

# **City Services Scrutiny Panel Policy Review 2014 – 2015**

## **Review of Cemetery Regulations and the Introduction of a Medical Examiners Service - Draft Report**

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## **1 Foreword from the Scrutiny Lead Member for City Services**

During the year, the Panel has looked at two issues facing the Council's bereavement service; the content of the existing Cemetery Regulations and the implications for the city of the proposed introduction of a Medical Examiners service. Given the linkages between the two reviews, it was considered appropriate to combine them into one report.

The review into Cemetery Regulations came about as a response to issues raised by members of the public regarding the maintenance of the Council's cemeteries, particularly in relation to the impact of unauthorised kerb sets.

The Panel consider that a review into the Cemetery Regulations should include an overall policy statement setting out the vision and direction of the service in the decades ahead and contain amendments to deal with the problem of unauthorised kerb sets; the number of which have grown in recent years. These kerb sets often adversely affect the appearance of our cemeteries, make maintenance more challenging and are of concern to the families of neighbouring graves who may find their own access hindered by them

The Panel would emphasise that the rules and regulations governing the maintenance of cemetery space is a very sensitive area and should be handled with care and sensitivity. We consider it important that a full and thorough consultation is undertaken in order that people are made aware of the changes being proposed, why the changes are necessary and the way in which the changes will benefit the whole community.

The proposed introduction of the Medical Examiners Service has been the subject of considerable delay. It was now unlikely that there will be any progress or new announcements until after the May 2015 election. However, the establishment of a new Medical Examiner Service will have significant implications and our report considers the respective roles and responsibilities of the Council and its partners such as the Coroner.

The Panel considers that the issue of funding is a sensitive and potentially controversial issue and the prospect of additional costs being passed on to the bereaved could result in issues of affordability.

However the Panel is impressed with the level of preparation with regards to the work going on with the Coroner and other partners and we are satisfied that the Council will be in a position to introduce the service at short notice if required.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues on the City Services Scrutiny Panel and all of the officers and staff involved for their hard work during the course of the review and thank them for their valuable contribution.

Councillor David Snowdon, Lead Scrutiny Member for City Services

## **Review of Cemetery Regulations**

### **2 Introduction**

- 2.1 On the 9 October 2014, the Council's Scrutiny Committee referred to issues that had been raised by members of the public regarding the maintenance issues of a number of the Council's cemeteries, particularly in relation to the impact of unauthorised kerb sets. The Committee asked that this Panel look into these issues in further detail as a matter of priority.
- 2.2 In response, the Panel has undertaken a short policy review into this matter. This has involved meeting with relevant Council officers, inspecting the conditions at Bishopwearmouth Cemetery and considering the approach being taken to cemetery maintenance among other neighbouring local authorities.
- 2.3 From the outset, it became clear that addressing these issues raised would require a review of the Council's existing cemetery regulations. It was also clear that any such review would need to be handled sensitively, balancing the wishes and expectations of families and cemetery visitors.

### **3 Aim of the Review**

- 3.1 The aim of the review was to examine maintenance and upkeep issues at the city's cemeteries and consider the implications of any revisions to the Cemetery Regulations.

### **4 Terms of Reference**

- 4.1 The terms of reference for the review were agreed as follows:-
- to examine maintenance and upkeep issues at the city's cemeteries;
  - to consider the practical implications for the Council of a review of its Cemetery Regulations;
  - to consider the impact upon residents and cemetery users of a review of the current Regulations;

### **5 Membership of the Panel**

- 5.1 The membership of the City Services Scrutiny Panel consists of Councillors David Snowdon (Lead Member), James Blackburn, Michael Essl, Stephen Foster, Stuart Porthouse, Lynda Scanlan and John Wiper.

### **6 Methods of Investigation**

- 6.1 The following methods of investigation were used for the review:

- (a) Desktop Research
- (b) Evidence from relevant Council officers;
- (c) Visit to Bishopwearmouth Cemetery

## **7 Findings of the Review**

Findings relate to the main themes raised during the Panel's investigations and evidence gathering.

### **7.1 Provision of Cemetery Service in Sunderland**

7.1.1 As a starting point for the review, the Panel received background information on the scale and operation of Bereavement Services in Sunderland.

