

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

For advice on this document please contact Clare Muir on 72119 or email Claire.Muir@reading.gov.uk.

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Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:
New Cemetery Regulations & Burial Provision at Henley Road Cemetery

Directorate: **Resources - Corporate Improvement & Customer Services**

Service: **Registration & Bereavement Services**

Name: **Diane Willshire**

Job Title: **Registration & Bereavement Services Manager**

Date of assessment: **May 2021**

Version History

Version	Reason	Author	Date	Approved By
V1	Policy Committee	Di Willshire	25/5/2021	Isabel Edgar Briancon

Scope your proposal.

- **What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?**

A full review of the provision being offered by the Service is underway with the aim of being able to enhance the Bereavement service offering currently available and meet more of the needs of our diverse community.

The review includes:

- 1) The Cemetery Rules and Regulations
 - 2) The grave types / memorial options available
 - 3) Opening hours and resources
 - 4) Accessibility
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- **Who will benefit from this proposal and how?**

It is intended all residents of Reading Borough and their families could benefit from the changes. The enhancements will allow the Service to satisfy the wider needs of the culturally diverse community, especially in relation to the requirements based on religious belief or physical ability.

- **What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?**

1) The Cemetery Rules and Regulations

The Cemetery & Crematorium Rules and Regulations are being updated to ensure clearer definitions and instructions are provided, and, commitment to transparency of our operations at the cemetery to allow better understanding of the Service by our users.

2) A wider choice of grave types.

Currently the Cemetery offers the following Grave Types for the burial of a coffin: Traditional Graves (Memorial Stone with Kerb Set) & Lawn graves (Upright Memorial stone only).

The Muslim community makes up around 7% (2011 Census) of our overall community in Reading, but over 17% of customers requesting burials. This Community have specifically approached us about the limitations of our current offer.

The change will see the introduction of a new grave type, to offer our customers better choice and specifically respond to Muslim faith burials.

Muslim Burials: The Muslim faith requires that no person nor machine, should be able to walk, ride or drive over the grave of a loved one. Due to the maintenance methods of a Lawn Grave, this cannot currently be observed. The Muslim community do have

access to a Traditional Grave, however this would be in the non / multi-faith section known as Mayfield, and this is not acceptable to the Community.

The additional grave option does potentially impact on the projected operations and lifespan of the burial ground. These will be reflected in the covering report for Policy Committee to consider.

Balancing the faith needs of this community along with the ongoing operating and longevity of the site must be considered. Therefore, best practice has been researched relating specifically to Muslim burials, and options such as Traditional or Mounded graves would meet the requirements of a Muslim burial.

Throughout the site, there are different sections for different grave types, and since the early 1980's, sections have been set aside specifically for Muslim burials.

Non-Muslim Burials: There is only one remaining Traditional grave area in the cemetery (Mayfield). Once this section is full, unless the Council have secured additional burial ground elsewhere, there will be no further provision for Traditional graves. This will impact on all faiths & non-faiths (except the Muslim Community) who use the Cemetery, but particularly the Black Caribbean and Traveller Communities.

3) Enhanced operating hours and opening times:

The addition of Saturday opening hours both for the Cemetery Office and burial/cremation services plus a late night on a Thursday in the summer season, provides more accessibility to the services for the Community as a whole.

Saturday opening also provides the additional benefit for Muslim families:

- Families will be able to book a Saturday burial in the event a loved one should die on a Friday*. Currently, where a death occurs on a Friday, the earliest burial that can pre-booked is a Monday.
- Families can arrange a same day burial (subject to all legal documentation being available before 11.30am) The last burial of the day on a Saturday is 2.15pm.
- Families can pre-book a burial for Monday, up to 4pm on a Saturday, in the event a loved one should die after the time a same day burial is not possible.

This removes the need for the current 'Out of Hours On-Call Service' (provided voluntarily by staff). This also means two members of staff would already be on site to manage a burial, removing the need for a mosque licensee to be present. This would be beneficial to the mosques, as it removes the need for them to purchase specialist training and insurance.

The removal of the On-Call service would mean burials are no longer available on a Sunday. However, this would have limited impact. On average, the On Call service is used 3 times per annum. No 'On-Call' requests have been received, to date, this year.

