

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 11 APRIL 2022 FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL MEETING HELD ON 22 MARCH 2022

EC75: MEMORIAL SAFETY TESTING POLICY FOR CEMETERIES AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS

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The Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager presented the report which set out the procedure for the ongoing testing of memorials and headstones and the policy and methodology for managing memorial safety.

The Chair thanked the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager for his report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts, the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager outlined the process for closing a Churchyard. He explained that it would transfer to the Parish, but they could forfeit this to the Borough Council. If the Parish decided to maintain the closed Churchyard, they would be responsible for health and safety issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Bubb, it was explained that the Council did not have the resources to extend the testing service and make it commercial.

In response to questions from Councillor Moriarty, the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager explained that to close a churchyard it had to meet certain criteria. Within the report mention was made of 'grave owner' and it was clarified that the deeds would specify who the grave owner was, and was usually the executor of the will. Work would be carried out to transfer grave ownership where necessary.

The Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager provided the Panel with detail of the testing process and the financial implications as set out in the report. The Panel was reminded that additional testing staff were not available, and existing resources would have to be utilised.

Councillor Bambridge asked for information on what happened to unsafe gravestones and those affected by flooding. It was explained that even in flood risk areas a qualified Stone Mason would be able to repair or replace as required.

In response to a question from Councillor Devereux, it was explained that once tested a stone would not be left if it was unsafe. It would be laid down respectfully and then the owner would be contacted. If the owner could not be traced, other options would be considered.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Long thanked the Panel for their comments and input and explained that it was very important to ensure that Churchyards were safe and posed no health and safety risks.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts it was explained that if the Council was responsible for a closed Churchyard, it would be responsible for the whole area, including footpaths and walls.

RESOLVED: That the Environment and Community Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet, as set out below.

1. That the Council be invited to adopt the new policy for Memorial Safety Testing and subsequent methodology for dealing with unsafe memorials.

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2. To agree an additional capital amount of £25,000 to test and inspect closed churchyards, with subsequent testing funding by an increase in the annual contributions to reserves.