

**Interim Report of**  
**Cemeteries Task Group**

**Lancaster City Council**

**December 2005**

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to outline for Cabinet the emerging recommendations made by the Cemetery Task Group, which would have financial implications for the Authority. The report is not complete at this stage and has been submitted purely to allow consideration of the key financial recommendations prior to budget setting. It should be noted that further recommendations might be developed that have financial implications; these will be forwarded to Cabinet in due course. In addition, the Task Group feel it appropriate to draw Cabinet's attention to what we consider to be the principal areas where investment is required and where the Council may be exposed to risk if action is not taken. At this stage the report is only interim and the Task Group will consider several other areas in order to fulfil its terms of reference.

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## 2. Summary of Recommendations with Financial Implications

Based on the evidence received by the Task Group regarding the Council's Cemeteries, this report focuses on creating acceptable standards and makes the following recommendations, which entail financial implications:-

### Recommendation 1

- a) That following the Monument Stability Report the Task Group recommends to Cabinet the appointment of an in-house dedicated supervisor and two staff as a matter of some urgency.
- b) That Cabinet implement a plan to deal with monument stability at other cemeteries and closed churchyards as a matter of urgency and public safety.
- c) That Cabinet considers what action to take in the medium to long-term for headstones which are currently staked and banded, where relatives have not come forward.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** £71,000

### Recommendation 2

That consideration be given to employing an additional member of staff in the Cemeteries Office.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** £19,782

### Recommendation 3

That consideration is given to the digitisation and computerisation of Cemetery Records and Cemetery Management Systems.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** £83,000

### Recommendation 4

- a) That Lancaster set standards for its cemeteries, (to include the Charter for the Bereaved).
- b) That a baseline assessment be carried out of where Lancaster currently is with regard to the set standard when set.
- c) That detailed costings be produced for the work required in order to meet the standard.
- d) That revenue budgets be realigned and, where necessary, increased to maintain these standards.
- e) That a dedicated sundries budget (minimum £5,000) be created.
- f) That the Cemetery budget be amended in order to achieve the above recommendations.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** £5,000, other costs not known

### Recommendation 5

- a) That Health and Strategic Housing assumes management responsibility and budgetary control of both income and expenditure for cemeteries.
- b) That, prior to transfer, work is required to ensure that transferred budgets reflect true costs and if budgets do not meet costs these should be increased prior to transfer.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** Not known

**Recommendation 6**

- a) That an Audit be undertaken of work required to ensure cemeteries comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- b) That a work programme be created.
- c) That this work programme be financed.

**Recommendation 7**

That consideration be given to reviewing and improving the signage at the Council's Cemeteries and an initial budget of £5,000 be created.

**Cost Indication (Where known):** £5,000

**Recommendation 8**

That the Cemeteries Task Group support the capital bid application to repair the damaged wall at Lancaster Cemetery and recommend that Cabinet include the project in their 2006/07 capital budget proposals as a matter of urgency and public safety.

### **3. The Role of the Cemeteries Group**

#### **3.1 Terms of Reference**

The group worked to the following terms of reference:

- To establish an understanding of the current situation, development and historical background to Council cemeteries, closed churchyards and burial grounds. This is to include Cemetery Lodges, Signage, Visitor facilities, Management arrangements, Buildings and structures, Historic status, Parking and Access, Planting, Plots, Animals, Memorials, Security and Woodland burials.
- To establish the Council's legal responsibilities in respect of the above and current funding arrangements including fees and charges.
- To establish current Council practice, in relation to how maintenance is managed and prioritised and to investigate how other Local Authorities deal with the maintenance of burial grounds and identify best practice from a risk management perspective.
- To establish the level of anti-social behaviour and security problems within the Council's cemeteries and consider possible solutions to these.
- To investigate public concern with the state of Council cemeteries at present.
- To consider Council service provision from a bereavement services perspective, including access to services by the ethnic community, compliance with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) etc.
- To consider the future options for the provision and development of Cemeteries and whether the Council should continue to operate a Cemeteries Services or support the development of an alternative form of provision.
- To make evidence based recommendations regarding the above issues.