7.1.2 The Council operates and maintains ten cemeteries within the city of Sunderland; namely:-

Bishopwearmouth Cemetery (84 acres)  
Castletown Cemetery (2.2 acres)  
Houghton Cemetery (4.6 acres)  
Washington Cemetery (4.3 acres)  
Easington Lane Cemetery (3.4 acres)  
Sunderland (Grangetown) Cemetery (34 acres)  
Mere Knolls Cemetery (38 acres)  
Hetton Cemetery (6.5 acres)  
Southwick Cemetery (17 acres)  
Ryhope Cemetery (9.5 acres)

There are an average of 3000 deaths annually in the city, from which approximately 600 will be buried whilst the remaining 2400 will be cremated.

7.1.3 The range of services provided by the Council includes:-

- Initial booking of the interment.
- Scheduling bookings across the ten cemeteries.
- Processing of statutory forms and completion and maintenance of burial records.
- Overseeing of interments.
- Dealing with applications for the purchase of grave spaces.
- Processing applications for the Installation and maintenance of cemetery memorials.
- Grounds maintenance in cemeteries, including the excavation of graves.
- Genealogical research requests.
- Exhumations

7.1.4 The rules governing the burial process are contained in the Council's Cemetery Regulations which are a requirement of the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977. The Regulations form the basis for the good governance of the cemeteries, ensuring that the city's cemeteries remain neat

and tidy and do not pose a safety risk to either visitors or those working within them.

- 7.1.5 A copy of the Cemetery Regulations is attached as an appendix to this report. They are available for public information on the internet at [www.sunderland.gov.uk](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk) and copies are also provided upon request to Bereavement Services.
- 7.1.6 Families who have suffered a bereavement and wish to have their loved one interred in one of the city's cemeteries are required to purchase a grave space. For 2014/15, the cost of an adult grave space for the interment of a resident of Sunderland is £704.00, and the cost for a non-resident of the city is £1408.00. When a grave space is purchased, the owner gains the 'Exclusive Rights of Burial' and this extends for a period of 100 years from the date of purchase.
- 7.1.7 The Exclusive Rights of Burial provides the purchaser with control over burials in the grave space should space allow, and over any memorials that may be placed upon the grave (following the submission of an application to erect a memorial to Bereavement Services and approval being granted). The Exclusive Right does not grant ownership of the land, which remains in the ownership of the Council.
- 7.1.8 When Exclusive Rights of Burial have been acquired, the purchaser is issued with a formal Grave Deed for the grave space in question, together with supplementary information which summarises the rights acquired through ownership, together with the responsibilities.

## **7.2 Condition of Local Cemeteries**

- 7.2.1 As mentioned earlier in the report, the Panel has been made aware of public concern regarding the impact of unauthorised kerb sets on the appearance and maintenance of our cemeteries. Many of these concerns have been raised by families with graves adjacent to such kerb sets.
- 7.2.2 In order to review the condition and maintenance issues facing our cemeteries, the panel undertook a visit to Bishopwearmouth Cemetery to view the situation at first hand. The Panel's conclusions and recommendations are based on the outcome of this visit and are set out in detail below.
- 7.2.3 The general upkeep of our cemeteries is good and they are clearly being well looked after and maintained. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to providing the best possible service to the public in an area that requires great tact and sensitivity.
- 7.2.4 However, there are clearly continuing issues relating to those sections of the cemetery containing unauthorised kerb sets.
- 7.2.5 Unauthorised kerb-sets can best be explained as graves that have been extended or adorned beyond the permitted 12 inches immediately in front of

the memorial (where families are allowed to plant with low growing flowers and plants). Some of these memorials may be poorly constructed or maintained and can have the effect of impacting on the orderliness and dignity of the cemetery. In quite a few cases, kerb sets are no longer being maintained or cared for which considerably adds to the problem.

