

Petitions, Public Questions and Statements – Full Council

Meeting Date: 04/12/2024

(Note: This document will be published prior to the Council meeting, containing details of statements received for the meeting and answers to questions relating to the remit of full Council. It will then be updated and re-published within 10 working days of the meeting, containing details of responses to petitions submitted to the meeting and answers to questions relating to items of business on the published agenda and supplementary questions relating to the remit of Full Council.)

Details of ordinary petitions, and questions and statements received for this meeting from members of the public are set out below.

Answers to questions relating to the remit of Full Council are published one clear day before the Council meeting. These questions will not be asked and answered at the Full Council meeting.

All statements received from members of the public are published on the day prior to the Council meeting and circulated to all Members of the Council. If time allows, statements can be read out at the meeting. Statements do not require a response, but the Lord Mayor (as chair of the meeting) or Leader of the Council or relevant Committee Chair reserves the right to reply at the meeting.

Representations in relation to petitions can be made at the Council meeting, and the Leader of the Council or relevant Committee Chair will respond.

Questions relating to items of business on the published agenda and supplementary questions relating to the remit of Full Council (arising from the original written question and/or the response), can be asked at the meeting, and the Leader of the Council or relevant Committee Chair will respond. Written responses to both these types of questions are published within 10 working days of the meeting.

A period of up to 60 minutes shall be allocated at meetings of Full Council for members of the public to present ordinary petitions, ask questions and make statements. The order for receiving public participations within the allotted time is – 1) Petitions; 2) Agenda-Related Questions; 3) Supplementary Questions to the (Initial) Remit-Related Questions; 4) Statements (Agenda-related & Remit-related).

Questions (Remit)

From: Toby Mckenzie-Barnes

Question: How does the Council's work with the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, and indeed support for companies like Boeing, BAE Systems and Rolls Royce, interact with its ambition to be an anti-racist city? Can the city's Race Equality Partnership give a statement on this issue?

Response from Councillor Tom Hunt (Chair of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee and Leader of the Council) -

Racism has no place in Sheffield. The Council has made a commitment to become an anti-racist organisation and to support Sheffield to become an anti-racist city. We are committed to eradicating all forms of racism in Sheffield. Working with residents, community groups, and partner organisations, our job is to bring our diverse communities together and create an inclusive city for all, free from discrimination, where everyone can thrive. Race Equality Partnership for Sheffield (REPS) is an active, collaborative network of people and organisations with a shared aim to make Sheffield an anti-racist city. It is for REPS to decide their work.

Page 2 Sheffield is renowned for the collaboration between its universities and industry: allowing businesses to research, test, prototype and commercialise technology and processes that give competitive advantages in international markets. The Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) has a global reputation for making step changes in productivity, developing new products and process, and training new people into industry.

Supporting the AMRC and the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District will be key to meeting our ambition to drive economic growth and our global reputation through exploiting our technology capabilities, sectoral strengths.

Supplementary Question: NO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION WERE RECEIVED

Questions (Remit)

From: Saghir Hussain

Question: Thank you for your support in expediting the installation of land drainage at Shiregreen Cemetery. While we appreciate the Council's efforts to include drainage in new burial chambers, urgent concerns remain.

First, what is the timeline for retrofitting drainage in existing graves? Bereavement Services has yet to provide plans for this pressing issue. Please confirm when this work will begin and provide a clear timeline.

Second, regarding the cost of the new drainage vault system, it is understood that excavation, drainage installation, chamber installation, concrete liner, backfilling, and preparation cost £850. This is significantly less than the previous charge of £2,850. Can you confirm that all new chambers will reflect this updated cost and that previous charges will be adjusted?

This discrepancy highlights that Sheffield City Council Bereavement Services has been profiting from bereaved families. Charges must be reduced to align with the updated costs and to support grieving families fairly. Such profiteering is unethical and needs immediate rectification.

Thank you for addressing these concerns.

Response from Councillor Kurtis Crossland (Chair of the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee) -

We understand that those who have loved ones buried at Shiregreen Cemetery are concerned about the presence of water. We want every resting place within our cemetery to be dignified and we have taken action to investigate and respond to these concerns.

We want to ensure everyone that we do not reach the water table when digging graves at this cemetery. Pre-dug empty graves do collect water, and the results of our recent ground water assessment show us this is surface water which perches through the soil into the graves on its journey down through the cemetery ground and away from the site.