#### **3.2 Membership of the Group**

The group comprises of Councillors David Kerr, Evelyn Archer, Susan Bray, Sheila Denwood, John Harrison, Helen Helme, Janie Kirkman, Robert Redfern, Catriona Stamp and with support from, Liz Bateson (Administration Services).

The group gratefully acknowledges the contributions and evidence freely given by:

- Stephen Mann (Public Health and Safety Manager, Health and Strategic Housing Services, Lancaster City Council)
- Clive Linehan (Administrative Assistant, Health and Strategic Housing Services, Lancaster City Council)
- Paul Cocker (Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager, Lancaster City Council)
- Andrew Kipling (Accountancy Assistant, Lancaster City Council)
- June Carswell (Superintendent Registrar) Carlisle City Council
- Roger Frankland (Lancaster Civic Society)

- Andrew and Anne Weston (Alan M Fawcett Funeral Directors), Jenny Darby (Co-operative Funeral Services), Paul Wilson (Preston Ireland Bowker Funeral Directors), Jane (J Mason & Son Funeral Directors)

### 3.3 Timetable of Meetings

Date of Meeting	Who gave evidence?	Issues scrutinised
16.06.05	Stephen Mann	Briefing on current situation of the Council's seven cemeteries
20.07.05	Stephen Mann Clive Linehan	Consideration of the Council's legal responsibilities as a Burial Authority. Fees and charges for burials. Dangerous headstones and the Memorial Safety Programme
29.07.05	Paul Cocker  Andrew Kipling	Briefing on cemetery maintenance.  Briefing with regard to income and expenditure of the Council's cemeteries.
16.11.05	Stephen Mann Clive Linehan	Activity update including success of 'Beautification Day', comparison with Carlisle Cemetery, Monument Stability Report, Charter for Bereaved Standards
06.12.05	Funeral Directors / Stone Masons	An informal meeting to discuss concerns/issues relating to administrative procedures, grounds maintenance, Cemetery rules and regulations and areas for improvement

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### 3.4 Site Visits

The following 'Site visits' were arranged in connection with the work of the Task Group:

Date of visit	Place of visit/ in conjunction with	Purpose of visit
30.06.05	<b>Torrisholme &amp; Hale Carr cemeteries</b> , Morecambe With Stephen Mann and Clive Linehan	Included looking at woodland burial provisions, chapels, ground/path maintenance, vandalism, dog fouling, headstone safety programme.
13.10.05	<b>Carlisle Cemetery</b> June Carswell	To look at woodland burial site. Gain insight into maintenance.
18.10.05	<b>Lancaster Cemetery</b> Roger Frankland  Stephen Mann, Clive Linehan	Members undertook a tour of the cemetery organised by the Civic Society with regard to the historical importance of the cemetery.  Attention drawn to memorials in view of stability report undertaken by Cemetery Development Services.
16.11.05	<b>Cemetery Office and Morecambe Cemetery</b> Stephen Mann and Clive Linehan	Task group members visited Cemetery Offices to understand public contact with the Council from a bereavement services perspective and gain a greater insight into the nature of the work undertaken by Cemetery Office staff. A brief tour of Morecambe Cemetery was undertaken to look at the condition of the paths, grounds maintenance, examples of anti-social behaviour and dog fouling.

### 3.5 Documentary Evidence Considered

- Cemetery – Rules and Regulations (2003) – Lancaster City Council
- The Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee – 8<sup>th</sup> Report Cemeteries, April 2001
- Notes on Saving Cemeteries – National Federation of Cemetery Friends, 1987
- A Monument Stability Report for Lancaster Cemetery to Lancaster City Council – Cemetery Development Services, October 2005
- The New Natural Death Handbook, 2000
- The Dead Good Funerals Book, 2004
- Bereavement Services, Carlisle City Council