- 7.2.6 As well as the impact of their appearance, such kerb sets can also provide difficulties for grass cutting and the general maintenance of the cemetery. Responsive Local Services (RLS) staff responsible for this duty may be unable to use sit-on machinery to maintain the area and are compelled to use trimmers to effectively manage the area in question. This makes maintenance duties more labour intensive and time consuming and adds to the risk of accidental damage to neighbouring graves.
- 7.2.7 By comparison, Members commented on the attractiveness of the open lawns section and the war graves section. The Lawn Sections were introduced into the city's cemeteries in the early 1970's. The intention of this was to provide a system of graves where the space between memorials would be maintained as open lawn. This would allow unobstructed access for visitors, including those with mobility issues or disabilities, and would greatly reduce the maintenance issues caused by official kerbed enclosures as often favoured on traditional Victorian graves.
- 7.2.8 Over the years, the strict Lawn Section Regulations were relaxed to allow families more choice for commemorating the deceased and official kerb-sets not exceeding 5 feet on standard 9 foot graves, and not exceeding 4 feet on standard 8 foot graves are currently allowed on these sections. Again these kerb-sets, although within the current Regulations, cause access and maintenance issues and contradict the original objective of the creation of Lawn Sections in our cemeteries.
- 7.2.9 Finally, the Panel visited the Commonwealth War Graves section of the cemetery. This section is uncluttered and dignified in appearance and the graves are maintained to an extremely high standard by the National Commission.

### **7.3 Views of the Panel**

- 7.3.1 As previously mentioned, the city's cemeteries are generally well maintained and in good condition. However, as ever, there is always room for some improvement and we would suggest a review of the existing cemetery regulations focusing in particular on the control of unauthorised kerb sets.
- 7.3.2 The current Cemetery Regulations have not been reviewed for a significant number of years. Terminology used within the Regulations is at times out of date, no longer relevant in parts and not always conducive to the successful management of the city's cemeteries. While such a review need not be a full scale overhaul the aim should be to produce a new set of regulations that are fit for purpose for the decades ahead.

- 7.3.3 We therefore suggest that a policy statement is included in the future regulations that sets out clearly and concisely the Council's overall approach to the maintenance of its cemeteries.
- 7.3.4 Given the severe resource constraints facing the Council for the foreseeable future, we recognise that that a long term incremental approach will be required albeit one that will generate future savings in maintenance costs and improvements in the environment of our cemeteries.
- 7.3.5 In terms of the specific problems being experienced with unauthorised kerb sets, we would suggest that the cemetery regulations should be revised to ensure that, in the future, only kerb sets that meet specified conditions are allowed.
- 7.3.6 We would not however suggest that existing unauthorised kerb sets should be removed. We feel that such an approach could be viewed as being heavy handed and insensitive. This was borne out by the experiences of a neighbouring authority where their initial policy of removing unauthorised kerb was revised to apply to only new kerb sets in the face of public concern.
- 7.3.7 We would therefore suggest that any revised cemetery regulations set out a time limit for kerb sets and that there should be a power for kerb sets to be removed where they are not being maintained by a family or have fallen into disrepair and become unsafe.
- 7.3.8 The Panel would also suggest that the review consider whether to have a traditional section which would permit the installation of authorised and approved kerb sets for families who choose this memorialisation option. In contrast, separate lawn sections would be available for interment which would be clear of any such enclosures and consist of headstones only with an open, clear, grassed area between graves. This could help to balance the interests of differing cemetery users while providing for greater conformity and easier maintenance.
- 7.3.9 One issue that the Panel would like to emphasise is that the rules and regulations governing the maintenance of cemetery space is a very sensitive area and requires to be handled with care and sensitivity. We consider it very important that a full and thorough consultation is undertaken in order that people are made aware of the changes being proposed, why the changes are necessary and the way in which the changes will benefit the whole community.
- 7.3.10 We suggest that the Council therefore draws up a consultation plan setting out how it will make best use of public notices, the Council website and meetings with key stakeholders as well as public meetings.
- 7.3.11 During the course of our review, a number of other issues having been raised which we feel could contribute to an improvement in the physical fabric of our cemeteries. One of these was the potential of developing the number of "friends" groups operating in our local cemeteries, particularly for older

sections of our cemeteries. Such groups can make an important contribution to the upkeep of sections of our cemeteries.

7.3.12 The review of the cemetery regulations should also take into account the views and interests of faith groups and again thorough consultation will need to be undertaken to ensure that they reflect any issues or concerns.

7.3.14 Our review has also highlighted the importance of making adequate provision for vehicles that need to enter and park in the cemetery. During our visit we were struck by the damage done by cars driving on verges and leaving unsightly tracks on the grassed areas adjacent to some of the graves. We would suggest that the Council look at this issue and ensure that appropriate provision is made for vehicles without it being to the detriment of other users of the cemetery.

