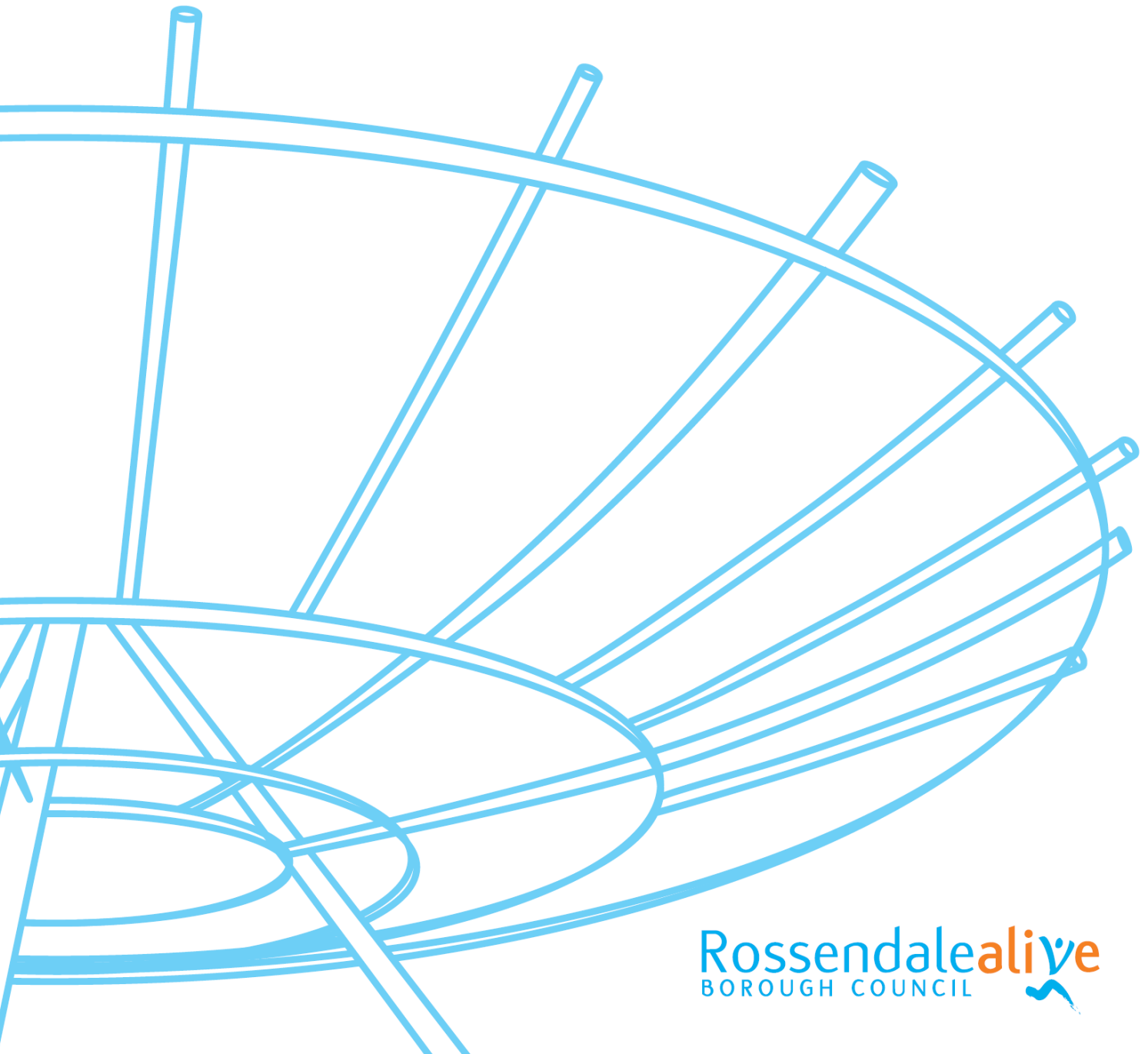


# Cemeteries Strategy



# Rossendale Borough Council Cemeteries Strategy

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## Introduction

Rossendale Borough Council manages and maintains four cemeteries: Haslingden, Rawtenstall, Bacup and Whitworth. Since the opening of the cemeteries they have been subject to varying maintenance regimes, services offered, rules and regulations; yet there has never been one comprehensive strategy guiding the longer term future of the cemeteries. Consequently the decision has been taken to produce this document to guide future cemeteries management. It will be used internally, remain in operation indefinitely and may be amended to reflect changes within legislation or customer needs.