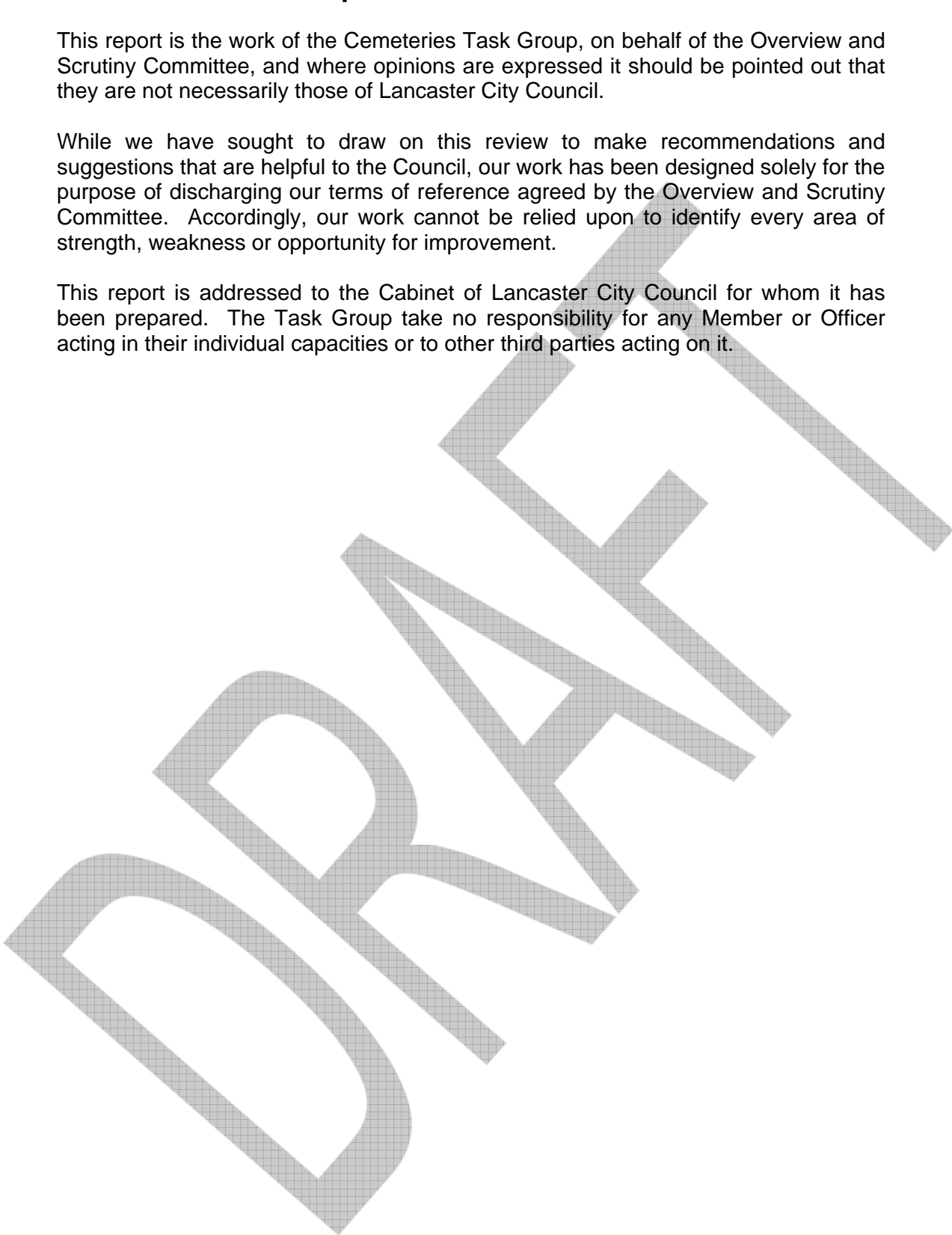
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#### **4. Status of the Report**

This report is the work of the Cemeteries Task Group, on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and where opinions are expressed it should be pointed out that they are not necessarily those of Lancaster City Council.

While we have sought to draw on this review to make recommendations and suggestions that are helpful to the Council, our work has been designed solely for the purpose of discharging our terms of reference agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Accordingly, our work cannot be relied upon to identify every area of strength, weakness or opportunity for improvement.

This report is addressed to the Cabinet of Lancaster City Council for whom it has been prepared. The Task Group take no responsibility for any Member or Officer acting in their individual capacities or to other third parties acting on it.



