

CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Lee Hunt, at his meeting held on Thursday, 5 October 2023 at 2.00 pm at the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Lee Hunt (in the chair)

Councillor George Madgwick
Councillor Asghar Shah

4. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Benedict Swann.

5. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

6. Provision of Community Funerals (AI 3)

The report was introduced by Steve Bell, Regulatory Services Lead.

Mr Bell then gave a summary of two of the points previously raised:

With regard to publishing community funerals on MIS, Mr Bell said that it is a very delicate subject and if the information gets out into the community sometimes relatives may be embarrassed by their inability to fund the funeral. Officers are also mindful of the time between being notified and the funeral. Whilst MIS is published weekly, a potential additional delay of 9 working days (referral received on a Monday and not received by Members in a timely fashion prior to the next MIS release), in addition to further delays in potentially seeking assistance from community groups etc. is a worry as this may postpone funeral arrangements unreasonably. If assistance is not ultimately forthcoming, then this would further extend the time in which the deceased is in our care.

The funeral costs are generally in the region of £1,800 and the duties of the funeral director are as follows:

- to provide services and arrangements for the burial (*this will include liaison with third parties as necessary - such as partner authorities and friends / family of the deceased*)
- the collection of the deceased from the Queen Alexandra Hospital mortuary (*or other locality as necessary*) to the FD's mortuary. *In such*

cases, a closed vehicle, not an open vehicle is to be used for these removals.

- the collection of the deceased out of normal working hours as is necessary.
- care of the deceased from point of collection to the funeral.
- the provision of a coffin suitable for the purpose of burial - *to include a name plate and other necessary furniture.*
- a glass sided hearse to take the deceased to the cemetery. *The FD is advised that on occasions burials may take place outside the boundary of Portsmouth.*
- all necessary funeral staff and professional liveried pall bearers.
- appropriate religious services at the graveside *for all burials.*
- the cemetery fee.
- the provision of administrative and financial staff.
- all coffins shall be accompanied by a floral tribute and where appropriate other requirements are organised as defined by us - *for example*, where the deceased has a military background shall be covered by the appropriate ensign / where family ashes are requested to be placed within the coffin / where toys or photos are likewise requested to be placed within the coffin.

In terms of costs, commonly these are:

- professional services provided by the funeral director = £200
- coffin = £200
- hearse fee = £200
- transportation costs - including bringing the deceased into the care of the FD = £275
- cemetery costs = £729
- minister fee = £70
- pall bearer fee = £240

In response to a question from the Cabinet Member regarding other local authorities covering the cost of the funerals if the deceased have died in Queen Alexandra Hospital but lived in a surrounding local area, Mr Bell said that discussions had taken place. Unfortunately other authorities said that it was in the Council's jurisdiction and there had been no offer of financial support from other local authorities. Members felt that this needed to be discussed further as it was every authority's responsibility and an additional recommendation was added by the Cabinet Member.

In response to a question regarding timescales, Mr Bell said that no two cases are the same and the Council try to organise the funerals as soon as possible. Sometimes this happens very quickly, other times a family member will say they want to take responsibility but need some time, then later say they are unable to, and this delays the process.

The Cabinet Member said that the 0.6 FTE is shared across Regulatory Services. If one officer is not able to do a role, another will pick it up, however this is a cost pressure.

Funeral directors operate 7 days a week but in the initial circumstances the coroners funeral director will collect the body and hold this if its over the weekend or a bank holiday and then will contact the Council at the earliest opportunity.

The Cabinet Member said this is a very important service and it was important to highlight that people who pass away in difficult circumstances are looked after. Members are encouraged to attend to attend community funerals and he felt that it was important that they are made aware of the details. An additional recommendation was added to this effect.

The officers were thanked for their report.

DECISIONS:

- (1) Recognised that the primary function of this service is to provide community funerals in a professional manner, with punctuality and the utmost levels of decency, decorum, and respect.**
- (2) Acknowledged the stresses being placed upon the wider regulatory functions as a result of continuing high demand for community funerals - as set out within Section 7 and 8 of this report.**
- (3) Approved the manner in which community funerals are delivered - as outlined in Section 11 of this report.**
- (4) Noted the financial pressures incurred from delivering this function - as set out in Section 14 of this report.**
- (5) That where practical, details of community funerals excluding names (time, date, location) will be emailed to the relevant ward councillors, from whichever authority the deceased is from, inviting them to attend.**
- (6) That financial and regulatory services officers meet with their opposite numbers in the surrounding local authorities covered by Queen Alexandra Hospital, to find a resolution to ensure that the costs of community funerals are covered, where people have lived in their area and subsequently died in Queen Alexandra Hospital.**

The meeting concluded at 2.22 pm.

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Councillor Lee Hunt
Cabinet Member for Resources