

Minutes

Corporate Policy Development Committee 10th April 2024



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
M Ault	No	S Rajeev (Vice-Chairman)	Apologies
J Bond	Apologies	M Staines	Apologies
G Courtauld (Chairman)	Yes	B Taylor	Yes
J Edwards	Yes	P Thorogood	Yes
M Fincken	Yes	E Williams	Yes
J Hayes	Apologies	T Williams	Yes
L Jefferis	Apologies		

19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no Interests declared.

20 **MINUTES**

INFORMATION: The Chairman identified a typographical error within the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy Development Committee held on 30th November 2023. An amendment was subsequently requested in respect of Minute 16, 'Draft Household Waste and Collections Policy,' as the Council's Budget Gap had been incorrectly stated as "£2.3billion." The correct figure was "£2.3million."

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy Development Committee (the Committee) held on 30th November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendment.

21 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no statements made, or questions asked.

22 **CEMETERIES SERVICE POLICY**

INFORMATION: Members were advised that the report for this item was set out on pages 5 to 24 of the Agenda. The Chairman then welcomed E McCambridge, Operations Strategy and Business Support Manager, and P Partridge, Head of Operations, to the meeting, who would be providing Members with an overview of the draft Cemeteries Service Policy (the Draft Policy). Before inviting the officers to begin with their report, the Chairman informed Members that the Draft Policy was being brought forward for the Committee's consideration in anticipation of its approval by the Cabinet Member for Transformation, the Environment and Customer Services.

P Partridge advised the Committee that Braintree District Council (the Council) was responsible for the management of four cemeteries across the District: Braintree Cemetery, Bocking Cemetery, Halstead Cemetery and Witham Cemetery. As with other Local Authorities, the Council was subject to the Cemeteries Rules and Regulations, although it was also highlighted that there was no statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide a burial service. Those Local Authorities who did provide burial services were required to comply with the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977.

A more detailed summary of the contents of the Draft Policy was then provided by E McCambridge. Historically, the Cemeteries Service had operated with no formal documented policy in place. Whilst this had not affected the day to day running of the service, it was noted that the vast majority of Local Authorities had a formal policy in place which set out the Rules or Regulations of the burial function. As such, the implementation of a formalised policy would bring the Council in line with other Burial Authorities. Furthermore, the provision of a policy would provide additional clarity for all users, including members of staff and stakeholders such as Stonemasons and Funeral Directors.

The full summary of the Draft Policy may be viewed via the [Council's website](#) and [YouTube Channel](#).

Further to the report, the Chairman invited questions from Members. In response to the questions raised, the following information was provided:-

- The lease of an Exclusive Right of Burial (ERB) was from the point of purchase. Under this lease, the purchaser had the exclusive right to the grave and memorial rights. At the time at which the lease expired, the legal right of that person to the grave for future burials or amendments to the memorial would end and revert back to the Council.
- Members were advised that Braintree Cemetery had the least capacity in terms of graves available for use, and that the Cemetery had recently been extended in order to increase the provision of graves for the District. It was noted in recent years, burials tended to involve cremated remains as opposed to traditional burial interments.
- The Council tended to adopt a flexible approach where there were issues regarding Next of Kin. Officers were not aware of any large-scale disputes over the previous decade, and there was generally much respect throughout the cemeteries between Next of Kin and other visitors. Issues such as vandalism occasionally arose but these were infrequent.
- Where personal items had been left on gravestones, the Council would always try to take a pragmatic view in the best interests of the bereaved whilst maintaining respect to other visitors to the cemeteries.
- On the subject of Muslim burials, the Council would work with its partners to meet with the requirements of the burial (e.g. where there are 24-hour timeframes) as much as possible.
- The purchase of an ERB related to the lease only, not the area of land. In situations where the owner/s of an ERB had passed away, the lease could either be re-purchased or additional years could be added to the lease.
- The Council was a member of the ICCM (Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management) who provided best practice examples for Burial Authorities, much of

which had influenced the content and design of the Draft Policy. Research had also been conducted with other Local Authorities to ensure that the document was suitable for purpose.