## 5. Background & Context

The Task Group was established as a result of a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2005. This emanated from guidelines established by the Health and Safety Executive concerning memorial safety following a number of reported fatalities and serious accidents caused by falling memorials. The presentation by the Public Health and Safety Manager, detailed current issues within the seven Council Cemeteries and closed churchyards for which the Council is responsible. It was noted that Health and Strategic Housing was responsible for policy, enforcement and the effective administration of burial records including income from various fees and charges. Current management of cemetery policy and administrative procedures was transferred to the Public Health and Safety Manager in September 2001; routine administration is undertaken by the Cemeteries Assistant with additional support from the Senior Administrative Officer to maintain a reasonable service delivery and provide cover for sickness and holidays. City Contract Services are responsible for grounds maintenance including grave digging, grass cutting, repair and maintenance of paths, fences and buildings and have sole responsibility for all cemeteries expenditure budgets. A supervisor and two grave diggers are currently responsible for this although on occasions they are diverted to other tasks by the City Contract Services Operations Manager.

In addition to outlining the memorial safety programme the presentation highlighted enforcement issues, repair and maintenance issues and problems with anti-social behaviour. It was apparent that in view of current workloads, budgeting constraints and responsibilities, the Cemeteries Service was unlikely to improve and would remain in the bottom quartile of authorities when compared to the Charter for the Bereaved Best Value Assessment score.

In addition to the 7 Council-owned Cemeteries, the Authority has the responsibility of maintaining the walls, paths, trees and memorials in 'closed' church graveyards. It was noted that the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order (LACO) 1977 empowered an authority with prescriptive and obligatory powers. Section 4 of this document relates to repair and access issues and states that it is the duty of a burial authority to keep a cemetery in good order and repair. This includes buildings, walls and fences and other buildings provided for use therewith. Based on visual evidence, including slides and site visits, the Task Group believes that the Council does not fulfil its obligations under Section 4 of LACO and there is a clear need for additional funding to address this.

The Task Group investigation is still continuing at the time of writing, and as a result this report is only interim and cannot answer all the issues as set out in the terms of reference. It is the Task Group's intention to complete this work and produce the final report as soon as possible to assist Cabinet in dealing with this problem.

## Current Service Responsibilities

Table 1 below contains a breakdown of the split of responsibilities between Health and Strategic Housing and City Contract Services.

<b>Environmental Health</b>	<b>City Contract Services</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration of:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sales of graves</li> <li>2. Re-purchase of graves and re-assignments</li> <li>3. Burials</li> <li>4. Erection of memorials</li> <li>5. Maintenance of records and registers</li> <li>6. Headstone safety programme</li> <li>7. Memorial mason's registration scheme</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounds maintenance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement of Rules and Regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repair and maintenance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhumations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grave digging</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Health funerals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance at funerals and Back filling of graves</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family history/grave searches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting of unauthorised memorials</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General enquiries and complaints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headstone safety testing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting fees and charges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ordering of plaques for Ashes section, trees, benches</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for income budgets only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for all expenditure budgets</li> </ul>

The Task Group believes that the sharing of responsibilities with regard to Cemeteries causes a wide variety of problems and a lack of strategic management of the service as a whole. It is the Task Group's view that the Cemetery Service would be more efficient if management and budgets were located in one place and that in light of the contractor as opposed to management functions of City Contract Services with regard to cemeteries, this should be in Health and Strategic Housing.

## 7. Findings

- 7.1 The Task Group are aware of the Monument Stability Report, which revealed that a significant number of memorials in Lancaster Cemetery were posing an immediate danger to visitors to the Cemetery. The Task Group understand that this will cost approximately £71,000 and endorse the recommendations made to Cabinet by the Public Health and Safety Manager with regard to pursuing this. The Task Group are, however, aware that this report only deals with Lancaster Cemetery and urges Cabinet to implement a plan to deal with monument stability at other cemeteries and closed churchyards as a matter of urgency and public safety.

