

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leisure and Arts Services Committee – 18 April 2005

REPORT ON: Cemetery Headstone Safety

REPORT BY: Director of Leisure and Arts

REPORT NO: 30-2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Members of the conclusions of the Pilot Memorial Headstones Inspection Team and seek approval on the way forward.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the inspection programme identified in 6.3 is adopted as the way forward.

2.2 The Director of Leisure and Arts be remitted to consider additional measures which would provide a long term option for the sustaining of headstone safety for the future.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Any financial implications of the inspection process will be contained within the Leisure and Arts Revenue Budget.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Introduction

Reference is made to Article 111 of the minute of meeting of this Committee of 15 December 2003 where the Committee agreed to a number of measures in relation to the control and management of dangerous headstones in cemeteries. As part of the proposal a Temporary Memorial Safety Team was appointed to carry out inspections of headstones and implement actions to reduce the quantity of dangerous headstones in cemeteries.

The Director of Leisure and Arts was remitted to bring back a further report relating to the performance of the team and any further implications for the survey work. The following report evaluates the work of the Inspection Team and proposes a sustainable way forward for cemetery headstone memorial safety for the future.

6.2 Evaluation of the Pilot

During the period of March to September 2004 a pilot scheme involving headstone memorial inspection, restoration of memorials and recording of headstones was undertaken. The exercise evaluated the scale of the problem and assisted in determining the most effective

approach to the problem for the future.

Over this period 15,000 headstones located at the Howff, Western and Eastern Cemeteries were inspected and approximately 10% were deemed unsafe, although local hotspots in the older sections of the Eastern and Western Cemeteries revealed up to 50% of the stones were damaged. All details of inspection were recorded on a database and, where identifiable, owners written to so that individuals were made aware of the problem and could make contact with the Department's staff. Where no contact was made to the Department and where the owners of the stone could not be identified, headstones were made safe by either digging stones in, carrying out minor repairs or laying flat.

The Department are now working through a programme to ensure a more permanent solution with these stones although, while effective, the cost of the pilot is not sustainable.

While the initial inspection pilot has ceased the Department has introduced an inspection and recording process before each funeral where all surrounding headstones are checked. On average 180 number of stones are checked in any week. Further to this the Department under the Capital Programme have undertaken around £30,000 of work to make safe dangerous stones in 2004/05. This equates to approximately 200 stones.

In conclusion the pilot has been extremely valuable in identifying the scale of the problem which is greater than first anticipated. It has also assisted in identifying pragmatic and sustainable options for dealing with the dangerous stones and has acted as a catalyst in developing future standards and practices in conjunction with Memorial Masons.

6.3 Way Forward

It is estimated that there are approximately 250,000 stones in the Council's cemeteries. From a Health and Safety perspective these all need to be inspected, recorded and any dangerous stones actioned. At the same time the cemeteries have to be managed and presented in a quality condition conducive to providing an appropriate environment for the bereaved.

On this basis, therefore, it is proposed that:

- Cemetery staff continue to inspect and take appropriate action to make safe those stones which surround a lair where a burial is planned.
- The time between identification of stones in a dangerous state and a response to that situation be minimised.
- Straightforward repairs can be undertaken by the team and where possible with assistance from other cemetery operatives
- More elaborate and extensive repairs, particularly to monuments over 2 metres high, would be carried out through contracting in services from suitable Contractors.
- The Leisure and Arts Department will continue to liaise with headstone owners and Memorial Masons in respect of specific cemetery headstone issues and develop a Registration Scheme.
- The Director of Leisure and Arts is remitted to bring forward proposals to provide a sustainable option for the long term maintenance of headstones.
- In all cases attempts will be made to identify the owners of dangerous headstones and where possible recover any costs entailed by the Council

7.0 **CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted on this report and are in agreement with its contents.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Article 111 Leisure and Arts Services Committee of 15 December 2003

STEVE GRIMMOND
DIRECTOR OF LEISURE and ARTS
1 April 2005