

Committee: MERTON AND SUTTON JOINT CEMETERY BOARD

Date: 31 January 2024

Agenda Item:

Wards; Borough Wide Merton and Sutton Subject: Contractor Report

Lead officer: John Bosley, Assistant Director of Public Space

Contact officer: Mark Robinson, MSJC Registrar/Cemeteries Manager (idverde)

Recommendations

1. That Members review the information and note the content of the report.
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1. Purpose of the Report and Executive Summary

1.1 This report to the Board reviews the activity from June 2023 to December 2023 and details the work activity for this period. It is intended that a report is presented to each meeting of the Board covering key areas of activity.

1.2 The report will cover the following areas.

- Key performance activity
- Complaints and compliments
- Income

2. Details

2.1. Grounds Maintenance

There were several key initiatives this period aimed at improving service delivery and infrastructure quality –

1. **Management structure.** 2023 saw the introduction of a new SLWP Cemeteries Supervisor. This role is totally mobile and as such allows the supervisor to work closely with the MSJC team to offer support, guidance and detailed instruction. The benefits of this are already becoming evident.

2. **Increased capacity and strength of delivery.** To ensure continuity and increase funeral capacity, a nationally recognised funeral services delivery contractor has formally been engaged on this site. The company provides bespoke grave digging services to support the in house team. This will be critical in increasing both capacity and flexibility in relation to short notice burials.
3. **Integrated H&S.** Staff welfare facilities and operational buildings used are now routinely inspected to ensure compliance. These inspections align with those undertaken by LBM.
4. **Infrastructure impacting the visitor experience.** This remains a key focus. As such discussions are in place regarding improving the road and path network and constructing new bearer beams. The project to replace the final 4 beams on section X is due to start in March. This will involve removing the memorials, installing new beams and re fixing to the new beam.

An update regarding the welfare facilities is contained in this report.

5. **User compliance.** To improve the aesthetics of the site a drive has begun to ensure compliance regarding the decoration of plots is adhered to. Where appropriate, plot owners have been written to prior to the necessary corrective steps being taken. This programme will massively improve the appearance of plot areas and produce a uniformity across the site
6. **Tree Survey.** A tree survey identified 30 OPM nests which have been addressed and removed. Site tree management remains a high priority on the site.
7. **Industrial Action.** Industrial action was taken by some staff during this period. As a result of careful planning, mutually agreed contingency plans, site staff loyalty and the deployment of a sub-contractor, service delivery remained totally unaffected both on operational and customer service levels

The last report detailed the following proposed initiatives –

- **The redevelopment of the entrance** – all metal work has now been repaired and repainted. All damaged brick work and bollards have been repaired. The two lawn areas in front of the gates are to be renovated and regularly fertilised to allow the lawns to be striped in the spring and summer months
- **The redevelopment of the perimeter to the left of the main gates** – the initial 175 metres of trees and shrubs have been removed, and a uniform yew hedge planted. This in tandem with the aforementioned works to the entrance and will give the site a formal and traditional appearance. Unfortunately several contractors have confirmed that the 400 metres existing railings and coping stones represent an H&S issue, being both heavily corroded and unstable. It is thus proposed that all brickwork be repaired, coping stones either reset or replaced and new replica railings installed
- **Tree works** – a full site survey has been completed and all required remedial tree works scheduled. This will both improve the overall aesthetics of the site and safeguard against future damage. Works started in August 2023
- **Hard surfaces** – a close working relationship now exists between idverde and LBM in the progression of a programme of improvement. This will improve the appearance of the site and benefit the users of the site.
- **Waste bins** – these have now been installed. These are emptied each Thursday. The old bins are in the process of being removed.

Approval is to be sought this coming period to replace the broken organ in the chapel and replace it with a new electric piano. An indicative cost of circa £2K is envisaged

Customer care remains a key focus for families and funeral directors within the team at the cemetery and the cemetery office. This has proven successful with an increase in compliments received and the strengthened interface with the Muslim communities in both the borough and neighbouring boroughs. Burial schedules have been enhanced to offer greater flexibility in this regard.

The continued investment and support to increase the output and flexibility of the site team again demonstrates idverde's commitment to the MSJC.

2.2 Health and Safety Audit of Headstone Testing

The testing procedure has been agreed with LBM officers continues. Regular meetings with client officers are scheduled to ensure the management of expectation and the address of any ongoing issues

Section M: This section has now been completed. No further issues regarding this area have been raised.

Section MU: This section has now been completed. No further issues regarding this area have been raised.

Section B: This section has now been completed. No further issues regarding this area have been raised.

Section FCR: This section has now been completed. No further issues regarding this area have been raised.

In addition to this testing full audits of keys sections were undertaken to ensure the correlation between grave location and records kept. Plot owners were advised of this process.

It is proposed to expedite the process of testing, a contractor all be deployed to support the local team.

