put into storage.

It was noted that Tunbridge Wells Bereavement Service speaks to people regarding their code of conduct for memorials.

The group agreed that funeral directors needed to be brought on board to explain to relatives what Medway Council expects in respect of its cemeteries and crematorium.

- (vi) **To investigate the options regarding mercury abatement equipment, taking into account legal requirements which will be in place by 2012.**

The group agreed that this work was necessary.

- (vii) **To review current staffing levels.**

The business plan covered staffing levels and it was agreed that these needed to be reviewed.

## **11. Conclusions**

- 11.1 Major phased investment in the service over a number of years is required to provide a better level of service provision and more modern facilities.
- 11.2 The task group identified that the overall standard of grounds maintenance was good and some buildings were in need of upgrading to raise the standard to meet public expectation, and it was recognised that attention was needed in the following areas:
- size of crematorium chapel
  - inadequate car parking
  - signage
  - record mapping facilities
  - management standards
  - staffing levels
- 11.3 The task group recognised stakeholder and public participation was limited and could be improved by greater communication, Friends of Cemeteries Groups, newsletters and higher profile attendance on sites.
- 11.4 Members recognise that there is a need to balance the needs of the existing users of the service, new service users and those of the community as a whole as well as having to give weight to environmental and sustainability issues.

## **12. Recommendations**

In consideration of the work carried out by the Task Group the recommendations to Cabinet are as follows:

### **Recommendations with a direct financial implication:**

- 12.1 That subject to authorisation from the licensing authority, mercury abatement equipment is fitted to enable the target level of 50% of cremations to be carried out in compliance with the Act by 2011 (as referred to in section 7 to the review report).
- 12.2 That subject to appropriate permissions from the local planning authority, Medway Crematorium enlarges one chapel and its car park by 2011.
- 12.3 That officers make arrangements for the digitisation of all maps and records.
- 12.4 That Cabinet notes and endorses the action to be taken by the Director of Community Services to increase administrative resources by two posts to enable the delivery of higher quality standards, particularly for registration and bereavement services.
- 12.5 That the Cabinet is recommended to agree the business plan set out in Appendix 1 to the review report which sets out 13 recommended pricing policies and proposes a programme of improvements and increases in the staffing establishment of the service. These proposals, to be funded by a combination of prudential borrowing, contributions made to the Environmental Surcharge Fund and from increases to the fees and charges made for burials and cremations. Fees and charges are approved by Council.
- 12.6 That the Service actively pursues an additional amenity for woodland burial.
- 12.7 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Community Services to adopt harmonised guidance, rules and regulations across all cemeteries in Medway as set out in appendix 2 to the report.

### **Recommendations to be investigated further by officers:**

- 12.8 That officers are instructed to commence working towards compliance with the Charter Standards and Excellence Criteria promoted by the Institute of Crematorium and Cemetery Management
- 12.9 That officers are instructed to set up systems of public and stakeholder consultation and seek advice from the National Federation of Cemetery Friends in setting up local groups and a forum.
- 12.10 That a mechanism is introduced for providing a gardening service for service users wishing to pay a fee for grave maintenance.

## **Background papers**

The Government Reply to the Eighth Report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 2000 –2001 HC91

## **Appendix 1**

### **Draft Business Plan for Bereavement Services**

The tables below identify the works that are required over the next three to five years in order to modernise and improve the bereavement service offered by Medway Council. The overall objectives are to provide services of the highest quality when compared to the market leaders, to provide a service that is sustainable and responsive to customer demands and seeks continual improvement. Service users should have a realistic choice; the services provided should be professional, caring and sensitive, and facilities should be within a fitting environment and enhance the life of the community.

It is anticipated that by a combination of fee increases, prudential borrowing and the retention of surplus funds, an appropriate programme of improvements could be funded. Broad details are shown below of the works and the costs, but these are best guess as detailed plans, specifications and schedules have not yet been prepared. There has been no allowance for replacing cremators and it has been assumed that activity levels remain static.

It is estimated that using the income and identified funding streams most significant works could be accommodated within a 4 - 6 year plan. Thereafter any surplus would be used to maintain buildings, improve facilities and standards of buildings and grounds maintenance on a rolling programme. Such funding might also be used to provide new cremators and mercury abatement equipment on the remaining cremators; develop underused wooded areas of the Crematorium for other forms of memorialisation. The surplus could be used to fund further borrowing in order to maintain programmes of improvements to the service (for example enlarge the second chapel or replace cremators).

Other options would be to:

- Establish a long-term maintenance fund
- Establish user groups/friends of Cemeteries.
- Continuing programme of cemetery improvements
- Continuing programmes of old grave clearances and setting out to lawn/garden.
- Provide customer care facilities (tea and restaurant facilities?).
- Develop one-stop-shops for the bereaved (Wolverhampton model?).
- Purchase further land (Podkin Meadow?) for memorialisation and disposal of ashes. Develop cemetery (Woodland) facilities elsewhere in Medway (Hoo/land adjacent to Woodlands Cemetery that is identified in the local plan?).

### **Mercury Abatement**

As one of the busier crematorium in the country, Medway will almost certainly be compelled to take remedial action by 2012. There are a number of ways in which this can be addressed:

1. Cease Operation.
2. Achieve 50% (minimum standard) compliance.
3. Share the (cost) burden with other crematorium.



4. There are possible alternatives. One provider, for example, is offering to provide cremators, abatement equipment, servicing and repairs for a 10-year period for the sum of £61.00 per cremation. At 2700 cremations per year the sum paid would amount to at least £1.65m.