## Our Customers

Our cemeteries are important places within the community. Within the landscape they have a defined characteristic offering peace and quiet in a formal yet relaxed style. Standards of maintenance are expected to be high out of respect. Our customers are key to the way we manage our cemeteries and if our management and maintenance procedures fail to meet expectations then our customers tell us how they feel or what they would like. We have listened to customers and this has assisted us to determine the future of the cemeteries.

***I would like to bury my loved one's ashes but not in a grave***

***– can this can be done?***

***Can I plant shrubs or flowers on my grave?***

***Can I choose where I am buried within the cemetery?***

***I'd like to place a bench somewhere so that I can sit in a special place to remember my loved one, can I do this?***

***Can I have a double width headstone and side by side graves so that I can be next to my loved one when the time comes?***

***My loved one enjoyed walking in the park – can I remember them in some way there?***

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## ***What Our Customers Want!***

***High standards of maintenance with grass neatly cut, attractive flower beds and paths without potholes.***

***A variety of ways to remember their loved ones and not just in cemeteries.***

***An opportunity to personalise and place memorials on the grave space.***

***Access to graves at a time that suits them.***

***Helpful and accessible staff to guide them through the bereavement process.***

***A place to visit for recreation not just bereavement.***

***Respect for war heroes.***

***To visit a safe place.***

We have established from comments and conversations that our customers want to be recognised for having individual needs and have access to variety of ways that the personal touch can be reflected. We understand that our cemeteries are not necessarily the place that people want to associate with lost loved ones and that the wider landscape should also be encompassed within the service we offer.

We also understand that at a time of bereavement the legal process and associated paperwork to arrange a funeral can be difficult and confusing. The more help people get to ensure the information they receive is relevant and important at that time then the easier the whole process becomes.

Great emphasis is placed on high standards of maintenance to reflect the levels of respect that should be given in a place of remembrance.

We have identified the variety of customers who use our cemeteries ranging from those visiting the grave of loved ones to the casual dog walker. Cemeteries are quiet and attractive environments and the range of users must be considered; they are also places of historic and natural interest, aspects which should be enhanced and protected.

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Cemeteries are working sites too and the safety of our employees is important, as is enabling them to carry out their job to the best of their ability thus assist our customers and improve service standards.

Taking in to account the feedback and consultation we have focussed the strategy primarily on the customer and employees needs, however wider issues such as biodiversity and good horticultural practice are also considered.

## ***Our Vision***

***Rossendale Borough Council will provide cemeteries managed to a high quality, offer bereavements services of a high standard which meets the needs of its communities and ensure that our cemeteries remain viable in to the long term future.***

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## **Strategy Aims and Objectives**

### ***Sustainability and Continuity of the burial process and associated services.***

- Cohesion of a range of related policies and guidance notes to produce one comprehensive, dynamic working document to ensure that bereavement services offered are managed consistently.
- To provide a safe and dignified environment at the time of burial.
- To ensure staff are appropriately trained and informed to carry out their jobs in a safe, sympathetic and respectful manner.
- Maintain close working relationships with funeral directors and memorial masons.
- Ensure bereavement services and burial are operated in accordance with legislation.
- Provide customers with timely, clear, user friendly documentation explaining our cemetery rules and regulations.

### ***Diversity of services meeting the needs and requests of our customers.***

- To offer a range of services and options that meet the needs of the customers and visitors both within our cemeteries and also the wider environment.
- To engage with people who have different burial requirements so we can shape the service to meet their needs
- Analyse and evaluate burial and bereavement services statistics and information to establish patterns and trends, allowing services to diversify in accordance with these in a planned manner.

### ***A high quality physical environment with a fit for purpose infrastructure and maintenance regime.***

- To develop plans to ensure future extensions to burial areas are accessible to all, a high quality environment and designed to cater for the different sectors of the population.
- To follow a cemetery maintenance regime that is based on environmental standards and customer expectations.

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## Method for the Production of the Strategy

### **Strategy Project Team**

Cemeteries and bereavement management affects or is influenced by several council sections, therefore it was necessary that all of these relevant sections were represented. Each person representing their section had roles and responsibilities in the production of this strategy as identified below:

<b>Section</b>	Operations	Operations	Communication	Communities	Facilities
<b>Representative (by job title)</b>	Assistant Operations manager	Bereavement Services Officer	Communication Officer	Communities Officer	Facilities and Property manager
<b>Roles and responsibilities</b>	Project leader. Ensure key project deadlines are met. Co-ordinate team meetings, delegate tasks, set targets and produce key documents including the strategy.	Key contact between council and funeral directors, memorial masons and customers.	Production of key documents that will be used by customers.	Provide contact between council and customers (including community groups and individuals).	Provide technical support concerning the infrastructure and associated developments to it.

