


Agenda Item No:	5	
Committee:	<b>Audit and Risk Management Sub Determination Committee</b>	
Date:	<b>26 January 2023</b>	
Report Title:	<b>Cemeteries - Apprentice Cemeteries co-ordinator</b>	

## 1 Purpose / Summary

The purpose of this report is to allow the Audit and Risk Management Sub Determination Committee to consider the proposed appointment of an apprentice cemeteries co-ordinator. This role will add capacity to the open spaces team, ensuring that the cemeteries service is well managed, reducing the risk of burial issues and the considerable impact that such events have on bereaved families. The role will also reduce the risk of the negative reputational impact such events would have on the Council and our partners.

## 2 Key issues

- FDC manages 5 open (burials still taking place) and 18 closed cemeteries (no burials possible as the cemetery is full). Work includes the maintenance of these cemeteries (grass / trees / memorial safety) as well as the bereavement process from grave selection to burial and then to memorial installation.
- Issues regarding burial management have come to light in the past year. Following recommendations from a third-party consultant, the operational team is under-resourced in this regard, leaving the Council at continued risk of a burial error or failure. Burial issues have occurred on several occasions in the past year. Whilst measures have been put in place to mitigate repeat issues, there is still significant risk to the Council's reputation if increased resources are not made available operationally in the cemeteries. More importantly the impact on bereaved families of burial issues is considerable and action to reduce issues occurring is necessary.
- Management of undertakers and memorial masons is also a significant concern for the service, with capacity to build relationships and understanding not available at this time. Additionally, there is no capacity to support bereaved customers effectively - particularly should an issue occur with the burial process.
- The recruitment of an apprentice cemeteries co-ordinator will ensure that operational cemeteries management has the additional capacity required to reduce risk to the Council and improve customer service to those linked with the burial process.
- A junior horticulture element will also be added to the role, developing a career path, increasing a small team's resilience and allowing effective succession planning.

## 3 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Audit and Risk Management Sub Determination Committee:

- 3.1 Notes the attached report.
- 3.2 That the Audit and Risk Management Sub Determination Committee, in order to reduce the significant reputational risk of burial failures, alongside other significant cemetery operational work, agrees to the addition of an apprentice cemeteries co-ordinator to the Council's establishment.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Forward Plan Reference</b>	N/A
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Cllr Peter Murphy - Portfolio Holder for Environment
<b>Report Originator and Contact Officer</b>	Phil Hughes - Head of Leisure and Open spaces
<b>Background Papers</b>	

## 4 Background

- 4.1 FDC has an open spaces team that consists of 0.7FTE contract manager and 1FTE horticulture officer. The work required of these 2 individuals includes, but is not limited to;
- Managing the contract with Tivoli, including liaising with the regional manager, contract manager and individual staff.
  - Ensuring that contractual obligations are met by Tivoli and that work remains on target, is of an appropriate standard, is carried out in a timely manner and meets FDC's budgeted expenditure.
  - Liaising with customers regarding open spaces concerns, as well as working closely with elected Members (incl. Town Council Members), particularly the Portfolio Holder for Environment. Open spaces is a service that raises questions on a daily basis - even in the winter period.
  - Managing the procurement and delivery of capital schemes within open spaces; approximately 5 play areas p.a. and ongoing asset maintenance within open and closed cemeteries - including the three chapels in FDC's ownership.
  - Managing 5 open and 18 closed cemeteries, working together with the My Fenland team regarding burial management and liaising with Tivoli regarding the operational side of the burials process.
  - Managing the memorial inspections scheme through the StreetScene team.
  - Ensuring the safety of Fenland's open spaces.
- 4.2 Capacity is extremely limited, with actions recently recommended by our bereavement consultant not possible. Recruitment for a tree officer continues (following 2 failed attempts), whose role will specifically be the management of the Council's tree stock, including ongoing tree works and a scheme of rolling tree inspections to proactively manage FDC's trees, reducing the risk to open space users. Whilst FDC continues to recruit, a third-party contractor is carrying out tree assessments.
- 4.3 There is a significant gap in the team's capacity regarding the operational aspect of the burials process and this has become increasingly apparent this year. The Council should be offering a service with zero errors when working with undertakers to carry out burials - whether this be an ashes interment or a full burial. This year has seen several errors - some the responsibility of FDC or Tivoli, our contractor, and others that of the undertaker. New measures have been implemented to ensure the likelihood of repeated failures is very low, but a risk remains.

4.4 FDC is currently working with an independent consultant regarding the burial process - both back-office management and operational management. This work has highlighted weaknesses within the operational side of the business that this new role will address.

## 5 Apprentice Cemeteries & Horticulture Officer responsibilities

The new role will have the following responsibilities:

### **Burials;**

- On site point of contact with customers and funeral directors regarding plot selection when required.
- Funeral Director relationship building and effective communication.
- Attending funerals as a representative of the Council, to include pre-assessment of grave and site, liaison with Tivoli operatives, liaison with funeral director and inspection of paperwork and transfer of burial paperwork to bereavement team.
- Link to families where necessary and handling of complaints with memorial masons, funeral directors and families.

### **Benches:**

- Liaise with customers regarding cemetery benches.

### **Memorials:**

- Work with street scene officers regarding memorial safety.
- Address large memorial safety.
- Assessment of siting of new memorials and checking of potential infringements.
- Liaison with memorial masons.
- Chapel and closed cemetery capital works.
- Project management and liaison between contractors, cemetery users and properties and procurement teams.

### **Grounds maintenance in cemeteries**

- Assessment of Tivoli work, reporting to the contract manager regarding concerns or omissions.
- Develop close relationship with community payback supervisors to develop annual programmes of works across the open and closed cemeteries, enhancing these areas.
- Work with established community groups and develop further groups to act as Friends of Cemeteries to improve community ownership and involvement in cemetery management.

### **Capital works**

- Be the main operational contact for any capital works carried out in the cemeteries regarding chapels or other assets.

### **Bereavement Team**

- To act as a single point of contact with the Bereavement Team and Tivoli to effectively coordinate burials and respond to burial and cemetery queries of an operational nature.

### **Heritage in Cemeteries**

Work with local community groups to enhance and highlight;

- War memorials.
- Improve the number and increase the quality of interpretation boards and other cemetery signage.
- Improve information regarding cemeteries and their assets on the FDC website.

## **6 Financial Implications**

### **6.1 Staffing costs**

Recruiting a band 4 - 6 career path apprentice to the cemetery co-ordinator role will incur additional annual costs of £30,233 (band 4, inclusive of on costs).

Training costs will be supported utilising the Council's apprenticeship levy.

## **7 Legal and Health and Safety implications**

- 7.1 The proposed role will have responsibility for managing the assessment and maintenance of larger memorials. This will add further resilience to the memorials management process already in place, enhancing public safety.