

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 8 July 2021

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 21 July 2021

Report of: Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management

Title: Funeral Service Provision Review 2021

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

A review of the provision of funeral services provided by Exeter City Council (ECC) identified a reduced capacity for full body burials at the three council run sites at Higher, Exwick and Topsham cemeteries. Based on the current demand we would not be able to carry out Full Body Burials beyond 2025 apart from the graves which have already been reserved. The review identified a need for redesigning the way ECC undertake ashes burials to ensure the remaining land within the cemeteries are used in the most efficient and respectful way.

2. Recommendations:

It is recommended that Council approve the proposed Columbarium design to support the increased demand for cremation services. The cost of the proposal is £367,300 based on a detailed design and costing review.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

To ensure that a correct solution was provided, an internal review was undertaken and it was agreed that a Columbarium should be designed. Six designs were proposed, and a selection committee of Officers, Directors and Councillors, supported the chosen design, with support of the Service Lead, responsible to the Director and the Portfolio Holder. Further discussions at the three locations have taken place with the Council Leader who also supported the scheme.

Options considered during the review for funeral service:

- a) Do nothing;
- b) Stop the provision of Full Body Burials after existing land runs out and continue with ashes burials;
- c) Purchase additional land for Full Body Burials in Exeter; or
- d) Design and build a columbarium to extend the service provision.

4. What are the resource implications including non - financial resources?

The design of the columbarium has been funded through the transformation fund, the project will be a tender process through procurement using our construction partners.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The costs associated with the project are noted. Delivery of the income over a period of time, will support the costs associated with the build. So long as ongoing maintenance is negligible, the income would cover the costs of borrowing annually over a ten year period, with a small surplus. However, if the level of capital receipts permit, it is likely that they will be used to fund the project allowing the income to support the General Fund budget.

6. What are the legal aspects?

None identified

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring officer except for the need to highlight that a procurement process will need to be followed to select a contractor to build the columbarium.

8. Report details:

8.1 The UK average for cremation is 78% however Exeter's percentage is more like 90% for cremation as confirmed by the funeral directors within the city.

8.2 The city has a population of approximately 131,400 at 2019 and across Devon circa 795,000, this is important as many Devon residents choose Exeter as their last resting place.

8.3 The burial service review was very clear, in that funeral services provided by the city are first class, we have an excellent range of services supported by a range of professionals who demonstrate compassion, respect and the desire to support our residents at these most challenging of times.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

Providing value for money services

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

The risks involve not making provision for services beyond 2024.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;

advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and

foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because.

11.5 The report is for permission to undertake a full tender process for the construction of the chosen columbarium.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

The current UK government ambitions for Net Zero Carbon by 2050 means that all new developments need to understand the embodied and operational carbon impact and undertake measures to mitigate and offset these emissions throughout its lifecycle.

It is proposed that a whole life carbon assessment is undertaken using OneClick LCA and the RICs whole life carbon database to allow benchmarking against known material impacts and the accurate identification of carbon hotspots. The process will also highlight opportunities for reduction through the application of material option appraisals at key points during the design and construction. In line with best practice, the assessment will be carried out at a minimum of two different points in time to allow accuracy in claims for reduction and offsetting.

The aim of the whole life carbon assessment is to reduce embodied carbon emissions at the source by the specification of low carbon materials within the construction (e.g. reducing quantities of cementitious material as far as practicable). The application of options appraisals will help identify appropriate low carbon replacements whilst capturing other key factors such as structural integrity, availability, feasibility etc. Ultimately this will allow accurate offsetting of any residual carbon through local and/or carbon sequestration projects delivery a low impact net zero carbon development.

13. Are there any other options?

In order to continue to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of the 3 cemeteries and to continue to provide ashes burials in Exeter, there is no other alternative.

Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management, David Bartram

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- Business Case
- Costings report
- Presentation

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