### **Stakeholders**

Cemeteries are visited by many people and expectations are high regarding quality of maintenance and response to any issue. Issues which arise in cemeteries can be emotional and sensitive. Stakeholders often have a deep involvement in issues due to the need to ensure any decisions are based on sound evidence with all options considered. The outcome of any decisions can cause extreme reactions which need to be handled confidently.

The stakeholders for our cemeteries are as follows:

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## **Internal**

- Parks and Cemeteries Staff: Cemetery charge hands have daily contact with bereaved families and visitors. They are the first point of contact. Other parks staff assist within cemeteries and carry out some of the grounds maintenance. They are aware of the importance to produce a high quality environment.
- Bereavement Services Officer: The council's primary contact to arrange burials and co ordinate other services offered. The officer has the skills and ability to deal with sensitive and emotional issues in a confident and respectful manner.
- Operations Team Staff: Have a duty to ensure cemeteries are managed and maintained to provide the high quality environment expected.
- Communities Team Staff: Will often be involved in bereavement issues surrounding alternative forms of memorials.
- Facilities team Staff: Have a duty to maintain and ensure safety of the cemetery infrastructure.
- Councillors: Recognise the importance of cemeteries as high quality environments, they are often involved when sensitive and emotional issues or conflicts arise.

## **External**

- Funeral Directors: Liaise with our bereavement services officer to arrange burials. Also provide valuable feedback around customer requests and can act as information providers regarding our cemeteries.
- Memorial masons: Work within our cemeteries erecting memorial stones. Need to be aware of our cemetery rules surrounding memorials and processes required for permission to erect a memorial stone.
- Bereaved families: Have an expectation that the burial process will occur as planned and that the after care of the grave space is of a high standard, they are not always aware of their rights and responsibilities surrounding graves which can result in emotional conflicts or aware of the maintenance operations which are necessary to keep the cemetery tidy, this lack of understanding can cause issues.
- Visitors: Graves are visited by many people and they have an expectation that the grave space will be maintained to a high standard and that it is easily accessible.

Stakeholders were consulted at various stages throughout the process of producing the strategy and associated policies.

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## **Legislation**

In any strategy it is paramount to take account of the legal obligations surrounding the subject matter. Rossendale Borough Council Cemeteries are affected by the following:

- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Authority Cemeteries Order 1977
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work 1999 (as amended)
- The Equalities Act 2010

## **Topics to be included within the strategy.**

After consultation with project team members the following topics will be included within the strategy. Each topic will have a dedicated section within the strategy.

The Burial Process, Memorials on a grave, Memorials not on a grave, Ashes plots, Muslim Plots, Footpath Improvements, Memorial Safety, Future developments (additional plots), Alternative Burials, Bereavement Services Pack, Pricing, Cemetery maintenance, Emergency Planning and Closed Churchyards.

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# The Burial Process

Legally the council has a duty to ensure burials are documented accurately and that staff and visitors are safe within our cemeteries.

*Our aim is to provide a safe and respectful burial process in a professional and sensitive manner from the first enquiry.*

## **Objectives**

- To ensure that the burial process flows from the initial booking to the completion of backfilling in a respectful and efficient way.
- The physical burial process including grave digging and interment of the coffin / casket must be safe and provide a tidy, attractive environment for those paying respect to the bereaved.
- Necessary documentation collects the information required to meet legal needs and allow evaluation to establish trends and patterns in the burial process.
- Documentation provided ensures our customers are aware of key information at the time of burial.

## **Method**

- Staff will receive the appropriate training to carry out their roles and responsibilities safely and efficiently.
- Bereavement services officer will be trained in a relevant academic qualification relating to the burial process and associated issues of person and financial management.
- Cemetery Chargehands have a recognised qualification or training certificate regarding the grave digging process, safety aspects and involvement in the interment process.
- Machine operators will hold the appropriate licence or training certificate / qualification to use the plant and equipment involved in the grave digging process – excavator and dumper. Refresher training will be provided at least every 5 years.
- Existing documentation such as interment forms will be updated.
- Produce a bereavement services pack (see later section).
- Ensure a risk assessments relating to grave digging are in place and used.

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- Produce a safe system of work in consultation with cemeteries staff and machine operators.
- Carry out site specific risk assessments.

***Evaluation and Monitoring***

- Staff receive annual personal development reviews to identify training needs for their role.
- Site safety inspections will take place to ensure that risk assessments are being adhered to.
- Risk assessments will be reviewed at least annually to ensure they remain relevant to industry practices and regulations.