- Although there were some sensitivities around the Rules and Regulations for visitors to the cemeteries, Members were reminded that these were publicly owned spaces. In respect of activities such as smoking or vaping, these could not be prohibited but visitors would be reminded to ensure all rubbish was disposed of correctly. It was added that the activities classed as “disturbances” at cemeteries was subjective.
- The grounds maintenance of the District’s cemeteries was undertaken by a separate service within the Council and impacted by various factors (e.g. such as seasonal weather changes) and had not, therefore, been included within the policy.
- All of the Council’s Public Health burials currently took place within Halstead Cemetery in a dedicated section. In terms of whether the Council opted to undertake traditional burials or cremation for Public Health burials, the associated costs would likely be deciding factors. It was added that as crematoriums were privately owned, their charges were separate from the Council’s.

The following actions were also agreed:

- In respect of page 12 of the Draft Policy, it was queried whether the term “Bye-Laws” should be hyphenated in order to maintain consistency with other Local Authority Cemeteries’ policies. Officers agreed to look into this.
- Officers agreed to provide some additional clarity in respect of page 12 of the Draft Policy, paragraph 3.4, around the permitted use of cameras at cemeteries (e.g. whether photos can be taken at gravesides).

Following Members’ questions, the Chairman concluded that the Draft Policy had been well drafted and that its purpose was clear, echoing the comments made by other Members of the Committee. The Chairman once again extended his grateful thanks to E McCambridge and P Partridge for their contributions to the meeting.

DECISION: Members considered the Draft Policy as set out.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider Braintree District Council’s (the Council) draft policy for the management of its four cemeteries (the Draft Policy) in advance of its consideration by the Cabinet Member for Transformation, the Environment and Customer Services.

23 **UPDATE ON DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25**

INFORMATION: The Chairman advised Members that the Council was currently in the process of reviewing its Annual ‘Scrutiny’ Work Programme for 2024/25. Accordingly, the Chairman had recently met with Councillor Heath in his respective capacities as ‘Scrutiny’ Chairmen in order to discuss the topic ideas that Management Board had suggested for Scrutiny Review.

The topics submitted by Management Board had been identified as they were both in keeping with the current priorities of the Council and had the potential to impact the wider District. It was underlined that Management Board were keen to work closely with the

'Scrutiny' Chairman and their Committee Members in order to identify the most suitable topics and thus develop a comprehensive Scrutiny Work Programme.

During the discussion with Councillor Heath, the Chairman proposed that 'Anti-Social Behaviour' (ASB) be added to the list of potential 'scrutiny' topics for this Committee to pursue for the purposes of Scrutiny Review, as the topic had previously engendered interest from Members. It was stressed to the Committee that the Work Programme was not intended to be an exclusive document, but rather a 'live' document that could be reviewed and amended on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, Members were welcome to suggest their own topic ideas for inclusion within the Work Programme at any stage. Any other topic suggestions would be assessed on their likely merit to the Council and wider District.

In terms of next steps, further feedback on the most recent topic suggestions was awaited from Management Board. It was hoped that the Committee would be able to formally agree the topics at the next scheduled meeting in June; however, this was caveated with a note that should any new Council policies come forward for urgent review by this Committee, it was possible that the topics currently identified within the Work Programme for Scrutiny Review would need to be re-scheduled to later in the year.

Members expressed support for the topic of 'ASB' and suggested widening the scope of the topic to encompass "safer streets" and "petty crime" within the District. In addition, it might be useful to undertake an exercise with the wider District and other Local Authorities to determine how successfully ASB related policies had been implemented.

A query was then raised about whether the Committee could conduct a horizon scanning exercise with services across the Council in order to ascertain what policies/strategies would be coming forward and thereby manage the Work Programme of the Committee more effectively. In response, Members were advised that documents such as the Council's Decision Planner could assist Members with identifying upcoming policies, but this was only for the next three-month period. It was preferable for the Committee to scrutinise emerging policies/strategies at earlier stages in their development. Governance officers were working proactively with services across the Council to identify potential policies that might require examination by the Committee. Furthermore, officers were seeking to implement a more formal process for gathering such information in order to help scope the future work of the Committee (e.g. through a regular surveys or questionnaires); however, not all emerging policies would be appropriate for the Committee to examine.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.10pm.

Councillor G Courtauld
(Chairman)