*It should be noted, with the introduction of Saturday opening hours, any faith family may pre-book a Saturday burial in advance should they wish, however this is unlikely, as very few Funeral Directors work on a Saturday. This will therefore not impact on the particular benefit to the Muslim Community for the reasons stated above.

4) Improved accessibility:

There are accessibility challenges throughout the site, and changes to operating practices (such as allowing Traditional graves in Lawn grave areas) may impact on the overall accessibility of the site. For example, blocking pathways for wheelchairs.

In older areas of the cemetery, it is not practical or feasible to introduce defined pathways due to the positioning of existing graves, however in all new areas of the cemetery, provision will be made to ensure grassed pathways are easily accessible.

The impact of this, is a likely reduction in the longevity of available burial space.

All new burial areas will allow a 900mm grassed pathway between rows to allow greater accessibility for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

o Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO) legislation, Local Authorities are required to prepare and adopt Cemetery Regulations that set out the Council's policy and procedures for the operation of the cemetery. The last time the cemetery regulations were updated and adopted by the Council was in 2011. The Regulation's apply to Henley Road Cemetery, Reading Cemetery and Caversham Cemetery only. They also apply to Reading Crematorium and Gardens of Remembrance based at Henley Road Cemetery.

In October 2020 the Council received representation from some members of the Muslim community who had loved ones recently buried at Henley Road Cemetery, stating the services being provided did not fully meet their needs in respect of burial options and satisfying their religious beliefs.

The Service committed to review the current Cemetery Regulations and consult on the proposals.

Although the review has been prompted by the Muslim Community, the changes will benefit all residents of Reading Borough and their families.

Assess whether an EqlA is Relevant.

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; advancing equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

- **Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, sex, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? Make reference to the known demographic profile of the service user group, your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.**

Yes / No (delete as appropriate)

The improved opening times and accessibility changes are intended to improve the service for all users of the Service. The introduction of Saturday opening will better meet the needs of the Sikh & Hindu communities, as research shows Saturday is their preferred day for cremation services.

The grave changes have been considered specifically to meet the needs of the Muslim Community.

The Muslim community make up around 7% of the population of Reading, however they represent around 17% of all burials undertaken.

Most users of the burial service are multi-faith/non-faith but burials are the preferred choice of Black Caribbean, Gypsy/Traveller and Muslims communities.

- **Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Make reference to your complaints, consultation, feedback, media reports locally/nationally.**

Yes / No (delete as appropriate)

Prior to the review taking place, the Muslim community initiated a petition against Lawn graves which was posted on the internet. It attracted worldwide interest and several million signatures. It was however impossible to identify how many signatures were from Reading Borough residents.

The BBC and the Reading Chronicle also ran a small piece on the topic, but no follow up.

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above, you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment. If **No** you **MUST** complete this statement:

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

X

X

Completing Officer

Lead Officer

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- Consultation
- Collection and Assessment of Data
- Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive

Think about who does and doesn't use the service? Is the take up representative of the community? What do different minority groups think? (You might think your policy, project or service is accessible and addressing the needs of these groups but asking them might give you a totally different view). Does it really meet their varied needs? Are some groups less likely to get a good service?

How do your proposals relate to other services - will your proposals have knock on effects on other services elsewhere? Are there proposals being made for other services that relate to yours and could lead to a cumulative impact?

Example: A local authority takes separate decisions to limit the eligibility criteria for community care services; increase charges for respite services; scale back its accessible housing programme; and cut concessionary travel.

Each separate decision may have a significant effect on the lives of disabled residents, and the cumulative impact of these decisions may be considerable.

This combined impact would not be apparent if decisions are considered in isolation.

Consultation

How have you consulted with or do you plan to consult with relevant groups and experts. If you haven't already completed a Consultation form do it now. The checklist helps you make sure you follow good consultation practice.