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## Memorials on a Grave

**Rossendale Borough Council introduced new cemetery rules and regulations following their agreement at Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008. These revised cemetery rules and regulations (conditions) were produced after a lengthy consultation process with undertakers, funeral directors and memorial masons.**

These new conditions were introduced to mitigate the problems caused by various memorials, including kerbstones and edgings, being placed on graves.

Despite the introduction of the new rules and regulations there was no structured format for enforcement and at the time of approval there was no bereavement services officer in post. Funeral directors were issued with copies of the new rules and regulations, yet it has since been found out that not all customers received them at the time of booking a burial. Consequently when enforcement regarding unauthorised forms of memorial was attempted it was met with backlash.

The issue surrounding unauthorised memorials was revisited with refreshed consultation with various stakeholders' particularly cemeteries staff to establish the various options available for an enforcement method. A subsequent report was submitted to Overview and Scrutiny where the following option was chosen.

*Enforce the existing cemetery rules and regulations for new graves and also for those graves which are re-opened for further interments only. Additional memorials would be removed at the time of re-opening and grave owners would not be able to replace them. Any challenge due to remaining obstruction to access under the equalities Act 2010 will be dealt with on an individual basis.*

Grave owners could be given time to remove memorials but staff would have to physically remove items where grave owners had refused to do so. The issues surrounding accessibility, maintenance issues etc will remain for existing graves with additional memorials. In addition, it is likely that there will continue to be breaches which would lead to conflict and customer dissatisfaction, and new grave owners will feel aggrieved at the inequitable application of the conditions.

It was also felt that further consultation was required around customer communication right at the start of the bereavement process, (i.e. at the time the customer chooses to bury a loved one in our cemeteries) to ensure that the rules and regulations applicable to memorials is made clear to customers, thus enabling enforcement with more confidence and better justification.

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***Our aim is to enforce the cemetery rules and regulations in a managed way to ensure that our cemeteries are a safe and tidy place.***

## **Objectives**

- **Ensure customers are aware of our rules and regulations particularly appertaining to memorials on graves at key times of the bereavement and burial process.**
- **Carry out enforcement of a breach of cemetery rules and regulations in a clear structured and dignified way, supporting the staff involved in that process.**
- **Cemeteries will be a safer and tidier environment accessible to all.**

## **Method**

- Customers will be aware of our cemetery rules and regulations at the time of booking a burial to ensure that they can make the right decision about where to bury their loved one. This will be in the form of a bereavement services pack and an interment form detailing key points around this issue which the customer will sign to have understood these conditions.
- Customers will also be aware of our cemetery rules and regulations at the time of requesting permission to erect a memorial. Memorial masons will hold our fact sheet around memorials on graves and can pass this to customers when a request for a memorial is made to them.
- Cemetery staff will be given the support they require to feel confident enough to remove items which contravene the rules and regulations.
- Establish a disability access forum to assist with managing access problems and avoid potential legal challenges.

## **Evaluation and Monitoring**

The number of occasions when enforcement is required will be recorded and reviewed annually to establish if there is the desired decrease in this number. If so it may be concluded that enforcement of the rules and regulations sin the proposed manner as per cabinet recommendations has been effective.

Any challenge made under the Equalities Act 2010 will be recorded and reviewed annually.

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## Memorials Not on a Grave

Rossendale Borough council approved the Memorials not on a Grave policy and associated guidelines in July 2010. The documents enable staff involved in dealing with request for memorials and incidences of informal tributes can do so consistently yet sympathetically to each case. This publication also ensures customers gain a flexible service that meets their needs while still maintaining uniformity and safety on our land.

*Our aim is to enable and facilitate alternative forms of memorials  
in places with a connection to the bereaved and their families.*

### **Objectives**

- Customers can be offered many ways to remember loved ones both within our cemeteries and within the wider environment.
- Organising an alternative form of memorial is carried out in a structured and dignified way so that the process is simple for the customer.
- Informal tributes are handled sensitively with the offer of permanent features as a lasting memory.

### **Method**

- Adoption and implementation of the memorials not on a grave policy.
- Ensuring key staff are aware of and understand their role within processes included in the above policy.

### **Evaluation and Monitoring**

The number of alternative memorials we assist people with will be recorded and reviewed annually to establish trends in terms of type and locations over time.

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## Ashes Plots

Rossendale Borough Council approved the development of new ashes plots within Haslingden, Rawtenstall and Bacup Cemeteries in July 2010. This was in response to increasing customer requests and construction started on site during winter 2010.

*Our aim is to extend the services we currently offer surrounding the interment of ashes and create attractive gardens for such purposes.*

### **Objectives**

- Customers can purchase ashes plots in all main cemeteries, thus widening the current availability.
- Ashes plots are constructed to a chosen uniform design.
- Ashes plots are encompassed within a tidy safe and attractive environment.
- Plots are accessible to all.

