



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18th JANUARY 2021

PRESENT: Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors B Price, R Bilcliff, S Goodall, M Oates, Dr S Peale, P Standen, M Summers and P Thurgood

CABINET Councillor Daniel Cook

The following officers were present: Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Sarah McGrandle (Assistant Director Operations and Leisure), Jo Hutchison (Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Elections Officer) and Jodie Small (Legal, Democratic and Corporate Support Assistant)

53 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor M Oates and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peale)

54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

55 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL

55.1 Review of Cemetery Regulations - Memorial Benches

The Chair reported that at the Council meeting on 15th December 2020, a petition was received requesting that a bench be placed at Wigginton Cemetery. At that meeting, the Leader of the Council, proposed, and the following motion was approved:

That Council referred the policy to corporate scrutiny for immediate review and make all officer time required available to fully understand the impacts of the policy and ensure corporate scrutiny can get this done by the end of January so not to prolong the matter further for Keeley's family.

As a consequence this additional meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had been scheduled to review the policy.

The Chair invited Councillor D Cook to introduce the report.

Councillor Cook highlighted to the Committee that whilst Tamworth's cemeteries had been governed by regulations since 1908, the first reference to memorial benches within the regulation was in the 1998. In 2007 all applications for memorial benches and trees were suspended pending a review due to the number of requests received. In 2010 the current Cemetery Regulations were approved, which set out that no memorial benches or trees could be placed, and introduced a plaque scheme.

Councillor Cook reported that since that point Officers had been implementing that policy. However, following the petition received, this Committee was asked to review whether the policy remained correct.

The Assistant Director, Operations and Leisure, highlighted to members that the documentation provided included details of the existing benches and their placement in the borough's cemeteries.

The Committee sought clarification in the following areas:

- The numbers of requests for memorial benches received since 2007. It was reported that around 2010 there were quite a lot of requests, however, since then the number of requests had dwindled because it was known what the policy was. However, more recently, 6 or 7 families had contacted the council to ask if we were reviewing our policy after seeing the petition from the Bunker family.
- The Committee requested data on the average number of requests for memorial benches received in an average year prior to 2010.
- The Committee sought and received clarification that the current Policy on memorial benches and trees did extend to areas outside of the five cemeteries.
- The Committee sought information on the burial spaces which were available in the borough's five cemeteries, and it was reported that one cemetery was closed, and of the remaining four there were approximately 20-30 spaces at Glascote, 100-150 spaces at Amington, 100-150 spaces at Wilnecote, and the largest number of spaces was at Wigginton.
- The Committee sought information on the extent to which the plaque scheme had been used and it was reported that there had been little uptake for this, which was understood to be because the designated granite benches where the plaques were placed were in a separate reflection area.
- Clarification was sought as to whether the number of burial plots was reduced as a result of the placement of memorial benches in the cemeteries.
- The Committee sought information as to whether, if a lack of space prevented memorial benches or trees being placed within cemeteries,

whether the council was aware of any alternatives which would be welcomed by Tamworth residents.

- The Committee sought to understand whether there were specific exceptional circumstances which could be defined which could support the request for a memorial bench or tree and be explicitly referenced in the policy, or whether the council already had the required flexibility to accommodate specific requests. Furthermore the Committee sought to understand which committee or post holder should determine what was exceptional, or whether this should be a matter for full Council.
- The Committee sought clarification as to whether any recommendations from this Committee should be made to Cabinet or to full Council. It was reported that the Constitution provided this Committee with the flexibility to refer matters to either Cabinet or full Council.
- Further information was requested on the amount of memorial benches and /or trees which could be located in cemeteries and how long any benches remained in situ.
- Further information was requested on the suggestion of a memorial space within the borough, apart from the cemeteries, including costs.

A motion without notice under rule 9.1.13 of Schedule 1 that the meeting be extended beyond 8.30pm was moved:

RESOLVED that the meeting be extended by 10 minutes, to 8.40pm.

(Moved by Councillor M Summers and seconded by Councillor S Goodall).

RESOLVED that;

- the Committee take time to have a further Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting as soon as possible, and
- the Chair contact all members to co-ordinate another meeting as soon as possible, and
- all members to submit questions and requests for any further information to the Chair for the Chair to forward to Officers and that the outputs would be shared amongst members..

(Moved by Councillor S Goodall and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peaple)

The following two motions were moved and seconded but later withdrawn and therefore not voted on:

That we recommend to Cabinet that:

- The plaque scheme be discontinued as there is no demand;
- The current informal method of reviewing alternative options with applicants to try to achieve flexibility be replaced by a formal one;
- A scheme for a memorial area in the town be prepared and submitted to Cabinet

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peaple and seconded by Councillor P Standen)

Recommendation moved that the Cemeteries Policy remain as is.

(Moved by Councillor M Summers and seconded by Councillor P Thurgood)

Chair

DRAFT