Although there has been no formal survey or investigation current estimates indicate that this authority could provide 50% compliance within the due date.

| <i>Bereavement Services</i>                                    |                   |          |
|--|-------------------|----------|
| Capital Works  | Cost              | Priority |
| Mercury Abatement  | £500,000          | 1        |
| Enlarge Chapel   | £250,000          | 1        |
| Memorial safety, grave markers and plinths                     | £55,000           | 1        |
| Digitisation of paper registers/mapping                        | £50,000           | 1        |
| Enlarge car parking  | £30,000           | 1        |
| Chapel of meditation - paving                                  | £20,000           | 1        |
| Rose garden paving   | £42,500           | 2        |
| Memorial Garden  | £40,000           | 2        |
| Tree maintenance/safety works, land management and maintenance | £27,000           | 2        |
| Building decoration and maintenance                            | £25,000           | 2        |
| Cloister improvements  | £24,000           | 2        |
| Vehicles and equipment   | £20,000           | 2        |
| Chapel flooring (1 chapel)                                     | £15,000           | 2        |
| Lighting   | £10,000           | 2        |
| Catafalques  | £10,000           | 2        |
| Toilets  | £35,000           | 3        |
| Chapel of meditation - book cabinets                           | £20,000           | 3        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£1,173,500</b> |          |

The costs for chapel enlargement and mercury abatement are the two items with the greatest opportunity for deviating from the estimated costs.

Over the term of this project it is estimated that the spend profile will be as per the following table.

| 2007/08      | 2008/09       | 2009/10       | 2010/11       | 2011/12       |  | Total          |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--|----------------|
| Yr 1         | Yr 2          | Yr 3          | Yr 4          | Yr 5          |  |                |
| £            | £             | £             | £             | £             |  | £              |
| <b>37000</b> | <b>209000</b> | <b>161500</b> | <b>573000</b> | <b>193000</b> |  | <b>1173500</b> |

It is proposed to finance the costs of the above from a combination of prudential borrowing and using the contributions from the Environmental Surcharge Fund. Contributions to this fund come from a levy made on each cremation and for 2007/8 this is expected to raise approximately £86,000. Further increases to fees and

charges could raise additional revenue that could be used to fund the proposed work.

In addition to this revenue there is a possibility that the disposal of property could raise capital. Ordinarily any capital raised through the disposal of property would not be ring fenced and would contribute towards the Council's annual capital receipts target of £4 million, where it is then distributed according to the Council's priorities. A commitment to set aside this capital for this project is not considered inappropriate in this case.

Summary of Funding is shown in the following table:

|                      | £                |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Prudential Borrowing | 488,000          |
| Capital Receipts     | 200,000          |
| Funds and Revenue    | 486,000          |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>1,174,000</b> |

It is estimated that the proposed improvements could be accommodated within the service with no further financial burden being placed directly on the Council. This proposal is not without risk because the business case is based upon the current level of cremations. This figure could alter with competition from elsewhere, loss of confidence from stakeholders or changes to the local demographics.

In addition to extra income of £86,400 being generated from the 2007/08 fee increases for cremations, a further increase of £15.50 could generate further additional income of £41,800 (based on 2700 cremations) to meet the annual cost of prudential borrowing as in the table below.

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Annual costs of prudential borrowing over 20 years (Total sum = £488,000) repayments starting in April 2008 | £ 41,800.00 |
| Fee increase required to cover borrowing costs, based on 2700 cremations pa                                 | £ 15.50     |

The figures above do not include costs for additional posts required within Bereavement Services. The table below demonstrates the additional costs for employing two new members of staff, one in October 2007 and the second in October 2008. The totals shown below include the additional cremation fee required to employ the additional staff.

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| <b>October 2007 – April 2008</b>  |         |
| Additional staffing costs for 1 post (subject to evaluation) in Oct 2007                    | £23,000 |
| Increase in cremation fees per additional employee (approx)                                 | £8.50   |
| <b>October 2008 onwards</b>   |         |
| Total staffing cost for 2 <sup>nd</sup> post in Oct 2008 including new 2 <sup>nd</sup> post | £46,000 |
| Additional increase of cremation fee to cover 2 <sup>nd</sup> post                          | £8.50   |

In order to generate sufficient additional income from fees to cover prudential borrowing costs and additional staffing costs the fee for a cremation would have to

be increased by £32.50 by 1 October 2008 representing an increase of 8.7% over this period.

All fee increases have been attributed to cremations for the purposes of this report. More detailed work on apportioning some of the increases to other services that are currently available would be undertaken as part of the annual budget setting process.

The mercury abatement works and chapel improvements are unlikely to commence until 2009/10 and therefore the full borrowing costs will not be felt until that date, therefore the borrowing could be phased which would allow less dramatic increases in fees and charges.

## **Medway Bereavement Services Pricing Policy**

### **Introduction**

The following principles form a policy to provide an explanation for the charges levied on users of the service. The principles have been drawn up to encompass fairness, equality and sustainability and to underpin our commitment to continuously improving service.

The Council will therefore revise and review fees and charges to reflect this commitment and any surplus income will be used to carry out improvements to the infrastructure and maintenance of the Council's cemeteries and crematorium and to expand and improve the service and increase choice where necessary. The Council recognises that the current level of funding is insufficient to meet expectations, needs and aspirations and will therefore take a phased approach to setting fees and charges and reviewing the services available

The principle drivers for the policy are health and safety, maintenance standards, national quality standards, preservation of heritage, protected funding, provision of choice, service improvements, staffing, sustainability.