### **Method**

- Construct ashes plots to a design complying with the Equalities Act 2010. The design will be used throughout all cemeteries for new plots to create a uniform and identifiable area.
- Each ashes plot will be landscaped to create a garden effect, providing visitors with a relaxing area for reflection and thought.
- Customers will be able to pre purchase ashes chambers within the ashes garden at the pricing rate applicable to that year.

### **Evaluation and Monitoring**

The number of purchased ashes plots and interments within ashes gardens will be recorded and reviewed each year in order to establish demand in each cemetery. Consequently enabling the development of future ashes chambers before there is insufficient space in existing gardens.

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# Muslim Plots

Rossendale Borough Council provides a burial service to the Muslim community providing custom designed pre constructed vaults resulting from consultation within that community. The vaults are located within Rawtenstall and Haslingden Cemeteries and vaults are available for burial within 24 hours of a death.

*Our aim is to continue providing a customised service to the Muslim Community of Rossendale and surrounding areas.*

## **Objectives**

- Ensure continuity of Muslim burials and availability of pre constructed vaults.
- Respect the mourning process at the time of burial during Muslim Services at the grave side while protecting liability of Rossendale Borough Council.

## **Method**

- Staff will receive appropriate training to ensure that they have the skills to safely and competently construct Muslim vaults.
- An annual budget will be allocated to ensure that the materials required to construct an adequate number of vaults to meet demand are available.
- Establish a separate accounting code so that expenditure for the materials to construct vaults can be tracked.

## **Evaluation and Monitoring**

The number of Muslim burials will be reviewed annually to ensure that any trends are identified thus allowing annual budgets to change to meet demands.

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# Footpath Improvements

Cemeteries are formal landscape spaces and should meet nationally recognised standards to ensure all visitors can safely access all plots. The infrastructure within our cemeteries is dated and the surfacing is deteriorating in places. Some improvements have already happened in the worst areas, but a longer term plan is required.

*Our aim is to have safe accessible paths through all of our cemeteries.*

## **Objectives**

- **Ensure path widths within and at access points to cemeteries comply with nationally recognised access standards where the site allows this.**
- **Identify and prioritise areas where surfacing is not of suitable standard.**
- **Identify changes in surfaces to account for damage caused by weather and vehicles.**
- **Produce a plan of required work to bring all footpath surfaces to a suitable standard.**
- **Respond to small-scale issues by carrying out repairs in house.**
- **Ensure routine grounds maintenance operations account for issues concerning paths – such as moss and weed growth.**

## **Method**

- Trained staff will carry out access audits in all cemeteries.
- Routine documented inspections carried out by cemetery staff every month. Work tickets to include issues related to paths.
- Site specific risk assessments will be carried out in all cemeteries including footpaths.

## **Evaluation and Monitoring**

- Returned work tickets will be reviewed and any issues regarding paths will be recorded – this may be reporting damage during routine inspections or recording action taken.

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- Further actions noted on site risk assessments will be included in the plan of required work.
- Evaluate the results of the access audits and develop a detailed report of requirements to achieve national access standards.

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# **Memorial Safety**

Rossendale Borough Council, as a Burial authority has a duty of care under the Local Authorities Order 1977 to maintain the burial grounds in good order. In addition there is a legal duty under The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations such as the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 meaning that the burial authority must ensure that systems are in place to control risks to employees, visitors and members of the public. An owner of a memorial has the responsibility to maintain that memorial so that it does not present a safety risk. Monumental masons also have the responsibility to ensure that the current NAMM code of practice is adhered to when erecting a memorial.

***Our aim is to ensure that visitors and staff are safe in our cemeteries by making sure that the memorials do not pose a safety risk.***

## ***Objectives***

- **Ensure existing memorials are safe and not likely to fall on visitors and staff.**
- **Ensure that new memorials meet current NAMM standards and are fitted by a BRAMM registered mason.**
- **Allow all visitors to safely access their grave without risk.**

## ***Method***

- Implement the memorials safety testing Policy with inspections, testing and measures to make memorials safe being carried out.
- Staff will be trained so that they are competent to carry out the testing.
- BRAMM registered mason will be used to make memorials safe.
- Enforce the Cemetery Rules and Regulations (method as agreed by cabinet) in relation to kerbs and chippings located on graves so that people can safely walk to graves without the risk of tripping and falling.

## ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

Full records will be recorded throughout the testing and repair process.