As this burial plot is at the bottom of the cemetery it experiences more water than burial plots in higher parts of the cemetery.

Traditional or earthen graves do not impede this flow of water, however the concrete lined graves preferred by some members of the Muslim community pose an additional challenge as the concrete acts as a barrier, effectively slowing the movement of water away from the grave.

To help improve this, we have agreed a new design for these concrete lined graves whereby the chambers will be installed slightly higher on a bed of permeable pea gravel which will allow water to easily flow through into a drainage channel and then away into a natural soakaway.

It is not possible to retrofit the existing concrete lined graves with exactly the same system, as we cannot interfere with an occupied grave.

The natural soakaway is being located in the bottom corner of the cemetery where the water would naturally soak away to on its own. By design it will help any water in this area to soak away more quickly and therefore it should help alleviate the collection of water in new concrete lined graves as well as supporting the movement of water through the whole burial plot, by preventing a 'backlog' of water in this area during periods of heavy or excessive rainfall.

The natural soakaway should be in place by mid-December.

Alongside this we are considering additional surface water drainage solutions for this burial area, and as part of developing these plans we will discuss the location and design of the existing concrete chambers with our new provider. The main aim of these plans is to redirect some of the surface water before it reaches the burial plot. We have been in conversation with the Environment Agency about the new regulations which affect these designs, and we hope to have a design agreed by the end of the year. If this is achieved, installation is likely to take place in January and/or February. We are committed to getting these solutions in place as quickly as we can, and we will provide an update to Muslim Partners via our Muslim Bereavement Forum as soon as we are able to.

Once these actions are in place we will keep them under review to ensure they are working effectively.

We understand funeral costs are a significant burden to many people at a difficult time. The Council is committed to ensuring our bereavement fees are reasonable and fair and benchmarking is carried out every year to ensure they remain so.

Burial prices exist in two parts. The first is the cost of the exclusive right of burial which applies to all graves. The second is the internment fee, which varies depending on a person's choice of burial type e.g. concrete lined grave.

We have just entered a new contract with a new provider for these concrete lined graves and the installation of the first of these chambers is being completed approximately now. The model of installation and the cost has changed under this new contract; however, it is not in line with what is stated in the question.

Due to a number of factors, including the provision of an out of hours service which is not currently charged for, the additional space used by these chambers (approximately 1.5 normal grave spaces) which is not currently charged for, the new pricing model mentioned previously, and a few other service delivery requests received by Muslim partners, we recognise that a full review of the service offer and accompanying fees and charges for Muslim burials is needed and we commit to having a review completed by 1st April 2025. Initially we will consult in more detail about this review with Muslim partners via the Muslim Bereavement Partnership Forum.

Supplementary Question:

Background:

Thank you for your response, shared concerns, and acknowledgment of the presence of water within the concrete chambers in the Muslim section of Shiregreen Cemetery.

You mentioned that it is not possible to retrofit the existing graves with the exact same system due to the need to avoid interfering with occupied graves. However, we are not asking for an exact system.

My question is:

Would Sheffield City Council fund the installation of a drainage system in the walkway area between the chambers - specifically between the head of one chamber and the toe side of the adjacent chamber? This area, currently used as a walkway, is not part of the graves themselves and could serve a dual purpose: acting as a French drain while also providing drainage for the existing chambers by directing water away appropriately. This solution would also help address the surface water issue previously raised, potentially reducing the need for additional surface drainage installations.

Furthermore, given that the contractors currently on-site are qualified, experienced, and have successfully installed similar retrofit walkway drainage systems elsewhere, could their expertise and familiarity with this site be utilized to assess and implement this drainage system without delay?

Response:

Answer to Questions 1 & 2

Now a drainage solution has been agreed for new lined graves, our next step is to finalise the surface water drainage plans for the full area and in doing so we are committed to discussing options with Gem Precast Ltd to utilise the skills and experience they have in this field. We cannot commit to the outcome of these conversations until they have taken place, but we do commit to trying to find the right solution for the Cemetery and everyone buried there, including those in the existing concrete lined graves.

Answer to Question 3

The new liners being installed from early December come with a new model of installation and a new fee, however the cost to the Council of the new installed liners is not £850. The Council is committed to ensuring our bereavement fees are reasonable and fair,

and benchmarking is carried out every year to ensure they remain so. We cannot commit to changing our fees for the Muslim lined graves, however we have plans to complete a full review of our service provision to the Muslim community which will include the fees attached to these services. Details of this review will be shared with partners at the Muslim Forum in January and the proposals devised from the review once it has been completed will be presented to the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee for approval prior to implementation.