[Consultation manager form - Reading Borough Council Dash](#)

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained?	Date when contacted.
Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management (ICCM)	Conversation & email	October 2020
Mosque Leaders	Meeting	March 2021
Approx. 70 Muslim community members	Meeting (open session)	March 2021
Other Local Authority Bereavement services	Conversation & email	April / May 2021

<p>Gardens of Peace (Privately owned Muslim Cemetery)</p>	<p>Conversation & email with the Director of the Cemetery. Visits to the Gardens of Peace are planned for June 2021</p>	<p>May 2021</p>
<p>The Consultation Groups will include but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Mosque Burials Working Group (set up specifically to represent the Muslim Community on these matters) o Alliance for Cohesion & Racial Equality (ACRE) o Religious & Faith Groups o Cultural Identity Groups o Access & Disabilities working Group o Bereavement Support Services o Existing Grave owners @ Henley Road (where possible) 	<p>A formal consultation is to take place. Additional consultation will be promoted via the Council’s Social Media, General Local Media and through our Voluntary and Community Groups. Notices will also be placed within the Cemetery grounds and office.</p>	<p>A period of 45 days commencing end June 2021</p>

Collect and Assess your Data

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

(Please delete relevant ticks)

- Describe how this proposal could impact on racial groups.
- Is there a negative impact? Yes & No / ~~Not sure~~

The changes are intended to improve the service offering for all users, regardless of race or ethnic origin.

The changes could improve the service for the Sikh and Hindu communities as we will be able to provide cremation services on a Saturday.

The changes have a positive impact for the Muslim Community as we look to offer a new grave type specifically to meet the needs of their faith. They will not however

be able to have a Traditional Grave in their dedicated section of the area known as Westfield.

In order to ensure the lifespan of the cemetery is prolonged as much as possible, it will no longer be possible for families to purchase the lease/reserve adjacent plots. This practice was stopped for Muslim burials in 2015/2016 as space in the dedicated area was scarce.

Although this will impact on all users of the cemetery, the number of requests over the last 5 years is minimal compared to overall burial numbers. The Communities potentially impacted the most, will be the Black Caribbean and Traveller communities.

Families will still be able to bury loved ones together in a double-depth grave. This is detailed in the covering report for the Policy Committee.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on Sex and Gender identity (include pregnancy and maternity, marriage, gender re-assignment)**
- **Is there a negative impact? Yes / No / Not sure**

The services offered are available to all individuals regardless of their sex or gender identity as defined above.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability**
- **Is there a negative impact? Yes / No / Not sure**

With the addition of grassed pathways to allow for the use of wheelchairs in the new burial grounds, the change has a positive impact for wheelchair users.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)**
- **Is there a negative impact? Yes / No / Not sure**

The services offered are available to all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on age.**
- **Is there a negative impact? Yes / No / Not sure**

The services offered are available to all individuals regardless of their age, except where restrictions are required by law or on the grounds of Health and Safety. For example, the Cemetery Regulations have been updated to specifically state no-one under the age of 18 years old is permitted to backfill a grave.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief.**
- **Is there a negative impact? Yes / No / Not sure**
 - The introduction of the Mounded grave option allows the Service to better meet the needs of the Muslim Community.
 - Changes to the burial options do not have any negative impact on the following groups:
Sikh's, Hindu's, Buddhists & Mormons. Traditionally, these faiths choose cremations.
 - The Black Caribbean and Traveller Communities generally choose the Traditional Grave Option. This can still be provided in the Multi Faith area of Mayfield.
 - The Catholic Community generally choose burials, although in recent years, following a declaration by the Pope, the burial of cremated remains is also acceptable. Burials with both Lawn grave and Traditional grave options are available in Mayfield. Cremated remains graves are also available in a dedicated area of the cemetery.
 - Jewish burials take place at dedicated cemeteries.

Make a Decision.

If the impact is negative, then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not, you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you **MUST** assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

- **Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason.**

A negative impact has been identified with regards the removal of the option to purchase/reserve adjacent burial plots. The data shows the impact is expected to minimal, given the number of requests over a 5 year period compared to the total burials in the same period.

This change is necessary in order to extend the lifespan of the cemetery, predominantly in the non & multi-faith traditional grave area. This restriction had already been introduced for Muslim burials in 2015/16 as space in the dedicated area was scarce. The change will align the restriction for all faiths and non-faiths.



Diane Willshire - Completing Officer

Isabel Edgar Briancon

Lead Officer