The number of incidents whereby enforcement of the rules and regulations has been made will be kept and this number reviewed annually to establish if there is a decreasing trend in such breach of regulations.

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Accident and incident forms are routinely used within the council and those relating to cemeteries and memorials will be accounted for and reviewed to establish any trends or patterns in cemetery related accidents.

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## Future Developments

Burials are a core function of Rossendale Borough Council. Our cemeteries were all developed over 100 years ago and many plots are reaching full capacity. Extensions to cemeteries and alterations to plots must all be well planned to ensure the seamless continuity of burial services. Customers have high expectations within our cemeteries and there are requests for alternative forms of burial and memorials. We need to adapt our bereavement services and the cemeteries site to accommodate changing trends, changes in environmental issues, changes in religious trend and capacity issues.

**Our aim is to provide sustainable cemeteries both in terms of the services we provide and the effect on the environment.**

**We will adapt to changes in trends and changes in legislation.**

### **Objectives**

- **Ensure burial services can continue at our cemeteries as plots reach full capacity.**
- **Manage cemeteries which attract wildlife and enhance biodiversity.**
- **Ensure new areas within existing cemeteries are designed to be accessible to all.**
- **Ensure compliance with new regulations and legislation.**
- **Offer a diverse range of services which can be accommodated within our cemeteries as well as the wider landscape.**
- **Cease the need for burial plots within cemeteries to be assigned to defined religious denominations.**
- **Determine if providing a burial service is a viable and sustainable option.**

### **Method**

- **Plan new cemetery developments in good time to allow for all necessary survey work and planning conditions to be adhered to. Past cemetery records detailing numbers of burials will be referred to in order to establish when full capacity in plots is likely to occur.**
- **Carry out a study and produce resulting report detailing capacity and expected burial time remaining in each cemetery, the cost of developing new plots and predict future maintenance costs, with a view to establishing if burial services are viable in to the future.**

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- Alter and adapt maintenance regimes of cemeteries and ensure new schemes allow a high standard while enhancing biodiversity. Carry out ecological surveys within cemeteries to determine any key species.
- All new designs for pathways, plots and ashes gardens will comply with national access for all standards.
- Research and remain informed regarding changes in legislation and regulations. Staff will receive training when necessary to be able to implement and changes.
- Plan areas within cemeteries to accommodate for changes in trends, such ashes gardens and woodland burial areas.
- Carry out consultation regarding the denomination of plots.

## ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

The use and demand of new areas will be recorded and reviewed annually to establish trends over time. New requests for services not currently offered will be considered for future developments.

Providing a cemetery / burial ground is a matter of discretion and not a legal requirement. Continued monitoring of annual costs and predicted future costs will be used to determine if the service can be sustained. Our existing cemeteries are lawn type and have high maintenance issues.

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## Alternative Burials

There are increasing numbers of requests for alternative forms of burial other than traditional grave spaces. People are more environmentally aware and either wish to be buried in peaceful natural landscapes or have woodland burial. This may be a tree planted on the grave space rather than a memorial stone or being buried within existing woodland. Currently our cemeteries offer more traditional burials, yet there is scope to offer a more ecological approach.

**Our aim is to provide burials which suit the varied customer requests and provide places within our cemeteries which meet these needs.**

### ***Objectives***

- Create at least one woodland burial plot within an existing cemetery.
- Design an area within any cemetery extension to allow for a woodland burial plot.

### ***Method***

- Create a woodland burial site within an existing wooded area at Rawtenstall Cemetery.
- Design a woodland / less formal burial area within the proposed extension of Haslingden Cemetery.
- Allocate an area within Whitworth Cemetery for woodland burial.
- Publicise the service via the bereavement services pack and media as they become available.

### ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

The number of woodland type burials will be recorded and reviewed annually to establish trends over time.

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# **Bereavement Services Pack**

Implementation and enforcement of the cemetery rules and regulation published in March 2008 has been met with some objections. One of the factors causing customers to have objections is that they feel they have not been made adequately aware of those rules and regulations. The rules and regulations booklet is distributed at the time of bereavement; however it was found that at times customers were missed out. The booklet is also a rather “official” looking document at customers do not find it inviting to read. The issues around this problem have been discussed at length within the council and it was felt necessary to produce a more user friendly information pack to accompany the official rules and regulations booklet. Assistance is available where English is not the first language or a customer requires additional support.

