

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services

Community Safety and Environmental Services Committee : 2 August 2006

Subject: Clydebank Crematorium - Service Times

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of potential consequences in altering the length of service times at Clydebank Crematorium from thirty minutes (current) to forty five minutes.

2. Background

- 2.1** At the Council meeting of 28 June 2006, the following motion was passed by Council:-

“This Council notes with concern that the policy of allocating 30 minutes for the services at our crematoria is woefully inadequate and leaves no scope for delay. This policy has led to the disgraceful situation where mourners have been ushered out of the door as another funeral is coming in. This Council then calls for a further report on the impact to the services from moving to a 45 minute service schedule be referred to the Community Safety and Environmental Services Committee for consideration.”

- 2.2** Clydebank Crematorium opened in 1968. For the past twenty-eight years, the length of a cremation service has been thirty minutes. The crematorium, having two separate waiting rooms (east and west) was designed to receive services on the hour and on the half-hour. Although each cremation service time is limited to thirty minutes, the vast majority of services conclude well before the thirty minutes has elapsed.

- 2.3** Apart from the thirty minute service time, mourners are allowed into the allocated waiting room some 15 minutes in advance of the service time and are allowed the use of the waiting room for some ten minutes after the service, if this is required.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Amongst crematoria across the country, thirty minutes is by far the common length of service. Neighbouring crematoria, specifically Falkirk, the Linn and Daldowie, (both Glasgow), and Cardross (Argyll and Bute) each allow thirty minutes for a cremation service. Inverclyde Crematorium allows roughly thirty-five minutes for a service.

- 3.2** During the Best Value review of Burial and Cremation Services (2003), extensive consultation was carried out with Funeral Directors, Clergy and representatives of the bereaved. Changing the length of service time was not raised as an issue. This continues to be the case with no representations or requests received from any of these groups to review the service time length.
- 3.3** As part of the Best Value review of Burial and Cremation Services, a service quality questionnaire was prepared for completion and return by the person who arranged the cremation. This questionnaire continues to be sent out. Of the returns received to date, only one return suggested increasing the length of the cremation service time.
- 3.4** Clydebank crematorium will typically carry out 1,750 cremations per year and an average funeral will have around sixty mourners. For funeral services alone, the crematorium will receive over one hundred thousand visitors per year. Records were examined for the past two years and whilst the crematorium did receive a few complaints, none referred to the length of service times. The staff of Bereavement Services welcomes comments on service standards at the crematorium. No complaints have been received regarding the issue of service times.
- 3.5** Where complaints have been received about cremation services, they have been mainly about delays in cremation services commencing. Any delays that are experienced however are caused either by the late arrival of a cortege or because of a large turnout for a service. In both of these circumstances the cremation staff manage the delays through consultation with the funeral director and the service officiant.
- 3.6** It is understandable that, if delays occur, mourners may feel upset, especially at such a sensitive time, however our visitors are generally very understanding of any problems arising from the late or delayed arrivals of a funeral cortege.
- 3.7** The length of cremation service is entirely dependent on the service officiant, who knows in advance the length of time available. Once the service is complete, the crematorium staff escort the mourners from the chapel. When the chapel is cleared of mourners, the cremation staff prepares the chapel for the following service. Only when these tasks are completed to the supervisor's satisfaction will the next service be allowed access to the chapel. The circumstances should not arise where mourners are ushered out of the door as another funeral is coming in.
- 3.8** Some days are busier than others at the crematorium. On many occasions all of the available cremation services are taken up, meaning twelve services in one day, this over a six hour period (9.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m). An increase to forty five minutes in service time would reduce the number of services possible to eight per weekday and four on a Saturday.

- 3.9** From time-to-time, the family of the deceased consider that special circumstances will apply to a funeral and a booking for one hour is placed. While this happens only rarely in exceptional circumstances, this option is presently made available.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1** Clydebank Crematorium generates significant revenues to the Council. Projected out-turns for 2005/6 for the crematorium indicate:-

Gross income	£841,310
Gross expenditure	<u>£273,400</u>
Net income	£567,910

- 4.2** Using the recorded cremations for 2005 as reference data, the suggested 45-minute service length was applied. Had this service length been in operation, one hundred and thirty seven cremations that did take place would have been unable to be accommodated.

5. Personnel Issues

- 5.1** A reduction in the number of services may have implications for staffing levels.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1** The length of time allocated for a cremation service at Clydebank Crematorium is consistent with neighbouring crematoria. The staff of the crematorium and bereavement services have received no complaints regarding length of service times from the bereaved, funeral directors or service officiants. Bereavement Services feedback forms reveal one suggestion from 2005 that service times should be looked at.
- 6.2** Delays, outwith the responsibility of the crematorium, can sometimes occur to service times however these are managed by crematorium staff. With the operational requirements at the conclusion of a funeral service, it is unlikely that a group of mourners would still be within the chapel whilst another service is entering the chapel.
- 6.3** Reducing the number of services available at the crematorium would impact on choice for bereaved families. Some in fact could be denied the use Clydebank crematorium.
- 6.4** There is no evidence to support such a significant change in the Crematorium's opening times and service standards.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is invited to agree that the service time at Clydebank Crematorium should remain at the present thirty minutes.**

David McMillan

Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services.

Date: 19 July 2006

Wards Affected: All

Appendix: Nil

Background Papers: Minute of Meeting – West Dunbartonshire Council,
28 June 2006

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