The Task Group are also aware of the success of staking and banding which has been carried out throughout the Council cemeteries and will need to be rolled out to the 'closed' churchyards for which the Council has responsibility. However, the Task Group recognises that this is only a temporary measure and that consideration will need to be given to the long term solution and this will involve further financial implications to the Council where relatives cannot be traced or indeed are unable or unwilling to fund the cost of repair/replacement.

### **Recommendation 1**

- a) That following the Monument Stability Report the Task Group recommends to Cabinet the appointment of an in-house dedicated supervisor and two staff as a matter of some urgency.
- b) That Cabinet implement a plan to deal with monument stability at other cemeteries and closed churchyards as a matter of urgency and public safety.
- c) That Cabinet considers what action to take in the medium to long-term for headstones which are currently staked and banded, where relatives have not come forward.

- 7.2 Currently one full-time member of staff, an Administrative Assistant and the Senior Administration Officer, on a part-time basis, undertake the day to day running of the cemeteries service. Absence through leave or sickness stretches the service severely and it is difficult to draft in other staff as they lack the detailed knowledge and expertise required to work the complex and ancient records. It was apparent from discussions with funeral directors and stonemasons that staffing levels were a cause for concern and this is an area which they felt needs to be improved. The Task Group is aware that the approximate cost for an officer on scale 2/3 would be £19,782 (including on costs).

### **Recommendation 2**

That consideration be given to employing an additional member of staff in the Cemeteries Office.

- 7.3 It was noted during a visit to the Cemetery Office that the staff worked with fragile and frayed records some of which were over 150 years old. It is apparent that for

ease of reference and to support for Government's e-government objectives it is important that this information should be digitised and stored on a computer system. Digitisation of the cemetery plans and original records is essential to provide a secure back up source for the plans and records which could be lost forever in the event of a fire. The initial set up might be costly but once established, the electronic database would allow the Cemeteries Department to operate more efficiently and, in the case of the cemetery plans, would greatly reduce the risk of a burial taking place in the wrong grave due to the illegible state of some parts of the plans. It is certainly the case that the original maps and records are deteriorating and cannot last indefinitely. Preserving these records for future indefinite use (in the absence of digitisation) would in itself prove costly (approximately £400 per volume for conservation and rebinding, totalling approximately £10,000) if, in fact, this is possible for all documents considering their very poor state. It is believed that costs for digitisation would be in the region of:

- Mapping and Scanning £6,000 **(Priority)**
- Digitisation of registers and books £37,000
- Data entry £35,000
- On-line web searches £5,000

It is believed that a phased approach to this project may be possible in order to spread costs over several financial years.

### **Recommendation 3**

That consideration is given to the digitisation and computerisation of Cemetery Records and Cemetery Management Systems.

7.4 The Charter for the Bereaved was established by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and includes 35 basic rights, which the Task Group feels need to be implemented at Lancaster City Council with regard to information, rights and targets in order for a burial authority to become a member. There is an annual subscription charge of £255. However, the Audit Commission refers to the Charter in Best Value Inspection Reports and indicates that its adoption is a means of maintaining high standards. A completed ICCM questionnaire rated Lancaster as a burial authority at 70 out of 74. Identified shortcomings, which need addressing to be included in the Charter, including a weakness in the provision of information including leaflets and standards of grounds maintenance. Evidently time and money are required to rectify these weaknesses and bring Lancaster up to the required standard. It was noted that Carlisle Cemetery received an annual sum of £8,500 in dedicated sundries. It is felt that a minimum sundries budget of £5,000 would go some way to meeting these needs.

#### **Recommendation 4**

- a) That Lancaster set standards for its cemeteries, (to include the Charter for the Bereaved).
- b) That a baseline assessment be carried out of where Lancaster currently is with regard to the set standard when set.
- c) That detailed costings be produced for the work required in order to meet the standard.
- d) That revenue budgets be realigned and, where necessary, increased to maintain these standards.
- e) That a dedicated sundries budget (minimum £5,000) be created.
- f) That the Cemetery budget be amended in order to achieve the above recommendations.