2.3 Cemetery Boundary Improvements

Please refer to client side report for full costings

2.4 Cemetery Welfare facilities Improvements

Several contractors have been invited to inspect the current building and offer quotations for the following –

- Total refurbishment of all toilet facilities
- Installation of an electric boiler
- Refurbishment of all floors
- Redecorating of all areas and tile replacement where appropriate
- Stabilisation and support to the internal concrete ceilings
- Dry lining of all walls in the waiting room/café
- Restoration and preservation of all original features
- Upgraded heating and hot water supply
- Creation of a café counter and shelving with appropriate utilities
- Replacement windows replicating the existing but having high thermal qualities and a wooden appearance in the current Georgian theme

In summary the old building will be brought back to life with modern utilities and thermal qualities but the original features and ambience will be maintained.

During this process the roof was inspected and the current felting deemed fit for purpose with a life expectancy of circa 8 – 10 years.

Please refer to client side report for full costings

- 2.5** Retirement – Cemetery Supervisor After 46 years with LBM and 36 years at the MSJC, he wants to focus on his family, love of cars and to actually use his camper vans! Thankfully the MSJC is not losing him all together as he will be working with his colleagues at all 5 cemeteries during the summer months over the next three years. This will be a huge benefit to the team and for him to both keep his hand in but also enjoy retirement.

3. Burial numbers

- 3.1 See appendix 1 for Burial numbers.

4. Complaints and Compliments

- 4.1 Summary of Complaints

Number	Reason
1	Over flowing bins
1	Removal of non-compliant decoration

- 4.2 Summary of Compliments

Number	Reason
1	Empathetic and supportive staff
2	Understanding and sympathy
3	Assistance with grave location
4	Patient assistance
5	Accompaniment on site
6	Detail of response
7	Helpful staff
8	Empathetic and supportive staff
9	Empathetic and supportive staff
10	Empathetic and supportive staff
11	Clarification regarding reinstatements

12	Empathetic and supportive staff
13	Clarity
14	Patience and dedication

5 Income

5.1 See Appendix 2: income figures June 2023 to December 2023

5.2 Excess Revenue Share - The principles of calculating this metric have been in deliberation for some time. Idverde have offered the Board an immediate credit of £503K as the full and final expectation for the period 2018 to 2022 as shown in the table below:-

Year 2	2018-19	MSJC Excess Rev share	£ 115,000
Year 3	2019-20	MSJC Excess Rev share	£ 88,000
Year 4	2020-21	MSJC Excess Rev share	£ 150,000*
Year 5	2021-22	MSJC Excess Rev share	£ 150,000*

* A ceiling of £150k to excess income per annum would then be applied in subsequent financial years

6. Consultation undertaken or proposed

6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

7. Timetable

7.1 None for the purposes of this report.

8. Financial, resource and property implications

8.1 Income and Interment information are contained in appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

8.2 The excess income due to MSJC for the period 2018 to 2023 detailed in paragraph 5.2 remains outstanding and requires resolution. Additional analysis needs to be undertaken by officers prior to further progression. The proposal will reduce the excess income due to MSJC over the period of the contract. Future recommendation(s) to the Board will need to consider legal advice and guidance from the Section 151 officers for both Merton and Sutton (as the cemetery is a precepting authority to both boroughs).

9. Legal and statutory implications

9.1 None for the purposes of this report – this excludes any advice on the excess income offer for which legal advice has yet to be obtained.

10. Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

10.1 None for the purposes of this report.

11. Risk management and health and safety implications

11.1 Considered within the Client Side Report.

12. Appendices

1. Burial numbers for January 2018 to December 2023
2. Income for June to December 2023 inclusive

Appendix 1

MSJCB Monthly Interments from 2018-2023

Month	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
January	19	25	31	20	25	22
February	17	22	25	17	14	27
March	26	27	29	25	13	25
April	17	20	30	47	13	23
May	22	31	20	31	27	21
June	20	20	24	17	18	17
July	18	19	14	26	13	15
August	17	27	21	24	19	25
September	24	25	27	21	17	21
October	18	28	25	21	19	22
November	27	22	22	11	12	21
December	15	14	27	20	13	17
TOTAL	240	280	295	280	203	256

Appendix 2

Merton & Sutton Joint Cemetery Income June to December 2023 inclusive

In providing this data, it is necessary to caveat the fact the logged amounts have in some cases not been reconciled against the bank and as such may change once reconciliation has been completed

Type of Income	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Total
Purchase, Interments and Grave Lease Extensions	103,353.00	45,455.00	61,275.00	83,071.00	79,500.00	96,320.00	60,105.00	529,079.00
Memorials permits	3,803.00	4,182.00	2,606.00	1,654.00	4,646.00	2,806.00	3,382.00	23,079.00
Transfer of ownership	250.00	1,750.00	(1,075.00)	625.00	375.00	485.00	300.00	2,710.00
Planting and Upkeep	675.00	3,237.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,912.00
Total	108,081.00	54,624.00	62,806.00	85,350.00	84,521.00	99,611.00	63,787.00	558,780.00

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