## **8 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The general upkeep of our cemeteries is good and they are clearly being well maintained.
- 8.2 The upkeep of cemeteries is governed by the Council's cemetery regulations. These regulations have not been reviewed since the 1990's. While overall they are fit for purpose they do require review to deal with the issues facing us now and into the future.
- 8.3 In particular, we need the inclusion of an overall policy statement setting out the vision and direction of the service in the decades ahead. They also require amendment to deal with the problem of unauthorised kerb sets; the number of which has grown rapidly in recent years. These kerb sets often adversely affect the appearance of our cemeteries, make maintenance more challenging and are of concern to the families of neighbouring graves who may find their own access hindered by them.
- 8.4 We therefore suggest that all future kerb sets be required to adhere to a clear policy set out in our cemetery requirements, and that these be enforced consistently and effectively.
- 8.5 In the case of existing unauthorised kerb sets we would recommend that these be gradually phased out over time and that the Council establish a policy to time limit and remove such kerb sets if they are not maintained or fall into disrepair. We would also suggest that the Council looks into the feasibility of establishing separate lawned-only sections along with separate areas for those wishing to have an authorised kerb set.
- 8.6 Clearly, the implementation of such measures will be a long term process and we would suggest the formulation of an action plan in order to focus the work required and also help to secure momentum into the future.
- 8.7 Most important the revision of our cemetery regulations should be handled sensitively given the emotive nature of the service provided. Any changes should therefore be accompanied by a thorough process of consultation with the public in order that they are aware of the reasons for the changes and the potential future benefits for the community as a whole.
- 8.8 Finally, the panel would ask that any review of the cemetery regulations should take account of the specific needs of faith communities and reflect the value of friends groups for future improvements to our cemeteries.

## **8 Recommendations**

9.1 The Panel's recommendations are as outlined below:-

- a. That a review be undertaken into the Council's Cemetery Regulations and that this include the development of a clear overall policy statement;
- b. That the review include provisions governing kerb-sets and that the Council work retrospectively to bring up to standard;
- c. That given the sensitivity of the issues involved a consultation plan be established involving the Council website and engagement with key stakeholders;
- d. That officers investigate the possibility of establishing friends groups at older sections across the cemeteries.

## **Introduction of a Medical Examiners Service in Sunderland – Draft Report**

### **10 Introduction**

- 10.1 This report sets out the findings of a short review of the potential implications for the Council in the event of the introduction of a Medical Examiner Service in the city.

### **11 Aim of the Review**

- 11.1 The objective of the review was to consider the implications for the Council of the establishment of a Medical Examiner service in the city.

### **12 Terms of Reference for the Policy Review**

- 12.1 The terms of reference for the review were agreed as follows:-
- To consider the practical implications for the Council of the establishment of the new position of Medical Examiner and input into policy development around this area;
  - To consider the respective roles and responsibilities of the Council and its partners in working with the Medical Examiner.

### **13 Membership of the Panel**

- 4.1 The membership of the City Services Scrutiny Panel consists of Councillors David Snowdon (Lead Member), James Blackburn, Michael Essl, Stephen Foster, Stuart Porthouse, Lynda Scanlan and John Wiper.

### **14 Methods of Investigation**

- 14.1 The following methods of investigation were used for the review:
- (d) Desktop Research
  - (e) Evidence from relevant Council officers;
  - (f) Discussions with Senior Coroner

### **15 Findings of the Review**

Findings relate to the main themes raised during the Panel's investigations and evidence gathering.

#### **15.1 Role of Medical Examiner - National Context**

- 15.1.1 As a starting point for the review, the Panel looked into the national and local context for the proposed introduction of a new Medical Examiner service.