7.5 It is evident that the current division of management and budgetary responsibility with regard to cemeteries and their expenditure and income is unsatisfactory. The Task Group believes that it would be more efficient if Health and Strategic Housing assumed management and budgetary control of the cemeteries service. The cemetery service requires management capacity and a dedicated full-time team. Currently the Task Group is concerned that the manager and staff in this area have been neglected and warrant further resources. On occasion, the supervisor and two gravediggers have been diverted to other areas within CCS and consequently essential weeding, pruning etc is not being done, resulting in complaints to the cemetery management staff. Neglect of essential maintenance has proved costly and is illustrated by the fact that 16 trees fell in the January storms causing approximately £3000 worth of damage to headstones. This figure would have been lower if there had been better funding for tree maintenance. Paths are in a poor state of repair and a potential hazard to visitors to the cemeteries. Money to repair these paths has been diverted to repair damage caused by anti-social behaviour.

Moreover, the way in which the Service is managed creates difficulties with regard to co-ordinating work. This would become alarmingly apparent in the event of an emergency such as a flu epidemic where a higher number of gravediggers would be required. The system, at present, lacks the flexibility to cater for this or more minor eventualities. It is suggested that this transfer of responsibility would include responsibility for managing and commissioning all functions set out in the second column of Table 1 on page 12 of this report including staff and operations for grave digging and memorial safety.

It should be noted that the Task Group has found it difficult to ascertain exact costs for the grounds maintenance functions of cemeteries due to the flexible way in which grounds maintenance is managed operationally across the council. It should be noted that the following recommendation needs to be considered in terms of recommendation 4 above and that some headings are already showing overspends and that prior to transfer work is required to ensure that transferred budgets reflect true costs.



**Recommendation 5**

- a) That Health and Strategic Housing assumes management responsibility and budgetary control of both income and expenditure for cemeteries.
- b) That, prior to transfer, work is required to ensure that transferred budgets reflect true costs and if budgets do not meet costs these should be increased prior to transfer.

7.6 It was apparent that the Cemeteries budget had not been amended to take into account the financial implications relating to changes in legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act. This is illustrated with regard to bench provision. Benches are already in short supply and a replacement or additional bench, compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act would cost £350.

**Recommendation 6**

- a) That an Audit be undertaken of work required to ensure cemeteries comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- b) That a work programme be created.
- c) That this work programme be financed.

7.7 It was apparent from the various site visits undertaken by Task Group Members that the signage in the Cemeteries was inadequate and poor. This contrasted sharply with the signage at the entrance and throughout Carlisle Cemetery, which had recently been renewed. Based on recent expenditure at Carlisle (£1,000 per cemetery) the Task group would suggest an initial budget of £5,000.

**Recommendation 7**

That consideration be given to reviewing and improving the signage at the Council's Cemeteries and an initial budget of £5,000 be created.

6.7 The Task group was advised that the Public Health and Safety Manager, (although from the Task Group's understanding this should have been the responsibility of CCS) had made an application for a capital bid to repair the damaged wall at Lancaster Cemetery.

**Recommendation 8**

That the Cemeteries Task Group support the capital bid application to repair the damaged wall at Lancaster Cemetery and recommend that Cabinet include the project in their 2006/07 capital budget proposals as a matter of urgency and public safety.

## **8. Conclusion**

The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with the key financial implications, which are likely to emanate from the Cemetery Task Group's final report. The Task Group has the opinion that there is clear evidence to suggest that the cemetery service is a 'Cinderella service' of Lancaster City Council – that is unconsidered, undervalued and unappreciated. A Commons Select Committee Report (2001) commented on the widespread problems of under-funding and neglect of cemeteries at both national and local government level, which according to Andrew Bennett MP, had resulted in 'unsafe, littered, vandalised and unkempt cemeteries which shame all society.' Implementation of the Cemetery Task Group's recommendations would help prevent the cemeteries for which Lancaster City Council has responsibility for being perceived in this way.

It is evident that the work of the Task Group is not yet complete and that further areas for scrutiny include matters arising from anti-social behaviour and vandalism and the possibility of establishing Friends Groups, to name but two. Arrangements are in hand so that these and other areas will be addressed in future meetings.

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