### **Pricing Policy 1: To set fees and charges for memorial, cremation, cemetery and burial services that enable long-term improvement and sustainability.**

- Land available for burial in Medway is a finite resource, and therefore priority will be given to the residents of Medway who have contributed to the Cemeteries and Burials Service through Council Tax and other payments. Subject to reasonable standards of equality, a premium charge may be levied for non-resident burials at double the resident burial fee in order to ensure that the provision of burial land is made available primarily to local residents.
- However, it is recognised that many longstanding residents move away from the area but wish to be buried in Medway. Therefore, in these circumstances, the needs of the bereaved and the wishes of the deceased need to be considered. Additionally those residents who, prior to death, were housed by the Council in an out of area care home are exempt from premium fees.

**Pricing Policy 2: To charge non-residents a premium to purchase the right of burial within Medway's cemeteries to preserve burial land for the local residents.**

**Pricing Policy 3: To respect the wishes of former residents of Medway to be buried in Medway even if they have not been resident within the last 5 years.**

**Pricing Policy 4: To charge a premium to transfer ownership of a grave, with remaining space, to a non-resident within 24 months of purchase**

### **Preserving Burial Land**

- It is recognised that the future availability of burial land must be addressed. The Council must consider the long-term needs of the residents as the availability of land for cemeteries diminishes. One method of addressing this problem is to reduce the period of time of lease of right to inter from 99 to 50 or even 30 years. This does not mean that the grave will be disturbed after 30 years as the grave space may be leased to owners for a further period on payment of the lease fee applicable at the time. This allows maximum flexibility for the authority and has significant advantages where memorials have been placed on graves. Owners do not have to renew their leases, but the lease of the grave would then revert to the Council. Any space remaining could then be allocated for further burial.
- A second method is to maximise the depth that graves are first dug. If all graves were dug to triple or quadruple depth this would increase the opportunity for additional grave use at a latter time.

**Pricing Policy 5: To lease the right for grave space for a period of 50 years, renewable by further leases in sets of 5-year or 10 periods, in order to potentially increase the land available for burial. Graves may be offered for longer periods but there will be a premium charge.**

### **Memorials and their Inspection**

- It is recognised that not all memorials are subject to regular maintenance by owners. Dilapidated memorials not only spoil the visual aspect of the cemeteries, but also potentially pose a risk. Therefore it is considered appropriate to charge a leasing or permit fee prior to a memorial being placed on a grave. This will provide for a regular memorial inspection to assess the condition and allow for remedial work to be carried out. Leases will be renewable after the thirty-year period and should leaseholders choose not to re-new the lease, then the Council may consider removing the memorial from the grave. The permit fee is intended to contribute towards the administration and regular inspection of the memorial.
- Memorials are placed in public areas and this introduces health and safety issues to the grave owner and the Council. Memorials should be subject to inspection, guarantees and insurance and be constructed from suitable materials that encourage longevity.
- The memorial permit fee is to cover the administration cost of the permit, initial inspection, safety inspections, repairs and additional grounds maintenance costs incurred.

**Pricing Policy 6: To permit the holder of the grave lease to erect suitable memorials on a purchased grave, by purchasing a ground lease to allow for the memorial placement and inspection. To prohibit the use of non-approved memorialisation.**

### **Bereavement Services Relating to Children**

- The service recognises the sensitivity of when there is a death of a child and therefore it is considered inappropriate to generate surplus income from the services relating to the death of children.

**Pricing Policy 7: To ensure that infant community burial fees are increased in line with inflation only.**

### **Grave Maintenance**

- It is recognised that the bereaved often wish to keep the grave planted and maintained to a very high standard. This has an added benefit of improving the overall appearance of the cemetery and should be encouraged.

**Pricing Policy 8: To facilitate better maintained graves the Council will set appropriate fees to accommodate grave maintenance programmes.**

### **Cemetery Chapels**

- The current fee levied for the hire of the cemetery chapel does not provide sufficient income to allow regular maintenance and re-decoration beyond emergency repairs. It is recognised that chapels play an important part in the funeral and that they should be properly maintained.

**Pricing Policy 9: To ensure that a regular programme of maintenance takes place and that suitable and sufficient facilities are available as a result of charging for the use of the Cemetery Chapels.**

### **Oversized Coffins**

- The use of oversized coffins and caskets results in larger graves, thereby decreasing the land available for new grave space and furthermore resources are required to complete the extra work involved in the digging and removal of material from larger graves. Therefore it is considered appropriate to charge for oversized coffins.

**Pricing Policy 10: To charge an additional fee for oversized coffins which reflects both the extra work and loss of land for future burials.**

### **Surveying of graves and registers**

- The Service has frequent requests from the public to survey graves to determine remaining spaces, interments of friends and family members, often for genealogical research and this incurs direct costs to the Service. Therefore the costs incurred by the Service are passed to the applicant.

- The maintenance of up-to-date and accessible records is vital for the proper management of the service

**Pricing Policy 11: To charge a fee for information in respect of interments unless directly related to a booked interment. To set fees for all services that reflect the costs of burial administration.**

### **Cremation and Cemeteries**

The fees charged for interment and the exclusive rights of burial are the principle forms of cemetery income; the income is necessary to support a range of services including grounds, buildings and infrastructure maintenance, staffing, health and safety, security and administration. The fees should therefore cover all operating costs. The aim is to provide a budget structure that sustains the service properly and fully and without any other direct subsidy from the taxpayer of Medway.

It is recognised that the cremation and burial and related activities form part of the same service and as such should be seen as a complete service. Any surplus generated therefore from either part should be available to support the whole of the service.

The dead and the bereaved should be given the highest standards of service.