**Our aim is to provide customers with visually inviting and informative method to explain the various rules, regulations and services appertaining to our cemeteries.**

## ***Objectives***

- **Ensure our customers are made aware of the services we provide and the rules and regulations which govern our cemeteries.**
- **Provide information in a friendlier and more visually stimulating way to encourage customers to read the information.**
- **Ensure customers are still made aware of and have access to the official rules and regulations document.**
- **Develop a system so that we know customers have been given the necessary information.**
- **Provide information in a low cost way allowing for future changes in that information that will not incur high reprinting costs.**
- **Provide information in a way that can be tailor made to the requests or needs of the customer at that time and cover more than just the rules and regulations.**

## ***Method***

- **Develop a bereavement services information pack comprising of several fact sheets each focussing on a specific topic surrounding our bereavement services and cemeteries, which meets the needs of different customers.**
- **Develop a system of distribution which ensures customers are made aware of key information at various times throughout the bereavement process.**

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- Change our interment forms to prompt customers to read key information about our rules and regulations so that they are able to make an informed choice at the time of booking a burial. The form also acts as a record that information has been provided and understood, thus enabling us to ensure that nobody has been left without information.
- Use the fact sheets to guide customers to read the rules and regulations document at a time that suits them. The rules and regulations booklet will still continue to be distributed.

### ***Evaluation and monitoring***

The number of instances whereby the provision of information is contested will be recorded and reviewed annually to ensure changes in the way we provide and distribute information can be changed if necessary.

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# Pricing

Rossendale Borough council produces an annual pricing structure for all elements surrounding burials. The prices are reviewed each year and the decision is then taken whether or not to increase the prices and if so by what amount. Our prices are benchmarked against neighbouring authorities to ensure our bereavement services are best value. Currently the cost of interment for people who were resident outside of the borough results in additional charging.

**Our aim is to produce a clear, planned and well communicated pricing structure for all aspects of bereavement services.**

## ***Objectives***

- Plan the increase in charges for bereavement services to ensure income from interments reflects the costs of maintaining the service while still ensuring best value.
- Simplify the structure of fees and charges in line with the majority of authorities.
- Ensure customers are aware of our fees and charges prior to arranging an interment.
- Establish alternative forms of remembrance which can assist with income generation.

## ***Method***

- Include a list of annual fees and charges within the bereavement services pack.
- Cease the additional charges for people outside of the borough thus bringing us in to line with neighbouring authorities.
- Include the charge for erecting a memorial on the grave at the time of purchasing the grave and increase this charge to act as bond which can be ring fenced to finance future safety repairs to memorials.
- Include an additional sum to memorials not on graves to cover maintenance costs.
- Liaise with RBC Finance team and benchmark against our neighbours to plan regular annual increases over forthcoming years.
- Explore the alternative forms of remembrance, particularly related to cremation, which can also act as income generators within cemeteries and assist with securing the future of the burial service.

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## ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

Review the pricing structure and charges annually in line with budget setting. Continue benchmarking against our neighbours to ensure we maintain a best value service.

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# Cemetery Maintenance

The expectations in standards of maintenance are constantly high in cemeteries. A poor standard of maintenance is viewed by customers as a lack of respect. Maintenance regimes considered acceptable in other amenity areas are not appropriate within cemeteries for either visual or structural reasons. Cemeteries have a landscape character of their own and despite being working sites are generally peaceful. This peace and quiet can attract a wealth of wildlife which should be encouraged. There is scope to enhance the natural environment within our cemeteries and thus increase the value of the site for our visitors. Visitors need to be able to get to graves and maintenance should allow ease of access across grassed areas by less mobile people by ensuring higher frequency mowing regimes to avoid dense, tufted swards.

**Our aim is to provide landscapes that are attractive and accessible by continuing high standards of maintenance within our cemeteries.**

## **Objectives**

- Carry out a higher standard of maintenance within Cemeteries when compared to amenity sites.
- Reduce reliance on pesticides as a means of controlling vegetation.
- Ensure planting schemes are kept weed free and plant failures replaced within the same growing season or year depending on plant type.

## **Method**

- Annual routine maintenance and resulting work tickets will schedule a higher frequency of grass cuts within cemeteries.
- Regular site inspections to ensure shrub beds and planting schemes are maintained to a high standard.
- Annual revenue budget for plants to be used as necessary to replace plant losses.
- Quarterly meetings with cemetery staff to inform them of and discuss changes required in routine maintenance so that alternative methods can be scheduled accordingly.
- Bereavement services officer will regularly review media and information pertinent to the cemeteries industry and inform staff of changes which may affect routine maintenance.

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## ***Evaluation and monitoring***

Results of site inspections will be kept and evaluated to identify any problem areas.

Impact of any changes due to industry standards and recommendations being altered will be reviewed and changes to maintenance methods be implemented of necessary.