Questions (Remit)

From: Peter Garbutt

Question: Professor Stefan Rahmstorf has recently published research which shows the imminent collapse of the AMOC.

The AMOC (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, otherwise known as the Gulf Stream) is the current of warm water flowing from the Caribbean to Northwest Europe, and is what keeps us relatively warmer than other regions on the same latitude.

Though the timing and effect of this collapse are subject to uncertainty, the likely outcomes could be catastrophic for the UK, including Sheffield, with the possibility of average temperatures dropping about 10 degrees centigrade, seriously reducing food production, and presenting a whole new range of difficulties for many policy areas including transport and housing amongst others.

My question therefore is:

Is this possibility on the Council's radar?

If so,

- a) who have the Council consulted (experts, government?);
- b) has any work on preparedness been done?
- c) are there any plans to inform/involve the people of Sheffield?

If not, will Councillor Hunt set up a team to start looking at possible effects and possible measures to cope with those effects?

Response from Councillor Ben Miskell (Chair of the Transport, Regeneration and Climate Policy Committee) -

Thank you for your question. The Council are aware of research that has been undertaken that identifies a potential risk that the Gulf Stream system of warm water currents could collapse.

There is still a recognised level of uncertainty regarding this risk and the scientific debate on the how quickly the Gulf Stream could collapse or how reversible such changes would be continues, and therefore it remains difficult for the Council or other subject matter experts to predict what the implications might be for UK cities like Sheffield, beyond some of the scenarios identified in the question.

However, in the absence of this detail the Council have worked with experts such as the UK Met Office on understanding the implications that changing climate may have on our services.

We are already seeing climate impacts across the U.K., with observed increases in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, flooding, drought and wildfires. Therefore, it is important that the Council takes action to ensure that our communities, services and buildings are resilient to the impacts of current, expected and potential climate change

Early this year the Council participated in a Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission pilot aimed at helping council services to understand climate adaptation planning. The project used data supplied by the Met Office, who created a specific city information pack for Sheffield, which sets out several future climate scenarios.

Scenario planning workshops were held with a number of services, as well as our Climate Oversight Board to provide Officers with a greater level of awareness of a changing climate and to help them to consider and plan how their services can be more prepared for the impacts of climate change.

Supplementary Question:

I believe it's extremely important to inform the Sheffield public about the implications of climate change. How else can they prepare, individually and in their communities? My question is, therefore, how does the Council propose to bring this information to ALL the people of Sheffield?

Response:

We are aware of the research you've referenced, which highlights the potential risks to the Gulf Stream system of warm water currents.

Officers have advised that while there is evidence of this risk, there remains a recognised degree of uncertainty in the scientific community about how quickly such changes might occur or how reversible they would be. As I mentioned in my original response, this

makes it difficult for the Council - or indeed other subject matter experts - to predict the specific implications for UK cities like Sheffield, beyond the scenarios you've outlined.

That said, in light of this uncertainty, we continue to work with partners, including the Met Office, to deepen our understanding of the potential impacts that climate change could have on Sheffield.

Your supplementary question asks how we can raise awareness of these critical issues among Sheffield's residents. While working within the constraints of budget pressures, we are actively finding ways to inform and engage as many people as possible, supporting understanding and action on the climate emergency.

It's important to emphasise that, while the Council provides leadership and plays a significant role, addressing the challenges of climate change requires a collective, citywide effort.

In addition to the resources available on the Council's website, such as our Climate Emergency Response page, and our bi-monthly newsletter, we communicate regularly through platforms like SheffNews.

Engaging the next generation is a vital part of this work, and I know you'll agree, as we first met when I had the privilege of teaching your children some years ago.

For example, Sheffield Children's University has partnered with Sheffield Hallam University to create the "Climate in a Box" project, which will be delivered to up to 600 pupils this year, with the potential to be reused in future years. We are proud to support this initiative.

Across the Council, various teams are working on projects aimed at providing information and resources to young people and schools, with the goal of educating children and, through them, their families and communities. Similar projects are being developed for other community groups.