**Pricing Policy 12: To set fees that reflect the service needs as a whole.**

**Pricing Policy 13: To charge fees that ensure the Crematorium is maintained to a high standard and these standards are maintained and improved where possible. The fees derived from the cemeteries are to be increased over time so as to allow continual improvement of the cemeteries to a standard equal, so far as is reasonably practical, to the crematorium.**



## **Appendix 2**

### **Guidance, Rules and Regulations for Cemeteries and Crematorium**

These regulations have been prepared as a balance between individual rights, the rights of all users and the needs to maintain a sustainable service. The cemeteries are operated in accordance with the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 and in respect of certain matters such as cremation, the disposal of non-viable fetuses, body parts and slides the council follows good practice and guidance provided by the FBCA and the ICCM.

The rules and regulations apply to the following:

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| Chatham Cemetery (inc Palmerston Rd Cemetery):       | Maidstone Road, Chatham   |
| St Margaret's Cemetery (inc St Nicholas's Cemetery): | Maidstone Road, Rochester |
| Strood Cemetery:                                     | Cuxton Road, Strood,      |
| Woodlands Cemetery:                                  | Woodlands Road, Gill      |
| Medway Crematorium:                                  | Robin Hood Lane, Chatham  |

**OFFICE OPENING HOURS** (Crematorium): Mon to Fri 09:00 - 17:00

#### **CEMETERY OPENING TIMES**

|                           |               |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Monday - Saturday         |               |
| 1 April – 30 September    | 09:00 – 19:00 |
| 1 October – 31 March      | 09:00 – 16:30 |
| Sundays and Bank Holidays | 09:30 – 16:30 |

#### **CREMATORIUM GROUNDS OPENING TIMES**

|                                 |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Summer (1 April – 30 September) |               |
| Monday – Friday                 | 08:00 – 18:00 |
| Saturdays                       | 10:00 – 18:00 |
| Sundays and Bank Holidays       | 11:00 – 17:00 |
| Winter (1 October – 31 March)   |               |
| Monday – Friday                 | 08:00 – 16:00 |
| Saturdays                       | 10:00 – 16:00 |
| Sundays and Bank Holidays       | 11:00 – 16:00 |

(Chapel of Meditation closes 15 minutes before the grounds are closed)

All visitors must vacate the grounds in good time and no less than 5 minutes prior to the publicised times of locking. The council reserves the right to close at any time without notice.

## **1 DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

Wherever these regulations require an opinion or approval to be given it shall be that of the Bereavement and Registration Services Manager. Any person aggrieved by such a determination may challenge it through the Council's complaints procedure but shall comply with the Manager's decision in the interim.

"Resident of the Borough" means any person who at the time of death lived or paid Council Tax in Medway. It includes any person who it would be reasonable to treat as a resident, such as a person who has moved away in the last 2 years or who had moved away on grounds of ill health or a person who can show 5 years (adult) or more continued residency. A Non-Resident is someone who has lived outside of Medway for a period of 5 years or more prior to their death.

A child or stillborn child is deemed to be a resident if delivery occurred within the area or either parent is resident.

"Body parts" will be deemed to be those belonging to a resident.

“Codes of Practice” include British Standards and Good Practice Guides

“Exclusive Right of Burial” (EROB) means the exclusive right of burial in a specific grave and is issued to the owner in the “Deed of Grant”; it does not provide or suggest any ownership of the land nor any other rights apart from those directly relating to exclusive burial rights and the right to erect an approved memorial, subject to permit. Exclusive rights may be offered for 30, 50, 75 or 99 years.

In the case of rights granted to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, these may be provided in perpetuity.

“Flowers” include potted plants, shrubs, tributes and other forms of floral decoration.

“Grave” means a burial place formed in the ground by excavation.

“Memorial” refers to any approved headstone, monument, kerb, chippings, cross, vase, tablets or other stone approved by permit. “Memorial area”, refers to the area on a grave where a memorial is or where it would be if one were permitted. Nothing shall extend beyond this notional boundary.

“Memorial Mason” may include ‘contractor’ or ‘stone mason’.

“Memorial Right” is the right to erect and maintain a memorial in a specific plot in the cemetery and is for a limited period, which may be limited. The responsibility for maintenance lies with the registered grave owner.

“Private Grave” means a grave where the ‘Exclusive Right of Burial’ has been purchased.

“Public Grave” or ‘Public Un-purchased Grave’ is a grave that has no exclusive burial rights attached and may be used at the discretion of the council. There are no rights to erect a memorial attached to a public grave.

The “Applicant” is the person who completes applications forms and makes the funeral arrangements.

“Cemetery” means the Cemeteries provided by the Council.

“The Council” means Medway Council: the term Council includes employees and contractors operating on its behalf.

The terms “Council” and “Cremation Authority” and “Burial Authority” also refer to Medway Council and may be interchangeable for the purposes of any regulations or correspondence.

“Working days” means days on which the Office situated at Medway Crematorium is open.

## **2 FEES & CHARGES**

All fees and charges are payable in advance to the Council. The Council may make prior written arrangements with business users for payment on monthly account. Fees are revised annually and it is for the applicant to satisfy themselves of any fees that may be charged or become due.

## **3 RECORDS**

Public records are available for viewing at Medway Crematorium by appointment. There are restrictions on access and there is a charge for assisted searches.

## **4 GENERAL REGULATIONS**

No person shall commit any nuisance in a cemetery.

No person shall play at any game or sport in a cemetery, or wilfully create any disturbance in a cemetery

No person shall wilfully interfere with any burial taking place

No person shall wilfully interfere with any grave or vault, any memorial or other memorial, or any flowers or plants on any such matter

Funeral processions shall take precedence and the council may restrict access to any person or persons during the duration of any funeral.

