

Report of Development Manager Parks and Countryside

Report to Chief Officer Parks and Countryside

Date: 1st March 2018

Subject: Creation of two Countryside Ranger posts to engage communities in caring for Leeds City Council cemeteries and crematoria.

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. A scrutiny inquiry by the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board recommended proposals are brought forward to recruit two additional rangers to work with existing volunteers and 'friends of' groups as well as establish new community groups that support practical volunteer activities in cemeteries and crematoria.
2. The budget agreed at full council (21st Feb 2018) included provision for two ranger posts funded through an above-inflation increase in Bereavement Services charges for the benefit of the cemeteries and crematoria and community relations.
3. The decision to increase charges for bereavement services has been made (D46327) which makes specific reference to recruiting rangers in this way.

Recommendations

1. The Chief Officer Parks and Countryside is requested to approve the appointment of two additional members of staff (based in the Parks and Countryside Service) to engage communities in improving cemeteries and crematoria through volunteering.

1. Purpose of this report

1.1 This report provides background on a proposed community engagement scheme focussing on Leeds City Council cemeteries and crematoria. The report highlights the need for the scheme to be delivered and why it is necessary to recruit additional staff to deliver it. Approval is being sought for the establishment of these posts and the recruitment of staff to them on a fixed term contract basis.

2. Background information

2.1 Leeds City Council manage 24 cemeteries and 3 crematoria (Cottingley, Lawnswood and Rawdon).

2.2 There are seven *Friends of* and volunteer groups currently affiliated with Leeds City Council cemeteries and crematoria (e.g. Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery). The groups vary in relation to how active they are but some do a fantastic job of helping the authority maintain, promote and improve their sites through practical volunteer days, fundraising, events and education. Other new groups are emerging (such as Friends of Pudsey Cemetery) and there is potential for more at other locations.

2.3 Leeds City Council, Parks and Countryside Service currently has a small Ranger team whose remit is to inspire, educate and involve local residents and visitors at public green spaces across Leeds. They do this through various means, including running public events and educational activities, providing volunteer opportunities and supporting community groups.

2.4 The rangers currently work with some of the Cemetery and Crematoria volunteer groups organising practical tasks (promoting the activities, doing the risk assessments, supplying the tools, providing training, ensuring everything runs smoothly on the day etc).

2.5 Currently there are four full time rangers in post to cover the whole of Leeds, plus one externally funded part-time ranger focussing solely on Gotts and Armley parks. This means that the team have limited capacity to provide support for volunteer tasks at cemeteries and crematoria.

2.6 Recruiting two rangers to increase the current ranger resource would enable them to provide more support for the Cemeteries and Crematoria volunteer groups that are already established, help new groups get set up, and increase volunteering at the sites overall (through better publicity, corporate volunteering days etc.).

2.7 The outcome of more volunteer time being spent on cemeteries and crematoria will be improvements to these sites, since they would be better maintained (and possibly benefit from funds raised by the groups). Visitors should have a better experience and this has been proven to work following the establishment of 'Friends' groups at locations such as Lawnswood Cemetery and Woodhouse Ridge.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 In October 2017, in a report on horticultural maintenance of Cemeteries and Crematoria (following complaints from the public) Scrutiny recommended the following:

That the Director of Communities and Environment takes a lead role in working with the Bereavement Service and the Communities Team to explore opportunities for raising the profile of 'friends of' groups and generating greater interest within local communities as well as supporting the establishment of such groups across all of the Council's cemeteries and crematoria.

This was based on the following statement:

The working group echoed the positive recognition that was given by the former City Development Scrutiny Board in relation to 'friends of' groups, which had resulted in a specific recommendation to encourage the establishment of such groups at all the Council's cemeteries and crematoria. In particular, the working group acknowledged how this valuable additional resource helps to achieve well maintained cemeteries, particularly focusing on the maintenance of older, neglected graves where family members are no longer living. This in turn encourages visitors and grave owners to also take a pride in the cemetery, making it easier to enforce grave conditions. Whilst the Council has not yet been able to establish a 'friends of' group in all of its cemeteries and crematoria, the working group reiterated the importance of the Council continuing to raise the profile of such groups in order generate greater interest.

- 3.2 It is proposed that, to fulfil the recommendation above, two full-time Countryside Rangers should be recruited to work with local communities to improve cemeteries and crematoria in Leeds.
- 3.3 Improvements will vary and will be in line with Green Flag standard, so they could range from basic maintenance like litter picking to make the sites look 'Clean and Well Maintained' to tree planting for 'Management of Natural Features,' or footpath improvements for 'Good and Safe Access'.
- 3.4 The new rangers would be based at Temple Newsam, where the team's tools and equipment are stored, with the current ranger team. They would be managed by the Senior Ranger.
- 3.5 The decision to increase charges for bereavement services has been made (D46327) which makes specific reference to recruiting rangers in this way.
- 3.6 The above-inflation price rise for Bereavement Services will be implemented from 1 March 2018. Given the time it takes for recruitment to happen, we aim to get the new members of staff in post by June 2018.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 The proposal to increase fees in line with inflation with a further 1% increase to cover the cost of recruiting rangers to work with community groups in cemeteries and crematoria was subject to public consultation. The responses included

reference to standards of maintenance which would help to be addressed by the appointment of rangers. There were no objections to an increase to fund rangers in this way.

4.2 Council policies and best council plan

4.2.1 The new posts introduced and proposed under this report will be recruited in line with Council policy and current legislation.

4.2.2 The outcomes of this recruitment will deliver against the Best Council Plan 2015-20 priorities of:

- Civic Enterprise – working with business and community partners to improve the city.
- Building resilient communities (building strong, coherent communities)
- Health and wellbeing (proven health benefits of spending time in green space)
- Making Leeds the Best City to Grow Old in (lots of volunteers and Cemetery and Crematoria visitors are older)

4.3 Resources and value for money

4.3.1 An above inflation price increase for Bereavement Services will fund these posts for improved community relations and cemeteries and crematoria enhancements as agreed at full council. The decision to increase charges for bereavement services has been made (D46327) which makes specific reference to recruiting rangers in this way.

4.4 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.4.1 These proposals are in line with Council policy and current legislation.

4.5 Risk management

4.5.1 No significant risks have been identified associated with this report.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Chief Officer Parks and Countryside is requested to approve the appointment of two additional members of staff within the Parks and Countryside Service to engage communities with the care and improvement of Cemeteries and Crematoria in Leeds.

6. Background documents¹

6.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.