We take an approach to communication and engagement that is informed by behavioural science. This means tailoring messages to resonate with different audiences - focusing not only on climate science but also on practical steps that are relevant and achievable. We pair this with funded projects, such as our business support programme, to ensure the conditions are in place for people to be motivated and empowered to take action.

Finally, we remain committed to seeking out additional funding opportunities to enhance our communication, engagement, and support for residents and businesses in tackling the climate emergency.

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| Questions (Published Agenda) |
| From: |
| Question: NO QUESTIONS RECEIVED RELATED TO AGENDA ITEMS |
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| Statements (Remit) |
| From: |
| Statement: NO STATEMENTS RECEIVED RELATED TO COUNCIL REMIT |
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| Statements (Published Agenda) |
| From: |
| Statement: NO STATEMENTS RECEIVED RELATED TO AGENDA ITEMS |
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Petitions *(The representations made at the meeting on behalf of the petitioners, and the response to the petition given at the meeting, can be viewed in the webcast of the meeting and are summarised in the minutes of the meeting; these can be found here – [\[Agenda for Council on Wednesday 4 December 2024, 2.00 pm | Sheffield City Council\]](#))*

From: Mahmood Hussain

Details of Petition for Debate:

We want immediate action to tackle the dire situation that exists with regard to the depleting burial space/provision in Sheffield by the delivery of available, affordable and appropriate new burial space/provision in Sheffield, for all communities, and particularly for the Muslim Community, within the next 24 months.

1. For nearly 2 years now the senior leadership of Sheffield City Council have been aware of the drastic situation regarding the depleting amount of burial space for deceased members of the Muslim community, such that at the then current rate of usage, only 5 years of supply remains within the city. There are still no actual concrete plans in place from Sheffield City Council to develop any appropriate burial sites to alleviate this long standing and pressing issue. Considering the amount of lead time involved in delivering new burial provision, this issue is now critical, with the very real and significant risk of burial space for the Muslim community running out in Sheffield, before appropriate new burial space provision is made available. This is a significant shortcoming in the Council's strategic planning and delivery of an essential and sensitive service to the Muslim community.
2. We the undersigned residents of Sheffield demand Sheffield City Council actively and effectively address this issue at the very highest level forthwith, to turn around this looming disaster. In particular, to urgently present a Programme and Project Plan to the community, and put in place firm actions that are actively and regularly reviewed by both the Leader and the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council, so this issue is addressed with the urgency, seniority, specialisms, resources and the time that it requires, and to work closely with key stakeholders to actually deliver appropriate and effective new burial provision for members of the Muslim community within the next 24 months.
3. This petition demanding immediate action is endorsed by Council of Mosques South Yorkshire, United Mosques Council of Sheffield, Federation of Mosques Sheffield and the South Yorkshire Muslim Bereavement Trust.

Response from Councillor Kurtis Crossland (Chair of the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee)

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the heartfelt concerns raised in the petition and the thousands and thousands of people who have signed the petition; I think it's because the loss of a loved one is one of the most difficult, stressful situations that anyone can go through, and so this petition has really struck a chord with people.

But I do want to assure you, alongside the rest of the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee, that we are fully behind the urgent search for new land. Every person deserves the dignity of being laid to rest in a way that honours their beliefs and their wishes. As I'm sure you are aware, you mentioned it in your speech as well, this problem isn't a new problem, we have known about this for probably over 10 years, the clock has been ticking for a long time.

Across the city we now have an estimated 6 to 8 years of burial provision left, but for the Muslim community, this is about 3 to 4 1/2 years at the moment, and that is why we do need to act now. So earlier this year, we approved a development of a comprehensive Burial, Cremation and Cemetery Green Spaces Strategy, which will set a clear path for ensuring a long-term burial provision. All the way through that process, every member of the Task and Finish Group made it clear that we couldn't wait for the completion of that strategy, we have to find new land now.

I also want to make it clear that Bereavement Services as a team have been working so hard on this. Working in Bereavement Services they know why this matters and why it's important to people, and as Councillors more land is something we've all pushed for. It's been something I've pushed for as chair, it's been something that previous chairs pushed for, it's something that the current deputy chair has pushed for and it's something the previous deputy chair pushed for. This does span parties because it isn't a political issue, it's about doing what's right for the city.

I do sincerely hope that this petition clears the blockage that has been holding the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee and Bereavement Services back because it's a massive issue for the city. We just need to find more land now, so thank you again.

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