Persons under the eighteen are not permitted unless they are under the direct supervision of a responsible adult.

Motor vehicles are permitted at the council's discretion and may be driven only on the designated roadways. No parking is permitted on grass verges. No vehicle is to be left on single-track roadways or in a position so as to cause obstruction to other traffic. Vehicle access may be restricted or cancelled at anytime without notice. Pedestrians shall have rights of way at all times, excepting in the case of a funeral procession.

No human remains shall be scattered in any part of the cemetery and no remains other than Human will be accepted. Authorised employees must be present at any committal of remains to the ground.

No dogs are permitted with the exception of special assistance dogs.

No employee of the council, or its contractor, may demand or receive any gratuity. Monies must only be paid to the office where a written receipt will be offered.

No goods of any kind may be offered for sale or advertised on land owned by or under the control of the Council.

No person shall drop, throw or otherwise deposit and leave any wastepaper or refuse of any kind except in the receptacles provided for that purpose.

No person shall enter or remain in the Crematorium or Cemetery at any hour when it is closed to the public unless specifically authorised by the Council.

Any Officer of the Council or a Police Constable may remove any person offending against any of these rules and regulations from the grounds.

## **5 GRAVES**

Every interment shall take place either in a private grave or in a public grave that will be selected by the Council.

The Council may offer selection and reservation of a private grave subject to the payment of the appropriate fee. The council reserves the right to revoke or relocate such purchases for reasons of health and safety, access or insufficient grave space. Where graves rights are revoked, an alternative grave will be offered or the original fee repaid to the registered owner. No person shall be entitled to pre-purchase more than two graves.

A Deed of Grant in respect of the Exclusive Right of Burial shall be issued to the person whom, or on whose behalf, the Exclusive Right of Burial is purchased and that person shall be registered in the records held by the Council as owner of the grave.

Graves shall be purchased or pre-purchased and no grave may be reserved without full payment.

The Council shall only recognise the registered owner. Any transfer of the Exclusive Right of Burial shall not be deemed valid unless such transfer has been properly executed and entered in the appropriate grave register.

Upon expiry, the Exclusive Rights of Burial may be renewed, at the discretion of the council, for a period of up to 10 years.

No purchased grave shall be opened without satisfying the council that the grave owners permission has been obtained. The Deed of Grant shall be produced unless the council can be assured that the (written) consent of the registered owner, or, in certain circumstances, of their legal representative is given. The applicant must satisfy the Council of their entitlement to open any grave.

The Exclusive Right of Burial may be offered back to the council. Where the grave has not been used the council may pay to the registered owner a sum equal to the original purchase price or 33% of the current value, whichever is the lesser amount. No payment shall be made in the case of a grave that has been used for burial.

Where the owner of a grave is to be buried within that grave and no other person wishes to be assigned the rights and responsibilities of the exclusive right then the executor shall surrender the exclusive right to the Council. Where the exclusive right is not available the executor shall certify that all rights revert to the Council.

## **6 BOOKING SERVICES**

Any instruction given relating to a provisional funeral booking reservation time will be received at the sole risk of the person giving such orders or instructions. The Council will not be responsible for any misunderstanding that may arise with regard to any booking given by telephone, facsimile machine, electronic mail or similar system. Any booking by telephone will be regarded as provisional until the formal Notice of Cremation or Interment is received at the Bereavement Services Office. The council will not accept responsibility for errors or omissions on any application.

When a booking has been made, no alteration of details will be allowed unless the alteration is confirmed in writing. Where applications or alterations are received after the office has closed these will be deemed to have arrived on the 'following working day'. No responsibility for any arrangements will be taken unless received in writing: e-mail, facsimile or telephone shall not be deemed to be sufficient

No alterations shall be permitted after 9.00 AM of the working day preceding the funeral. In the case of any burial alterations are subject to degree and effect on the service.

The Bereavement and Registration Services Manager must be informed of any persons who may have died from an infectious disease.

All forms must be delivered to Medway Crematorium Office no later than:

- 9.00 am, one working day prior to the date of cremation
- 9.00 am three working days prior to the date of the interment.

Shorter periods may be possible for interments subject to the payment of any additional fees that may be demanded.

Longer time periods may be necessary where there is any defect, omission or issue with any application.

Any cancellation of a service may incur a charge in respect of any work that has already been carried out or where other bookings may have been lost.

The Council may make a charge for any overrun in service time and/or alternatively reserves the right to terminate any funeral where it is over-running.

## **7 INTERMENTS**

No less than 3 days before the funeral any memorial, planting or other obstruction must be removed, at the owners expense, from any grave so as to permit unfettered grave preparation.

Only persons approved by the council shall be permitted to excavate graves. Subject to written notice being given, mourners may assist, under supervision, in the backfilling of the grave only.

The Council may deposit soil in any location and maintains the right to use soil boxes or similar equipment and place them on graves adjacent to those being opened, without notice. The soil box will be removed as soon as practical after interment and the grave reinstated. Although every effort will be made to return graves back to their original condition the Council shall not be liable for any damage or removal of any items that are not subject to a permit.

No coffin will be buried less than 900 mm (3 feet) below ground level unless the Council considers the soil to be of suitable character, where permission may be given for the burial to be no less than 2 feet below the level of any adjoining ground, as long as the coffin is made of perishable materials.

