

Report of the Chief Executive

WELFARE FUNERALS1. Purpose of report

To seek approval for proposals in respect of retention periods of ashes and personal effects in connection with welfare funerals.

2. Detail

Under the provisions of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, it is the duty of a local authority “to cause to be buried or cremated the body of any person who has died or been found dead in their area, in any case where it appears to the authority that no suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body have been or are being made otherwise than by the authority”. Effectively, these are cases where there is no next of kin or there are insufficient funds to pay for a funeral. Details of the number and cost to the Council of these welfare funerals over the past five years are shown in appendix 1.

The process is quite complex and involves contact with several agencies including the Coroner, Registrar, and Funeral Director. In some cases, a will is available and next of kin are easily found. In such cases, the process is straightforward in terms of transfer of ownership of money and goods, and also of the deceased person’s ashes. However, the process can be a little more complex if there is no will or readily identifiable next of kin.

A recent internal audit of the procedure has identified that although our process is sound, there are two areas which require clear guidance. These are the length of time the Council retains (a) the ashes of a cremated person, and (b) any valuables or personal effects of a deceased person.

A summary of the relevant part of the procedure is reproduced in appendix 2. In view of the sensitive nature of these matters, it is considered that a formal committee decision is made on the retention times. It is suggested that these are set at 12 months from the date of the welfare funeral.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to APPROVE that personal effects and ashes of a deceased person resulting from a welfare funeral are kept for a 12 month period if they have not been properly claimed in the meantime.

Background papers

Nil