- 15.1.2 The Panel heard that the current system for death registration has remained largely unchanged for 50 years. Under this system, the doctor attending a patient in their final illness completes a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) when death occurs. The doctor then ensures this certificate is sent to the Registrar of Deaths, usually by handing it to the relatives of the deceased. On receipt of the MCCD, the Registrar registers the death and gives a Certified Copy of an Entry to the informant, which is the document most properly referred to as the formal death certificate.
- 15.1.3 However, the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the case of Dr Harold Shipman in 2003 led to a demand for a fundamental national reform of the system for death certification in order to prevent the possibility of any reoccurrence of criminal activity.
- 15.1.4 Furthermore, it had long been known that many death certificates were inaccurate in terms of the reasons given for cause of death. In practice, Doctors receive little training in relation to completion of death certificates and many inaccuracies can arise. Indeed, a pilot study conducted in Sheffield found that death certificates might be inaccurate in one in four cases, while the Office for National Statistics put the figure at one in five.
- 15.1.5 The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 sets out the legal basis for a new system of death registration in the UK.
- 15.1.6 The Act includes proposals for the introduction of an independent Medical Examiner to ensure thorough external examinations of bodies where necessary; scrutiny of all death certificates which are usually written by junior doctors; discussion about deaths with bereaved relatives and consultations with Coroners.
- 15.1.7 The Panel heard that the proposals are designed to ensure that families receive an expert explanation of the cause of a death and an independent authority who will be empowered to listen to and act on concerns and provide greater transparency to the death certification process. The reforms therefore should strengthen safeguards for the public, make the process simpler and more open for the bereaved and increase the quality and consistency of certification and data relating to causes of death.
- 15.1.8 Those eligible for the position of Medical Examiners will be appropriately trained senior doctors with at least 5 years' experience. The main responsibilities of the post will be to:
- ensure compliance with the legal and procedural requirements associated with the current processes of certification, investigation (by coroners) and registration of deaths within a Local Authority area;
  - support those doctors who call for medical advice on suspected natural causes of death before they prepare an MCCD, and provide general medical advice to the coroner;

- scrutinise the certified causes of all in-scope deaths in a way that is compliant with the proposed national protocol;
- maintain comprehensive records of all deaths scrutinised and undertake analysis and provide information as required to ONS & locally for clinical governance purposes;
- explain to bereaved relatives cause of death in a transparent, tactful and sympathetic manner;
- support the training of junior doctors in completion of MCCDs and provide feedback on accuracy of certification locally

15.1.9 The Panel heard that Primary Care Trusts (PCT's) were originally intended to be responsible for the Medical Examiners service. However following the introduction of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the subsequent abolition of Primary Care Trusts, provision was made for the new Medical Examiner service to sit with local authorities.

15.1.10 The proposed introduction of the Medical Examiner Service will have considerable implications for local authorities at a national level. It is estimated that up to 500, mostly part time, Medical Examiners will be needed across England and Wales to scrutinise around 390,000 deaths per year and provide advice to doctors on a further 40,000 deaths that are subsequently investigated by a Coroner.

15.1.11 Clearly, reforming the current system will have an impact on a wide range of individuals and organisations. Key partners include local authorities, doctors and NHS staff, Senior Coroners and Coroners' Officers, funeral directors, Registration Services, Burial and Cremation authorities, Bereavement Services, the public, local government and other representative bodies. Indeed, the Act makes particular reference to the importance of the Medical Examiner working closely with the Coroner and the local authority Bereavement and Registration Service.

15.1.12 The Panel heard that concerns regarding the potential cost of the Medical Examiner Service had led to delay in the Government issuing formal approval for its establishment. Further guidance is expected shortly but this is now likely to follow the General Election in May 2015.

15.1.13 However, there was considered to be cross party support for the establishment of the Medical Examiner and a pilot project conducted in Sheffield was seen as a success, although this project did not consider the funding implications of a national roll out.