Every coffin placed in a brick lined grave or vault must be covered and sealed with a reinforced concrete slab of not less than 50mm (2 inches) and entombed in such a manner as to make the vault airtight. Where brick graves are required, it shall be for the registered owner to undertake the work and provide the authority with such plans, drawings and method statements as they may require. These requirements may be requested for any re-open. New brick lined graves shall be regarded as occupying no less than two standard grave spaces.

The Council shall dig any grave to a depth that allows the authority to maximise future grave use and re-use.

In the event of a Notice of Interment being cancelled after the Council has commenced work, the council may retain whole or part of the interment fee.

On every opening of a grave in which the exclusive rights have been purchased, the Deed of Grant and written authority of the registered owner must be produced with the notice of interment. Except in the case of an 'owner-burial' or where ownership is being reverted back to the council, the transfer of ownership must take place before the grave can be opened unless the burial is for the registered owner. In cases where the deed has been mislaid, the registered owner may provide written authority.

No grave in respect of which any charge remains unpaid will be re-opened.

The Registrars certificate must be provided before the funeral commences: where the certificate has been issued, but forgotten, the funeral director must sign a declaration in accordance with the Births and Deaths Registration Act (1926) before the funeral takes place.

All coffins must bear a nameplate or other suitable form of identification and must contain the name of the deceased and the date of death and exactly how it appears in any application

for interment. Each individual adult and child shall be in a separate coffin; the only exceptions being where a mother dies in childbirth or when twins or multiple births die in childbirth.

**8 INTERMENTS** (A full graveside service is considered a 'Chapel Service in the context of these times):

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Monday to Thursday (Chapel service):    | 9:30 – 2:00 |
| Fridays (Chapel service):               | 9:30 – 1:30 |
| Monday to Thursday (Straight to grave): | 9:30 – 2:30 |
| Fridays (Straight to grave):            | 9:30 – 2:00 |

Later times may be available upon request and subject to an additional charge.

**9 GRAVE MAINTENANCE AND AFTERCARE**

After any interment, the grave shall be backfilled and levelled off or mounded. The Council will top new graves for a period of six months after interment. During this period the council will remove anything from graves that interferes with this procedure without notice.

Anything placed upon a grave apart from an approved memorial becomes the property of the Council. Suitable shrubs, plants or flowers may be planted but the council reserves the right, without compensation, to prune, cut down or dig up and remove any such plant which, interferes with the good management and maintenance of the cemetery. Any plants within a purchased grave that is not subject to a memorial permit and contained within an approved kerb, are left at the grave owners risk.

**10 MEMORIALS**

Where memorials are removed they may be left temporarily in the cemetery provided that it does not cause offence or obstruction or is placed such that anyone might reasonably believe that it is on the grave of another person. Should the Council receive any complaint in respect of the position of any memorial so left it will require the memorial to be removed within 48 hours. Temporarily means a period not exceeding 6 months. If this period is to be exceeded the memorial must be removed complete from the cemetery or relocated to a designated area.

The council reserves the right to:

- Remove any memorial, which is not maintained in a position and manner to the satisfaction of the Council.
- To remove any memorial or alter its position, if such a course appears to the council to be desirable in order to preserve the amenities of the cemetery
- To remove any memorial in order to facilitate the opening of any grave..

A monument may only be erected on a grave that has an exclusive right of burial. Nothing shall be placed upon a grave without a written permit from the Council. Permits will only be issued for approved forms of memorialisation.

Wooden, wire or metal fences or similar, boulders, rocks and concrete surrounds are not permitted. The council may approve the use of certain plastics and glass fibre in the construction of memorials and memorial surrounds as it thinks fit. Non permitted memorials may be removed and any costs incurred may be passed to the grave owner.

All graves and anything placed upon them must be kept in good repair at all times by the owners.

The Council may provide fixing joggles, landings or other appropriate fixing devices and where these are provided these must be used.

The Council may provide directly or through approved agents memorial surrounds on a temporary basis.

The Council may direct the positioning of any memorial as it thinks appropriate and in accordance with the location and direction of other nearby memorials. Grave owners have no rights to request that any memorial be placed in a specific location on a grave. The council will direct that memorials are placed in a position that assist the council in undertaking its duties of grounds maintenance.

The Council may designate parts of the grounds as Lawn Cemetery or traditional sections. All new sections will be lawn sections. On these sections a small section at the head will be available for erection of a monument and placing of tributes. This will be designated as the *Tribute Area* and will be as set out by the Council.

Erection of monuments is only permitted during office working hours. Any vehicle, plant, equipment must be removed from the cemeteries by 4.30 Monday – Friday. Saturday working may only be permitted by prior arrangement.

Excepting in the case of any memorial that is dangerous and requiring immediate attention, the Council will require, by Notice, the grave owner to repair any unsafe memorial. Where there is any failure to comply with the requirements of any notice, the council may carry out remedial works without liability and any costs shall be recoverable from the owner as a simple contract debt or entered in the grave register as a debt.

A “Right to Erect” a new memorial on a grave will be subject to a 30 year agreement, or for the remaining period of the EROB, whichever is the shorter. This right may be renewable for a further determined period by the Council on expiry. Such rights will only be issued to a registered grave owner.

The Right to Erect a memorial shall only follow once a permit being returned to the Council. This Right shall remain in place subject to an inspection and submission of a safety inspection report by a properly qualified stonemason (or other such person as may be approved by the Council) once every five years (of the anniversary of installation). Any rights may be terminated should any inspection or necessary repairs not be carried out.