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# Emergency Planning

In 2009 the anticipated outbreak of Swine Flu caused the cemeteries industry to make plans for a pandemic. Although the pandemic never materialised it was apparent that such plans should be in place ready for any threat at any time. Much of the co ordination for dealing with large scale emergencies will occur at county level with district authorities acting as local support teams and communicators.

**Our aim is to have a mechanism in place to be able to respond to an incident resulting in a high number of burials.**

## **Objectives**

- Ensure key staff are in place to be able to respond to an emergency within cemeteries.
- Ensure all staff have the ability to cope with an emergency.
- Respond to any emergency confidently and efficiently.

## **Method**

- Staff have the opportunity to attend training courses and seminars to develop the skills needed to cope with emergencies.
- Bereavement Services officer to attend the Lancashire Resilience Forum.
- Sufficient numbers of operational staff have appropriate certificates for plant and equipment required to carry out burials.
- In the case of alert situations key operational staff will be kept informed and consulted on how to practically handle potential situations.
- Continued development of the existing emergency plan highlighting key individuals; roles and responsibilities and action levels. This plan can then be adapted to individual situations with specific requirements at team level.

## **Evaluation and Monitoring**

- Number of alert situations with reason and the impact it had on the service. Information can be used to revise the emergency plan.

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## Closed Churchyards

Once a Church of England cemetery / graveyard has reached capacity it is then classed as “closed” for new burials. The maintenance of this churchyard then falls under the remit of the local authority. The local authority is then responsible for maintenance of paths, walls and the vegetation. The churchyard also then becomes a place of work and all legal obligations and associated regulations apply. This means that the safety testing of memorials also becomes a requirement of the local authority in these churchyards.

**Our aim is to maintain close churchyards so that  
they are safe for staff and visitors.**

### ***Objectives***

- Establish a current level of risk within all closed churchyards.
- Have an annual maintenance regime that keeps the churchyards tidy and responds to isolated issues such as tree works and invasive weeds.
- Establish and maintain contact with church wardens or persons in connection with each closed churchyard.

### ***Method***

- Carry out site specific risk assessments to all closed churchyards.
- Carry out tree surveys at all closed churchyards.
- Audit the existing vegetation types at all closed churchyards to identify invasive weeds and establish a maintenance regime to suit any specific requirements.
- Carry out memorial safety testing in closed churchyards in accordance with the current policy and procedure.
- Establish contacts with church wardens prior to any safety testing.

### ***Evaluation and monitoring.***

Documentation relating to any procedures or assessments will be kept and reviewed at the necessary intervals.

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## SUMMARY

**The Burial Process:** Deliver a safe, respectful and efficient service by improving health and safety; staff training and communication.

**Memorials on a grave:** Cemeteries will be safer, tidier places with good accessibility by clear enforcement of cemetery rules and regulations accompanied by better customer information.

**Memorials not on a grave:** Assist customers who wish to remember loved ones in ways other than traditional grave and memorial stone. The policy and guidelines help staff deal with requests.

**Ashes plots:** Create ashes gardens within every cemetery that are accessible to all and attractive quiet places to visit.

**Muslim Plots:** Ensure enough Muslim vaults are constructed each year to meet demand and allow mourners to be involved with the burial process.

**Footpath Improvements:** Make improvements to priority sections of paths then continue to monitor path surfaces and respond to minor issues as a course of routine maintenance.

**Memorial Safety:** Test all memorials within cemeteries and closed churchyards over a five year rolling programme and secure a method of income to allow future repairs to unsafe memorials within our cemeteries.

**Future developments (additional plots):** Plan for the short term and long term development of cemeteries considering new plots, expansions and provide room for alternative burials. Consider of new plots and burials space is affordable in to the future. Plots will cease being allocated to defined religious denominations.

**Alternative Burials:** Develop a new area within Rawtenstall cemetery allowing burials within a quiet wooded area. Plan to create opportunity for similar alternatives within future cemetery expansions and developments.

**Bereavement Services Pack:** Create a user friendly informative pack consisting of fact sheets which can be updated as necessary and thus provide customers with accurate timely information.

**Pricing:** Develop an updated pricing structure based on results of benchmarking and consultation. The structure will be simplified and prices reflect the income needs of the service. The double fee for non residents will be abolished. Explore alternative sources of income.

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**Cemetery maintenance:** Ensure maintenance standards remain high and staff are involved in making necessary changes to the way we work.

**Emergency Planning:** Develop a basic emergency plan structure so that we can confidently respond to an alert situation. Ensure staff are appropriately trained and informed to respond the emergency situations.

**Closed Churchyards:** Ensure closed churchyards are safe places to work and visit. Establish and maintain contact with church wardens. Adopt appropriate maintenance regimes.

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