

THE MINUTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 16 MAY, 2005

Present: Councillor Mrs A Naylor (Chair)
Councillors S Bishop, H High, A J Holmes,
Mrs E Huntington, D J Taylor-Gooby,
C Walker and T Taylor

DEVELOPMENT OF A POLICY FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF CLOSED CHURCHYARDS

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager the aim of which was to start the process of consultation for the development of a corporate policy for the maintenance of closed churchyards within the District, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the first draft policy had been circulated for consideration. Following any amendment of the policy it was then intended to consult stakeholders. The draft policy sought to set out how the Council would fulfil its statutory obligation to maintain walls, footpaths, gates, trees, grassed areas and headstones in closed churchyards. The policy aimed to minimise expenditure on maintenance works in closed churchyards whilst seeking to ensure the health and safety of visitors to churchyards was protected.

There were ten closed churchyards within the District and the current annual budget for repair and maintenance was £15,250.00 and the annual cost of the testing programme was £11,710.00. The Council could adopt a policy which sought to maintain churchyards to a higher standard. This mainly involved restoring original walls and gates to the original condition. However this was likely to require significant budgetary increases.

S Clasper explained that when the churchyard was closed the responsibility was passed to the District Council regardless of its condition.

Discussion ensued regarding possible methods of funding to maintain the churchyards and it was suggested that Undertakers, Town and Parish Councils and the Heritage Fund be approached for contributions towards the maintenance costs of the upkeep of the closed churchyards.

A Member referred to apprentices at East Durham and Houghall Community College and suggested that the College be approached to offer apprentices some work experience in the closed churchyards.

Following much discussion, it was **AGREED** that:-

- (i) the draft policy for the maintenance of closed churchyards be endorsed;
- (ii) the churchyards should be maintained to conform with legal requirements;
- (iii) funding avenues be explored for external funding to help with maintenance costs.