Memorial Dimensions (Maximum Permitted). These are maximum dimensions and the mason shall make every allowance in his or her design to allow for individual ground conditions and site circumstances so as to ensure that maximum sizes are not exceeded. Maximum height shall be measured from a point on the ground immediately behind the highest part of the memorial.

| Lawn Memorials       |        | Cremated Remains |       |
|----------------------|--------|------------------|-------|
| Height               | 90 cm  | Height           | 75 cm |
| Width                | 90 cm  | Width            | 60 cm |
| Length               | 90 cm  | Length           | 60 cm |
| Traditional Sections |        | Children's       |       |
| Height               | 120 cm | Height           | 75 cm |
| Width                | 90 cm  | Width            | 60 cm |
| Double width         | 180 cm | Length           | 120cm |

These sizes include the memorial and any space required for personal memorials and planting.

Only memorial masons who appear on the councils approved list will be permitted to undertake any work. Application to be put on the register is subject to meeting and providing:

1. Copy of public liability certificate. The scheme requires that every participant shall be insured for public liability to the value of five million pounds (minimum) for any one incident.
2. Copy of employers liability certificate
3. The scheme requires that every participant shall be insured for employers liability to the value of ten million pounds (minimum).
4. Copy of current summary of health & safety policy and details of where the full policy is held.
5. Copy of risk assessment (applies on entry through the cemetery gate.)
6. Copy of written guarantee – 10 year minimum including stability and safety of a memorial. It is strongly advised that this is tied into a 5 year Maintenance check.

Membership of BRAMM may be accepted as having fulfilled the necessary criteria, but is not a requirement of the scheme.

The Council may display a list of approved masons and those masons removed from any list in any cemetery, advertising, websites, literature as it thinks fit.

The Council may require that any application to provide a memorial shall include full construction details, fixings and foundations, inscriptions and designs, and any other detail as it thinks necessary.

It is for the memorial mason to design and install any memorial such that it is securely fixed and meets the relevant codes of practice. The mason shall ensure that all landings, beams, lintels and other foundations comply with the relevant British Standards and Codes of Practice and are securely fixed and take into account the localised ground conditions.

All memorials shall be set square, level and not to exceed the maximum dimensions. Masons shall take into account the local ground conditions, slope and incline and ensure that no memorial is set, at any point, higher than the maximum dimensions. Any calculation shall include for any concrete or similar landing.

The Council shall test all memorials upon completion of work and this shall include a topple test. Memorials must pass the topple test in order for the memorial to be entered in the appropriate register. No testing shall take place for a period of at least 28 days following installation.

No work in any cemetery shall take place without a permit. The mason shall have a copy of any permit on his or her person and available for inspection by a Council officer and where a permit is not presented, the Council reserves the right to order all works to be ceased and the area cleaned, tidied and vacated until a permit has been provided. Any permit may set out general or specific terms and conditions for installation.

The name of the monumental firm supplying and erecting the monument may be cut in lettering no less than 20 mm in height and no more than 50 mm high on the reverse or side of the memorial. The section and number of the grave must be similarly cut plainly on the monument in a clearly visible position.

All persons working in a cemetery shall be appropriately dressed which shall, as a minimum, be appropriate shorts and tee shirts that cover the tops of arms.

Any spoil, arisings or other material created in the course of working in a cemetery shall be removed by any person working in the cemeteries. The council may allow certain waste to be deposited in approved locations.



Permits are issued by the Council as an approval for the works to commence. The return of the permit shall signify that all works have been properly completed to the design set out in the application and any deviation from the submitted scheme shall be explained by the person who made the application. Where no permit is returned no entry shall be made in the appropriate register and the memorial shall remain unpermitted and may therefore be removed in accordance with these regulations. Where any contractor fails to return a permit, the authority may refuse to issue any further permits for any works in any of its cemeteries.

Permits shall remain in force for a period of six months after which an extension shall be required.

Where there is a failure to properly install any memorial the Council shall write to the installer and the grave owner advising of the failure and giving a reasonable time within which to remedy. Where the defects are not remedied, the authority shall have the right to remove the memorial (and recover any expenses). Any person found fitting memorials improperly for the third occasion in any cemetery, the shall be removed from the approved list and will not be allowed to undertake any further work for a period of no less than 1 year. Admission back onto the list will be subject to current references.

Permits shall be required for the installation of any memorial, the fitting of any ground anchor or other structural work. Permits shall not be required for cleaning, on site lettering, replacement chippings and other similar minor works. Where contractors are found abusing this system, they shall be removed from the list of approved masons.

Stone masons and other contractors shall be able to undertake grave maintenance works without the need for permits. Grave maintenance refers to the planting out of annual plants, shrubs and installation of any approved temporary surrounds.

## **11 WOODLAND BURIAL**

Apart from immediately following any funeral, flowers shall not be placed on any woodland grave.

Bodies buried in Woodland graves must not have been embalmed unless the funeral director can provide written assurance that treatments are environmentally sound and the process is necessary for public health reasons. Bodies must be contained in a biodegradable coffin.

## **12 CREMATORIUM**

No cremation is permitted unless authorised by the Medical Referee.

No portion of the coffin shall be removed from the Crematorium following the Committal Service unless for a lawful purpose and in which case the applicant for the cremation shall be notified. The only exception to this is where any coffin does not comply with the constructional requirements and in such cases the person supplying the coffin shall take steps to remedy the defect on the Crematorium premises.

Only coffins intended for cremation shall be permitted for which specific guidance is available separately. No coffin will be accepted at the crematorium unless it is clearly identified with the name of the deceased.

Any person may, by giving at least 24 hours notice, witness the coffin being placed in the cremator chamber. No more than 6 adults will be admitted at any one time.

No cremated remains will be accepted at the Crematorium for disposal that are not accompanied by a Certificate of Cremation or in specific cases appropriate documentation to the satisfaction of the registrar. No remains other than Human will be accepted.

