

Council – 7 July 2008

Notice of motion – Muslim Burial Issues

Service Area: **Public Protection**

Wards: **All**

Summary of report

The attached note has been prepared as background information for the Council meeting in view of the notice of motion as stated below, which has been submitted by Councillors Oliver, Khan and Nazir.

This Council recognises that Walsall is a multi cultural borough and that we should work with all communities to achieve community cohesion, whilst wherever possible being sensitive to specific cultural and religious needs.

We therefore note the lack of progress in Walsall in responding to community needs in terms of Muslim burial issues, and calls upon the Council to work in partnership with appropriate community representatives to support the development of a business case for a community based model, such as implemented in Leicester which is cost effective, meets appropriate legal, health and safety requirements, and empowers the local community.

Signed:



Executive Director: **Jamie Morris**

Dated: 24 June 2008

Muslim Burial Issues – Background Information

1. This Council's burial service is operated during normal working hours Monday to Friday across its cemeteries throughout the Borough. There are approximately 600 interments per annum of which around 35 adults (6%) are from the Muslim community.
2. Since September 1995 a service extension has been offered to the Muslim community consisting of a Saturday standby arrangement enabling one burial to take place. A similar arrangement has operated for the last few years on a day during longer Bank Holidays at Christmas and at Easter. Full details of the service offered are contained in a procedure circulated to the community.
3. The additional cost of this service to provide standby and enhanced payments to staff is built into the service budget, amounting to some £8,000 per annum. When the service is requested on a Saturday, or a Bank Holiday a premium charge is levied to cover the extra call-out costs over and above the cost of operating the standby rota.
4. During the last two years or so, extensive comparison work has been carried out to ascertain the level of provision of Muslim burials at other local authorities. In addition, at the suggestion of the Muslim community representatives, a fact finding visit was made to Kirklees MBC and the opportunity was taken to also visit neighbouring Calderdale MBC in West Yorkshire. As a result of which, further considerations were made regarding the current arrangements in Walsall.
5. The council has historically worked with members of the Muslim community through the Muslim Burial Committee and others, in order to meet their religious and cultural requests. Some examples are mentioned above and others include the establishment of Muslim burial areas in all cemeteries that still have land available for full coffin interments; namely North Walsall, Streetly and Willenhall Lawn. In addition, the recent extension at Streetly includes a section for Muslim adult burials.
6. With regard to the Muslim burial provision by Leicester City Council, it has been established that, according to the 2001 census figures, the population of Leicester was 279,921 of which 11.03% stated that they were Muslim. The corresponding figures for Walsall were 253,499 and 5.4%. Leicester carries out in the region of 150 Muslim burials per annum which is more than in Walsall where the take up is considerably lower. It is understood that all 'out of normal hours' burials at Leicester

are administered by a Muslim community group at a cost to Leicester City Council.

7. In order to protect the council's interests and the safety of the public, if a model along the lines that Leicester has adopted is considered as appropriate for Walsall, further considerations would need to be taken into account including issues of legality, risk management and public safety.

Contact Officer: Dr Judith Sunley
Head of Public Protection
Tel: 01922 652213
Email: sunleyj@walsall.gov.uk