



<u>Committee and date</u>	<u>Item No</u>
Communities Overview Committee	
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Burial capacity within Shropshire

Responsible Officer

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1. Summary

Bereavement Services last reported to the Communities Overview Committee on burial capacity within Shropshire in September 2018. The committee has requested an update on progress made since on the various actions required. This report provides the current position.

2. Recommendation

That Overview Committee consider the report on progress made and current position and identify any future course of action or work programme required.

3. Opportunities and risks

Elements of the bereavement service are statutory and the council charges for the majority of bereavement services provided. Constant demand exists for the service. The bereavement service is exposed to minor operational and legislative risk.

4. Financial Assessment

The council retain burial fees generated from the sale of the exclusive right of burial and interment fees at council occupied cemeteries. Burial fee income to the council has increased by in region of £30k during 2018 calendar year compared to 2017 on account of new burial space being identified and used at Longden Road cemetery.

Capital monies will be required to develop new cemetery provision where capacity is identified as being required, 1, in the wider Minsterley area and 2, for Shrewsbury. The plan for the wider Minsterley area is to develop on council owned land adjoining Church Pulverbatch cemetery, the capital cost has not yet been fully assessed but it is considered to be a small-scale project.

The development cost for a new cemetery for Shrewsbury is unknown at present. The largest component of future development cost is likely to be for land acquisition

if suitable land cannot be found from within the council's owned estate. The size of cemetery developed will be a factor in the total development costs.

REPORT

5. Update on progress made since September 2018

The committee had agreed to revisit the bereavement service area again in September 2019, therefore this review is earlier than anticipated. The committee wished to see progress made on the following actions; to prompt Parish & Town Council's again to respond to the previously issued survey and to clarify and standardise the burial offer for other faiths.

Since September 2018 a small number of further replies have trickled in from councils that had not previously replied. A further direct approach has been made to Broseley Town Council as it has sought information from bereavement services with regard to a proposal it has to extend its cemetery. Further prompt for response to the survey will be made to other councils when good opportunities arise and it is proposed to repeat the survey in Spring 2019 to councils that did not respond previously.

In order to standardise and normalise the burial offer to other faith groups it has been necessary first of all to bring on line further burial capacity at cemetery where space was limited. Once this work is concluded it would be appropriate to consider reviewing the current policy of selling graves at point of need only.

Since September 2018, the priority for the bereavement service has been to bring further burial capacity on line at certain cemeteries to ensure burials can still be offered. The table below summarises the previous position and updates on the progress made.

Table 1. Previous position, actions and progress

Cemetery/ Occupier	Position at mid - September 2018	Position at mid - January 2019
Longden Road	95 unused and created graves.	16 adult and 1 minor (half plot) new graves purchased since mid-September 2018.
New section (Shrewsbury General Cemetery) SC	Space for 200 graves to be created later this year. Space for 300 further graves to be developed in due course prior to need. Capacity estimated to last	Space for around 200 new graves has been created in Extensions 16, 17, between extension 9 & 10 and between extension 12 & 13. Space for 200 further

	c10 years.	graves will be created later this year at the northern most side near to the newest entrance although it will be some years before this area is required for burial.
Longden Road Old section (SGC) SC	Not calculated. Limited space exists in small lawned areas around chapel to be viewed as emergency capacity only. Capacity unknown	The partnership with Caring for God's Acre continues to strengthen. Volunteer work party days take place fortnightly usually comprising around 10 volunteers who help maintain this part of the cemetery for wildlife/historic value. Some small areas have been identified for further investigation to see if space exists.
Church Pulverbatch SC	55 Note – proposal is to extended cemetery onto adjoining SC land. Current capacity estimated to last c25 years. Extension possible to create 100 years plus capacity.	New fencing to denote the extent of the boundary of the council's land was completed in January. A new access gate has been installed to provide access for plant to develop the next phase of this cemetery, a new gate also provides improved access for the ROW network.
Minsterley SC	9 Adjoining landowners have been approached to sell land, no interest at present. Capacity estimated to last c1-3 years.	5 small Hawthorn trees are earmarked for removal from near the western boundary to create c25 new burial spaces.
New cemetery	Not applicable	Bereavement Services has met with Estates twice in January. Two sites are under initial review for potential cemetery development.