Where no specific instructions are received from the applicant, cremated remains may be strewn in the crematorium grounds no less than 14 days after the date of the cremation.

Cremated remains will only be released to the person authorised by the applicant for the funeral.

Arrangements may be entered into for the recycling of certain metals recovered during the course of the cremation process.

Any unauthorised memorialisation that may have been placed independently in the Gardens may be removed immediately.

Floral tributes consisting only of fresh, cut flowers may be placed in the Gardens of Remembrance and the Chapel of Meditation provided that they do not cause offence, inconvenience or danger to others. These should not include any wrapping or other artificial materials. The grounds will be cleared of all flowers and other items on at least one occasion a week, but this may be more frequently if they are in poor condition or the grounds considered untidy.

The Chapel of Meditation may be cleared of all flowers and tributes no less than daily.

Only memorialisation provided by the Council will be permitted in the crematorium grounds and any type of memorialisation in any part of the grounds not approved by the Council will be removed without notice.

No guarantee is given that memorials will be fixed or re-fixed in any specific location. Spaces cannot be reserved without payment of the appropriate fee.

In the interests of efficiency and in accordance with the relevant codes of practice, any coffin may be set aside for cremation at a latter date.

### **13 MUSIC**

The council takes no responsibility for the copyright, playability or safekeeping of music supplied.

The Council may provide a selection of music but substitution may be provided without penalty. Where there is a specific piece of music that is required and essential, the persons arranging the funeral shall provide special and specific equipment that they will operate. Such equipment shall be independently powered.

### **14 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

The Council supports the Charter for the Bereaved, which is a commitment to improving the service and defines the rights of every individual who experiences bereavement. It recognises their needs and rights and seeks to support these standards and it is the right of the bereaved to complain in the event of any dissatisfaction or failure relating to their rights not being offered by the Council.

### **15 RESERVED RIGHTS OF MEDWAY COUNCIL**

These Regulations repeal and cancel all previous Regulations made by the Council or their predecessors with respect to the Cemeteries and Crematorium in the said Borough.

The Council reserves the right, after due consideration with relevant organisations, to alter

these Rules and Regulations or any part of them from time to time as they may see fit and may make supplementary rules and regulations specific to named cemeteries.

## **16 MAINTENANCE STANDARDS**

### **CEMETERY GROUNDS**

In caring for the cemetery grounds we aim to achieve the following maintenance standards  
Grass will be cut every: 14 days. Some areas may not be cut when protecting plant and wildlife

Grass cutting and strimming is only carried out during the growing season from the start of April to the end of October.

Grass cutting may be omitted, for an area of 300mm (12") around individually planted graves or particular memorials where damage may be caused.

Leaf clearance, where undertaken, will commence in November and be completed by the end of March.

All roads and hard surfaces will be kept weed free and will be swept as and when necessary by hand.

All flowerbeds will be planted annually and maintained every 14 to 17 days.

Graves are not specifically maintained. Grassed graves may be cut in accordance with the above. Inappropriate plants will be removed at our discretion. Weeds will be cut back or strimmed from grave tops and memorials at the discretion of the service. Planting that extends beyond the memorial area on any grave will be cut back, strimmed or otherwise removed.

### **CREMATORIUM**

In caring for the memorial gardens we aim to achieve the following maintenance standards

The Lawn areas will be cut every: 12 days. Some areas may not be cut when protecting plant and wildlife. Grass cutting and strimming is only carried out during the growing season from the start of April to the end of October.

Each flower and shrub bed will be weeded and edged, where appropriate, every: 21 days

Roses will be inspected for disease and aphid infestation every: 10 days

Roses will be treated within: 10 days (*and thereafter as required*)

Paths will be edged every: 21 days

Paths will be inspected and any repairs completed within 90 days.

Shrubs will be pruned annually.

The wooded area will be kept natural, but nettles, brambles and unsightly weeds may be strimmed or treated with an appropriate herbicide.

An area of longer grass will be maintained around numbered trees.

Roses will be fed after pruning and before the growing season each year; watered as required to keep them healthy; heads will be removed after each flush of bloom.

Shrubs and trees will be replaced as required over the winter period.

Shrubs and trees will be pruned and cut back in accordance with their seasonal requirements.

These standards are subject to weather conditions permitting work.

## **17 SERVICE STANDARDS**

### **General**

Telephone calls are answered within 20 seconds

Written correspondence is responded to within 10 working days (e-mails in 5 working days)

Complaints are investigated within 3 working days

## **Burial**

Burials are arranged with 3 working days notice. This is to allow proper allocation and identification of grave space, checking for burial or memorial rights, ascertaining hazards or problems with the grave and surrounding area, arranging excavation, co-ordination and receipt of instructions and other information.

## **Cremation**

Cremations are arranged with 2 working days notice.  
Literature is posted to the applicant within 7 days of the cremation

## **Memorial Gardens**

Applications for dedications are processed within 72 hours of receipt  
Dedications are in place within 10 weeks from application

## **Book of Remembrance**

Applications for entries are processed within 72 hours of receipt  
Entries are ready to view within 12 months of application/anniversary

## **Cremated Remains**

Collection of cremated remains is possible within 48 hours (24 hours with notice)

## **Grave searches**

Written applications are processed within 28 working days from receipt.

## **Grave maintenance**

Applications are processed within 72 hours of receipt

## **Memorials**

Transfer applications are processed within 28 working days from receipt  
Memorial permits are processed within 28 days of receipt  
New memorials are inspected for safety within 21 working days of installation

**Organisational Chart – Bereavement Services**