

Briefing Note

Title: Burial Places in Wolverhampton and the Crematorium**Date:** 28 August 2019**Prepared by:** Steve Woodward**Job Title:** Head of Environmental Services**Intended
Audience:**Internal ☐Partner organisation ☐Public ☒Confidential ☐

This briefing note was commissioned following a special meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel which looked at the processes to be followed after a death. They recommended that the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel should receive a general report on the Burial and Crematorium Services specifically addressing the following.

- The Crematorium booking system, waiting times and delays particularly during the winter season.
- Provision of burial places in Wolverhampton and how much space was left. In addition, what land had been set aside for different religious groups, its suitability and how long it is likely last. Secondly, whether there are any plans for setting land aside in the future for burial purposes.

1.0 Purpose

To consider the information relating to Bereavement Services requested by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel.

2.0 Bereavement Services Overview

- 2.1 Bereavement Services has no statutory requirement however, the City of Wolverhampton Council are committed to the provision of burial and cremation services. Whilst the Public Mortuary is provided under the Public Health Act 1936, in the absence of available suitable facilities at the local hospital.
- 2.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council formally adopted the Charter for the Bereaved in March 2004 and in doing so, committed to measuring the performance of Bereavement Services against the only national standard developed specifically for the funeral industry in the UK and the service has achieved the Gold Award.
- 2.3 The service continues to offer a range of services ensuring that equality issues are met, that service users have a variety of choice available to them and that the structure

of fees and charges applied is fair and favourable compared to other Local Authorities and nationally.

- 2.4 Officers within the service are also involved in establishing and maintaining a programme of work to ensure the safety of memorials in the Council's four designated closed churchyards these are St Marys (Bushbury), St Thomas's (Wednesfield), St Phillips, St Michaels and all Angels (Tettenhall).
- 2.3 The Coroners service is also part of the Bereavement Service function. The Mortuary is situated in Wednesfield town centre adjacent to the Police Station in Alfred Squire Road. The facility currently has 30 refrigeration and 5 freezer spaces. These will shortly change to 25 refrigeration and 10 freezer spaces.

3.0 Background and context

- 3.1 Bereavement Services currently offers a cremation facility at Bushbury Crematorium and maintains seven cemeteries where adult burials and cremated remains burials take place on a regular basis.
- 3.2 At present three of the cemeteries, namely Bushbury, Danescourt and Beacon Hill can accommodate new full adult graves for burial, accommodating all the City's cultural needs. Bushbury and Beacon Hill cemeteries have non-denominational new burial spaces where multiple faiths are accommodated within the same area. Danescourt Cemetery is split into four sections, General, Roman Catholic, Church of England and Muslim. New sections are still available on a needs must basis, (see table in 3.5). Jewish burial spaces are available at Merridale cemetery only. The levels of existing space are monitored on a regular basis by the Bereavement team. New cremated remains graves are available at several sites across the City and again the usage of the grave space is reviewed on an on-going basis.
- 3.4 Based on the current uptake of graves namely around **200 new full burials and 160 new cremated remains graves per year**, grave space is reducing year on year and it is essential that due consideration is given to the sustainability of the service to ensure that new burial space is available, at a choice of cemetery, to all service users in the long-term future. In total up to 600 full burials along with 500 cremated remains interments are carried out annually into new and existing graves.

3.5 **The table below provides a summary of the current capacity for new graves and for cremated remains graves provision.**

Cemetery	Full Earth Grave Capacity	Cremated Remains Grave Capacity
Beacon Hill	Approximately 2 years	Approximately 10 years
Bilston	Closed – site full. Small extension being considered and 160 new graves could be made available	Cremated remains and Vaults available, approximately 5 years
Bushbury	Approximately 15 years	Approximately 25 years
Danescourt	Approximately 10 years	Approximately 10 years
Hall Green	Closed – site full	Approximately 20 years
Merridale	Closed – site full	Closed – site full
Penn	Closed – site full	Approximately 1 years

3.6 Bushbury Crematorium continues to be an extremely busy facility, carrying out circa 2,800 cremations per annum, thus making it the 16th busiest individual crematorium out of the 290 crematoria within the UK. It is the busiest individual crematorium in the West Midlands region. All cremations are booked via the funeral directors through Customer Services, who have access to our booking system (Epilogue). This service is available Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm excluding bank holidays. The crematorium is open Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays, accommodating a maximum of 18 pre-set 45-minute services a day between 9am and 4pm in two chapels. We have service availability on most days. It is generally the Funeral Directors that cannot accommodate the families at those available times. Extreme weather conditions can cause spikes in the death rate, which may cause short delays within the service. There may be delays over bank holiday periods to accommodate services lost.

3.7 It is important that the service continues its efforts to offer a first-class facility and keep up to date with new initiatives and in recent years has introduced a modern media music system (Wesley music system) and continues to offer many forms of memorialisation for families following cremation so that they have a lasting memory of their loved ones.

3.8 The operation of the Crematorium is regulated under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and it is important that cremation and filtration equipment is maintained to a suitable standard.

4.0 Proposals/Options to Consider

4.1 Consideration will need to be given to sustaining burial capacity for the future and new potential burial grounds within the City, will need to be identified and developed with appropriate funding being made available. Bereavement Services will need to work with Corporate Landlord to identify future burial space. Consideration could be given to purchasing the small pieces of privately-owned ground adjacent to Penn Cemetery and Danescourt Cemetery giving us continuity of service. Bushbury Cemetery was

extended approximately 10 years ago, however some of the ground is not fit for purpose without installation of extensive drainage, which will have financial implications.

- 4.2 New initiatives and trends in offering families more choice at their cremation funeral service are developing and it is important that facilities at Bushbury Crematorium are kept up to date through “invest to save” projects such as the introduction of screens to display photographs, web casting and DVD recording of services, all of which have a potential additional income stream. Furthermore, we will explore the introduction of pre-paid Cremations.
- 4.3 At present, as well as the Public Mortuary in Wednesfield, Bereavement Services operates an administrative office from the Civic Centre and operationally at the Crematorium itself. Consideration needs to be given to bring the administration and operational teams together, to both be based at the Crematorium. This will instantly ensure that an improved range of service is offered to all our customers from one central location, the site at Bushbury Crematorium being the preferred location. In order to do this, a new purpose-built administrative facility will be required or the adaptation of existing buildings at the Crematorium and also at Northcote Farm, where office space may be an option.

5.0 Risk to the Service

- 5.1 Planning permission is being considered for a new a private Crematorium to be built nearby in between Essington and Bloxwich and commences operating in 2020/21.
- 5.2 This will undoubtedly influence the number of service users that use Bushbury Crematorium and therefore may have a detrimental effect on income from using the facility.
- 5.3 It is vitally important that Bushbury Crematorium remains competitive with any other local cremation providers from the standard of facilities offered, to the range of after care services such as memorialisation, and the charges levied to bereaved families.
- 5.4 Identification of suitable burial ground in the medium term ensuring burial capacity in future years.
- 5.5 Once a churchyard is closed, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) may apply to the LA to take over its maintenance under the Local Govt Act 1972 and Wolverhampton has four sites. Section 215 of the Act states that the LA would be responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard, including the memorials (safety of) and its boundary walls and fences and path surfaces. Trees are also included.
- 5.6 The implications in respect of 5.5 above is that the costs of maintaining the four sites will increase year on year.