Further Explanation to Table 1.

37 new graves were purchased in total across all Shropshire Council cemetery during 2018 calendar year and a further 137 'reopens' for 2nd or 3rd interments took place.

Longden Road Cemetery - New section - The council's estates surveyors section had no plans of the cemetery. The lack of plans hindered the identification of usable space as the location of services/utilities within the cemetery could not be identified.

Historic plans held at the archive library have recently been located and viewed and are aiding identification of future burial areas.

Trees have been removed from the central bed between extension 9 & 10 (new extension 28) this has created 68 new grave spaces. A trial grave has been dug in this area and identified it to be fit for purpose, suitable for double depth graves and free of services/utilities. The central bed between extension 12 & 13 (new extension 27) will provide 96 new grave spaces. Works to create burial space in the areas between the entrance gates and the round-a-bout area will commence this year, this will create around 200 new graves. It is appropriate to allow the ground to settle after works are carried out before any interments.

Longden Road Cemetery - Old section - The Friends of Longden Road Cemetery in collaboration with the charity Caring for Gods Acre continues to be a productive partnership, generating around 200 volunteer days within the cemetery, with a value of around £30k annually. The friends group is promoted locally and via social media.

CfGA has recently been awarded heritage lottery funding for a project called the beautiful burial ground. This funding has enabled the purchase of mapping software and support which has been used to map out the old section of the cemetery. The mapping will prove a useful resource and has revealed that some very small areas of the old cemetery may have new burial space available, these are to be investigated further.

Minor refresh works continue to take place throughout both the new and old parts of the cemetery and buildings to assist in maintaining a dignified and appropriate appearance.

Emstrey - Any activity here requires the agreement of Dignity, no new graves have been sold at Emstrey since September 2018.

Church Pulverbatch - The land for this cemetery was purchased in the 1950's although only around a quarter of this land was initially developed and utilised as cemetery. Since the 1950's and progressively over time a number of boundary features had become diminished or lost. Earlier this year new fencing was erected to denote and secure the boundaries and works are now ongoing to develop the next phase of this cemetery. An area sufficient to meet the need for the Church

Pulverbatch and Minsterley communities for around 30 years is set to be developed in the coming months and an area will be left un-consecrated for non-Christian burial. Minsterley is some 5 miles distant from Church Pulverbatch.

Minsterley - Discussion with owners of land adjoining the existing cemetery has not yielded any interest in selling land to extend this cemetery. Some small trees are due to be removed from the cemetery on the western side and this will create around 25 new burial spaces. The proposal to develop Church Pulverbatch cemetery is to also meet the need for the Minsterley community, around 5 miles distant. Significant space also exists at Westbury cemetery, around 4 miles distant, thereby giving Minsterley residents choice.

New cemetery - Two sites in the Shrewsbury region have been identified by estates department for further investigation. These sites are to be reviewed further in due course.

Other actions taken and progress made

The council's ground maintenance provider has been instructed to refocus its resource to those cemeteries that are being used for burials. This resource should enable an improved appearance at these cemeteries.

At the suggestion of the local member I visited the Saulton Long barrow near Wem, the visit was informative and a positive relationship made with the owner.

Some further links have been made with local clergy and funeral directors.

6. Conclusion

Since September 2018 reasonable progress has been made to ensure the bereavement service can bring on line necessary burial capacity through the works at Longden Road, Church Pulverbatch and Minsterley cemeteries with the additional benefit that this brings increased revenue for the council.

Once this capacity is available it would be opportune to review policies regarding how graves are sold, for instance at the point of need or in advance and to formalise the offer for other faith groups.

Spring 2019 would be an opportune time to prompt again councils that did not respond to the council's initial survey.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Bereavement Services Report to Communities Overview Committee – item 6 - 10th September 2018.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Lee Chapman, Portfolio Holder for Adult Services, Health and Social Housing

Local Member

All

Conflicts of interest declared by members

Appendices