## **15.2 Establishment of Medical Examiner - Local Context**

15.2.1 The establishment of a new Medical Examiner Service will have significant implications for the Council.

- 15.2.2 Department of Health recommendations are that each Medical Examiner district should deal with an average of 2100 deaths per annum. In 2013, 3089 deaths were registered in Sunderland with this figure expected to remain consistent for the foreseeable future.
- 15.2.3 Based on the anticipated workload, the new service will require a staffing structure including a Medical Examiner, Medical Examiner Officers who will act as investigatory and support staff, as well as administrative support.
- 15.2.4 There will also be other issues to consider such as the consequential effect on the Coroner and its successful integration with the established Bereavement, Registration and Coroners Service.
- 15.2.5 The Panel has raised concerns that the establishment of the Medical Examiners service could slow down the death certification process causing potential distress for the families of the deceased. However, we were reassured that it should add only 1 or 2 days at the most to the process and that this would be outweighed by the assurance provided families assurance that a death has been independently scrutinised.
- 15.2.6 In terms of the financial implications, using guidance provided by Department of Health and information from pilot Medical Examiner areas in Sheffield and Brighton indicate costs per annum of around £230k including Medical Examiner staff costs, together with support staff, ICT and central support and overhead costs would need to be considered by the Council.
- 15.2.7 There is as yet no indication whether additional funding will be made available to local authorities in support of the provision of the new service. If there is no funding, provision may need to be found from within the Council budget. The introduction of a fee charged by the Medical Examiner to the bereaved family would provide an opportunity to create a cost neutral service. This fee can only be recovered retrospectively and initial indications subject to validation of costs, are that the charge per reported death could be in the region of £100. Clearly, the economic, political and practical aspects of such a charge would require careful consideration.
- 15.2.8 It is anticipated that Councils will be given the authority to decide how the new fees will be recovered. There are a number of options including:-
- No fee
  - Work with the Funeral Directors to include it in their total fees
  - That the Registrar collects the fee from the informant when a death is registered.
- 15.2.9 It was also anticipated that approximately £40,000 could be saved by the introduction of the Medical Examiner system, as the current role of the Medical Referee that is a requirement under the current system would no longer be necessary.

- 15.2.10 It was stressed that the ME service will need to have open and transparent costs. There are current costs associated particularly with cremations (commonly known as Ash Cash) that are currently integrated into the overall Funeral Directors costs. The statutory forms requesting a cremation must be signed by two doctors and then signed off by the Medical Referee. These costs will no longer be needed with the introduction of the ME system and it's associated fee.
- 15.2.11 During the review, the Panel met with Mr Derek Winter, Senior Coroner for Sunderland to obtain a clearer understanding of how the Medical Examiner (ME) may impact on the current Coroner workload in the city and the way in which partnership working is progressing.
- 15.2.12 Mr Winter highlighted the on-going delay with the implementation of the ME system. He noted that a number of successful pilots have been undertaken around the country but a definitive proposal had still to be put out for consultation. It was felt that the main reason for the delay was linked to how the new scheme will be funded, and it was noted that all of the pilot sites across the country had not imposed a fee upon families.
- 15.2.13 Mr Winter confirmed to us that Sunderland was ahead of many other local authorities in terms of planning for the new service and that it was pleasing that work had already been done to obtain some indication of the costs involved and the potential options for funding.
- 15.2.14 The introduction of a Medical Examiner service could result in more deaths being referred to the Coroner and that would mean a likely increase in the demands made on the Coroners Service. Currently, around 50% of all deaths are referred to the Coroner and last year this represented around 1700 cases in Sunderland. It should be noted that the number of Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLS) applied to residents in the city are currently having an impact upon the Coroner caseload, with a significant increase in cases referred. Whilst DoLS remain an issue, this would continue to keep the Coroner caseload higher than usual, and impact upon the ME caseload to reduce it.
- 15.2.14 Mr Winter highlighted the importance of the Coroner and Medical Examiner establishing close links and a good working relationship in order to promote an efficient and coordinated service. He also confirmed that he was working closely with the Council to prepare for the introduction of the service.

## **16 Conclusions**

- 16.1 The proposed introduction of the Medical Examiners Service has been the subject of considerable delay. It was now unlikely that there would be any progress or new announcements until after the May 2015 election.
- 16.2 However the Panel is impressed with the level of preparation with regards to the work going on with the Coroner and other partners and we are satisfied that the Council will be in a position to introduce the service at short notice if required.
- 16.3 Clearly, more work will need to be done on the cost of the service and how it can be best funded once an announcement has been made. The Panel considers that the issue of funding is a sensitive and potentially controversial issue and the prospect of additional costs being passed on to the bereaved could result in issues of affordability.
- 16.4 We would suggest that the Council looks in more detail into how any additional cost could be addressed for example by incorporating it into the charges and fees traditionally collected by Funeral Directors, usually referred to as disbursements.
- 16.5 We would also suggest that consideration be given into the possibility of some form of regional shared service if this was to prove a viable option, possibly with a 'South of the Tyne' Medical Examiner service to be considered.

## **17 Recommendations**

- (1) The Council continue to work with partners to prepare for introduction of Medical Examiners Service;
- (2) that the financial implications of introducing the Medical Examiner be examined in more detail including the options for the funding of the service;
- (3) That any consideration of future funding options take into account the sensitive nature of the service and likely issues of affordability