

## **Report to the Leader of the Council**

**Subject:** Changes to Cemetery Restrictions due to Covid-19

**Date:** 30 June 2020

**Author:** Acting Chief Executive

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Purpose**

For the Leader of the Council to authorise changes to the current restrictions on the numbers of mourners attending funeral services inside cemetery buildings, increasing the permitted number of mourners from 6 to 20, and increasing the number of mourners permitted at graveside services from 15 to 30, in line with changes to government guidance on funerals and social distancing.

### **Key Decision**

This is a key decision as it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the borough.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT the Leader of the Council:**

- 1) Authorises an increase in the limit of numbers of mourners attending services inside Cemetery buildings from 6 to a maximum of 20 from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.**
- 2) Authorises an increase in the limit of numbers of mourners attending graveside funeral services from 15 to 30 from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.**
- 3) Delegates authority to the Service Manager responsible for Cemeteries in consultation with the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services to make any necessary amendments to the funeral booking terms and conditions to reflect**

**the changes in restrictions on the numbers of mourners.**

- 4) Delegates authority to the Director responsible for Cemetery Services to approve any operational measures necessary to facilitate the recommendations in this report if approved.**

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020, as a result of government measures in relation to social distancing to limit transmission of Covid-19, the Council took the decision to restrict the number of mourners attending funerals at Council cemeteries to 15. This related to mourners attending funeral services both inside cemetery buildings and at the graveside.
- 1.2 Following on from this decision, it became apparent that 15 mourners within cemetery buildings was difficult to manage whilst trying to maintain social distancing and the health and safety of staff. As such, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020 a further decision was taken to restrict the number of mourners attending funeral services within cemetery buildings to 6. The number of mourners permitted at graveside services or committals (following on from a service in the cemetery building) remained at 15.
- 1.3 From 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the government will bring into effect changes to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, restrictions)(England) Regulations 2020 ("the Regulations") in respect of outdoor gatherings, permitting gatherings of up to 30 people in certain public places permitted by law. Specific guidance has been issued in relation to religious ceremonies and gatherings in places of worship and what changes will be effected from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The guidance makes reference to funeral services and states that funerals within a place of worship should have no more than 30 people in attendance. A place of worship would cover the Council's cemetery buildings used for religious ceremonies.
- 1.4 The guidance provides that risk assessments should be conducted and ceremonies should be conducted in a way that wherever possible provides for a 2 metre distance between attendees or, if 2 metres is not viable then 1 metre with mitigation.
- 1.5 The government provided specific guidance for managing funerals which was updated on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020, the guidance stressed the need to keep attendees at funerals to a minimum in line with what could be safely managed, but advised those responsible for organising funerals to come up with an appropriate figure based on the size of premises and ability to maintain distancing of 2 metres. The guidance advises on regular cleaning of premises between services and for this reason there is no

proposal at this time to increase the length of service within the Council's cemetery buildings which are restricted to 30 minutes, as cleaning will need to be undertaken between services. This guidance has not yet been updated to reflect changes highlighted in para 1.3.

- 1.6 Given the changes to social distancing rules and the guidance from government proposing up to 30 attendees at funerals, consideration has been given as to whether the Council can increase the numbers of mourners attending funeral services at Council cemeteries from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

## **2 Proposal**

- 2.1 It is proposed that from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the current restriction on the number of mourners attending funeral services inside the Council's cemetery buildings be increased from 6 to a maximum of 20. It is felt that up to 20 mourners can be accommodated within chapel buildings whilst maintaining 2 metre or 1 metre social distancing dependant on chapel size. Appropriate risk assessments have been considered and measures including cleaning between services will be maintained. Cemetery staff will manage services and ensure that numbers are appropriate up to 20 in each cemetery building.
- 2.2 It is proposed, in line with government guidance to come into effect on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 that the permitted number of mourners attending graveside funeral services at Council premises be increased from 15 to 30.
- 2.3 It is proposed that all other restrictions currently in place at Cemeteries including the restriction on backfilling graves and the 30 minute time limit on services within cemetery buildings remain in place but under review as it is not considered safe at this time to change those restrictions.
- 2.4 It is proposed that a delegation be given to the Service Manager responsible for cemeteries, in consultation with the Director of Organisational development and Democratic Services to make any necessary amendments to the funeral booking terms and conditions to reflect the increase in the number of mourners permitted at funerals.
- 2.5 It is proposed that a delegation is given to the Director responsible for Cemeteries to ensure that any appropriate operational measures are taken to facilitate up to 20 mourners within cemetery buildings and 30 at the graveside where it is safe and in accordance with social distancing requirements.

## **3 Alternative Options**

- 3.1 The restrictions on numbers at burials could remain set as they are currently, at 6 in cemetery buildings and 15 graveside. Whilst this will facilitate a 2 metre separation in cemetery buildings, it does limit those allowed to attend funeral services. This restriction on numbers has been particularly upsetting for residents over the last few months especially those who have large families wishing to attend to mourn a loved one. Whilst the safety of staff and residents is still paramount, the relaxing of the 2 metre government guidance, and numbers attending certain gatherings, does enable the authority to make these changes to the numbers of mourners and gives the opportunity for more individuals to pay their respects.
- 3.2 There is an option to remove restrictions on numbers of those attending funeral services altogether, however this would be contrary to government guidance, regulation and would impose a greater risk of transmission of Covid-19 to staff and residents.

#### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

#### **5 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 Government guidance and changes to the Regulations to facilitate gatherings at funerals of up to 30 from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Guidance will need to be taken into account in respect of maintaining social distancing at 2 metres or 1 metre with mitigation where 1 metre is not feasible, Appropriate risk assessments will need to be completed and the guidance followed in terms of cleaning.
- 5.2 It is unclear whether the Regulations will be amended to alter who is permitted to attend funerals, this is currently restricted to family members, members of the deceased households or, if neither of the former apply a friend. Definition of a family member is not specifically given and the changes proposed in this report will enable much wider family gatherings at funeral services.

#### **6 Equalities Implications**

- 6.1 Increasing the numbers of mourners at funerals may have an impact on those within protective characteristics who are at greater risk of contracting Covid-19 such as age and disability due to an increase in exposure to others at funerals, however the risks of transmission will be reduced through ensuring appropriate social distancing and following government guidance. Those who show symptoms of coronavirus will still be required to isolate and not attend funeral services.

## **7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications**

- 7.1 This decision will have no significant impact on carbon reduction or sustainability issues, although an increase in numbers attending funerals may mean an increase in vehicular use for those attending.

## **8 Appendices**

- 8.1 None

## **9 Background Papers**

- 9.1 No specific background papers have been identified but government guidance has been considered.

## **10 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 10.1 To enable larger numbers of mourners to attend funerals in line with government guidance from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020.
- 10.2 To ensure the booking terms and conditions reflect the current restrictions on mourners attending funeral services.
- 10.3 To ensure that any operational measures necessary to implement these recommendations can be taken swiftly without overburdening the Executive.

### **Statutory Officer approval**

**Approved by:** Tina Adams  
**Date:** 1/7/20  
**On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer**

**Approved by:** Francesca Whyley  
**Date:** 1/7/20  
**On behalf of the Monitoring Officer**