

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO CABINET**

**7<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Report Title:** Memorialisation Headstone Policy

**Submitted by:** Service Director - Commercial Delivery

**Portfolios:** Sustainable Environment

**Ward(s) affected:** All

<b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b>	<b><u>Key Decision</u></b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Bereavement Services has undertaken a review of the Council's memorialisation rules and regulations and wishes to increase the memorial headstone maximum height size from 36" to 40" (inclusive of base), update the Terms and Conditions for Memorial Masons and include new memorial rules and regulations regarding inscriptions and materials.			
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>			
That Cabinet approves the changes in memorial sizes as detailed in the report, alongside the Terms and Conditions.			
<b><u>Reasons</u></b>			
The appearance of the Council's active cemeteries and options given to Bereavement Services customers for the types of memorials affects more than 2 wards, and therefore Cabinet is asked to consider policy changes.			

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The provision of high quality cemeteries is important for the Council as spaces for reflection and a crucial part of residents grieving from the loss of a loved one. The way in which cemeteries are managed can be very emotive as families have differencing views on memorialisation. The Council therefore seeks to offer different types of memorialisation including the traditional headstone. The current policy sets the maximum height of headstones at 36 inches, although its stone masons can also manufacture larger headstones.
- 1.2 As part of the memorial rules and regulations review it is proposed that the maximum size restrictions enforced on the lawn type memorials permitted within the borough cemeteries be increased.
- 1.3 The current lawn type memorial size restrictions set by the Council are:

Height: 36" (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 35" (plate only)

The proposed new memorial restrictions would allow a headstone of a new maximum size of:

Height: 40" (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 35" (plate only)

These proposed sizes would be the maximum memorial headstone sizes that would be allowed on an individual grave space, fitted to an independent foundation in compliance with the current BS8415 standard.

- 1.4 The size restrictions for memorials were last reviewed in 2013 and the increase would bring them up-to-date to meet consumer demand, allow the bereaved to be able to personalise memorials more through varied designs, encouraging artistry and allowing them to reflect the individuality of the person that they have lost to help them grieve and remember.
- 1.5 Neighbouring authorities allow bigger memorial headstones on their lawn type graves. This increase would bring the Council's size regulations into alignment with other bereavement facilities, to support the borough's residents and to encourage community involvement and development of our resources.
- 1.6 The current lawn type memorial size restrictions imposed by neighbouring authorities are:
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council  
Height: 5' (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 45"
- Stafford Borough Council  
Height: 31" (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 42"
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council  
Height: 38" (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 30"
- Cheshire East Council (Orbitas)  
Height: 42" (plate and base inclusive)  
Width: 39"
- 1.7 The increased size would not affect the memorial safety inspection programme of works as Bereavement Services staff are trained to test memorials up to a height of 5ft without the involvement of a structural engineer, thus this would not incur an additional expenditure to the Council's bereavement service.
- 1.8 It is also proposed to include the following in the rules and regulations in regards to memorial inscriptions, design and materials:
- non-offensive jokes are allowed
  - nicknames are allowed

- different coloured stones and fonts are allowed
- lanterns are allowed (as long as they are not glass or protrude from the memorial)
- photographs and scan images are allowed
- non-offensive symbols and logos are allowed (with the correct permissions granted)
- the use of wood as well as stone is allowed
- all material requests will be considered with an emphasis on environmental sustainability

1.9 The terms and conditions and memorial diagrams issued to all Memorial Masons that have been approved to work within the borough's cemeteries and crematorium would be updated to reflect the new sizes and regulations detailed above.

## **2. Issues**

- 2.1 The Council undertook a consultation between 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024. 85% of the 20 respondents said that the memorial headstone sizes are currently too restrictive and should be increased. The comments provided included a range of opinions on cost of headstones, that the increased size differences between different headstones would look out of place, cultural expectations and supporting families coping with bereavement.
- 2.2 Members of the public, especially those from the borough's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community and bereaved parents, are requesting larger memorial designs and more choice.
- 2.3 Graves are increasingly being used for multiple burials, including the additional burials of cremated remains once two coffin burials have taken place in the grave or when the first burial has been that of a child leaving space for both parents to be individually buried within the grave. There is currently insufficient room on the memorial headstone for more than two inscriptions and a motif or photograph under the current size restrictions.
- 2.4 There are current memorial designs including a double heart design, a book design and a gates of heaven design, that have been requested that do not fit within the current size restrictions but would if they were increased to the new proposed sizes. These designs are allowed within neighbouring authorities' cemeteries.

## **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the changes in the memorial sizes alongside the terms and conditions.

#### **4. Reasons**

- 4.1 To extend memorial range and variety and provide more choice to allow the bereaved to be able to personalise memorials more through design and encourage artistry.
- 4.2 As Gold Award members of the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved, the Council's Targets are:
- to, where possible, extend the range and variety of memorial options
  - to encourage greater artistic input into memorials
- 4.3 After a person has died the memorial headstone on the grave provides a personal focal point and becomes an important part of the grieving process for the bereaved and this should be encouraged to allow the family to grieve and be able to get closure; grief is individual and the chosen memorial design and inscription should reflect the individuality and personality of the deceased.
- 4.4 Memorial designs, construction and fixing methods have changed and improved considerably since 2013 along with trends and choices requested by members of the public.

#### **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1 The Council could maintain the existing policy of headstone heights set up to 35" tall and 35" wide or offer larger memorial headstones or change the sizes.

#### **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 None identified.

#### **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 None identified.

#### **8. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 If the Council is unable to offer burial and memorial options then this would affect the income for the service.

#### **9. Major Risks & Mitigation**

- 9.1 None identified.

## 10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)



- 10.1 Providing suitable memorial options helps those grieving and those particularly those who are terminally ill to plan for their funerals, it therefore supports residents mental well-being at such a difficult time.

## 11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council

*We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.*

Offering a wider choice of memorial size improves customer choice and therefore likelihood of purchasing a memorial.

One Digital Council

*We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.*

One Green Council

*We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle*

## 12. Key Decision Information

- 12.1 This affects all the Council's cemeteries so affects more than 2 wards.

## 13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 13.1 Cabinet approved the Crematorium and cemeteries Rules and Regulations on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

## 14. List of Appendices

- 14.1 Appendix A – New Memorial Size Diagram  
Appendix B – New Terms and Conditions for Memorial Masons

## 15. Background Papers

- 15.1 N/A