

Developing an action plan to address breaches of cemetery regulations regarding memorials

6 November 2019



Background

Historical perspective:

- Profile of SBC's Bereavement Service provision – numbers of cemeteries and crematorium and areas covered;
- Staff resources in 2015 and since 2017, following internal transformation process;
- Ad hoc and uncoordinated approach to enforcing memorial decorations policy due to fear to reputation of the Council, adverse publicity and limited resources; and
- No previous attempt to get “buy in” from Members.



SBC's Memorials Decoration policy (1)

SBC's Cemeteries and Crematorium Rules and Regulations:

What is allowed:

- Flowers, small potted plants or heather up to a distance of 46cm from authorised memorial stone or a vacant space where a memorial would have been for full graves;
- All of the above items up to a distance of 30cm for cremated remains graves.



SBC's Memorials Decoration policy (2)

What is not allowed (non-exhaustive list of examples):

- Small fences, kerbs (in newer sections of cemeteries only), lights, glass, porcelain tributes, wind chimes, pebbles, chippings, trees, bird baths and tables;

(Circulate copies of information leaflet produced).



Quantifying the problem

Steps taken:

- Identified which cemeteries managed by SBC where most of the breaches to memorial policy were known;
- Bereavement Service team tasked with surveying our Woodlands cemetery and crematorium;
- Each “breached” memorial identified across the whole cemetery – description made, grave number and location recorded and collated;
- Selection of photographic evidence taken demonstrating types of breached categories of memorial decorations.



Creating an action plan (1)

- Propose an action plan that is comprehensive, coordinated, systematic, but fundamentally realistic – taking into account the size of the challenge, staff and financial resources available, likely reaction/impact (e.g. from grave owners and families, local media, etc...) and reputation of SBC;
- Get “buy in” from Bereavement Service staff and Parks team to proposed action plan;
- Get “buy in” from key Senior Management member and Cabinet Member



Creating an action plan (2)

- Make necessary changes to proposed action plan to take account of constructive feedback from key stakeholders (Bereavement Service/Parks staff; Senior Manager and Cabinet Member);
- Take proposed action plan to relevant Member committee (in SBC case – Overview and Scrutiny Board and then Cabinet) for approval.



Creating an action plan (3)

Approach taken:

- **Graduated** to avoid “big bang” approach and resources being overwhelmed – tackle one section at a time;
- **Targeted** – concentrate on worst cemetery (with highest number of breaches) and start with publicity/comms programme to promote awareness. Start at the oldest section of the cemetery and work through;



Creating an action plan (4)

Approach taken (cont'd):

- **Systematic** – work from the oldest to newest sections;
- **Coordinated** – close working relationship between Bereavement and Parks Services (“Tree Team”) to agree when to programme in removing breached memorial decorations and what categories to deal with;



Getting the message across (1)

- SBC's agreed action plan started with a communications programme to raise awareness with the public around breached memorial decorations in cemeteries;

- Methods included the following:
 - a) Devising a “user friendly” coloured information leaflet to explain the “dos” and “don'ts” in relation to memorials – included in all requests for interment applications and added to SBC's website for people to download/view.



Getting the message across (2)

Methods of getting message across (cont'd):

b) Production of carefully worded public notices and conspicuously displayed around the cemetery;

c) Press releases and social media feeds (Face Book/Twitter) and resulting local media coverage;

d) Dealing with follow up enquiries from the public and Members.



Learning experiences (1)

- Getting “buy in” for our approach from staff and members was not a problem, but you need to consult and make sure your key stakeholders are on board;
- Don’t underestimate the length of time to complete public awareness raising campaign and dealing with follow up enquiries;
- Member interest in this topic is high and contentious, but invest time to explain why it needs addressing;



Learning experiences (2)

- Mis-understanding over aims and objectives. A public petition was started to stop SBC *changing* its memorials decorations policy. In fact we were only explaining what our policy already stated and that we were going to enforce it.
- Unexpected delays in moving from public campaign to actually starting removal programme – various reasons.
- Leave baby and children's sections alone.



Update on our action plan (1)

- This is a long term project to get on top of historical breached memorials in SBC cemeteries and is on-going;
- SBC's Parks "Tree team" have cleared all breached memorial decorations from our 3 oldest sections with Woodlands Cemetery. Discussions are taking place to programme in removal from the next 4 oldest sections;



Sample photo of breached memorial (1)



Sample photo of breached memorial (2)



Any questions?

