

# Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Executive  
Date: 5 September 2024  
Ward(s) affected: 'All' Wards  
Report of Strategic Director of: Housing and Environment  
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Status: Open  
Key decision: Yes

## Supply of Grave Digging Services/Contract to GBC Cemeteries

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has recently reviewed its governance and financial procedures and rules. As a part of this process, full Council adopted a new Scheme of Delegation on 23 July 2024. The new arrangements provide a different process for making decisions to enter into contracts which result in a key decision. All such decisions without prior Executive authority should now come before the Executive for authorisation. The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive of the detail of the procurement of the proposed grave digging contract which is a key decision as the value exceeds £200,000 and to seek approval to proceed and to commence on 1 October 2024. The current Grave digging contract expires on 30 September 2024. The Procurement Timetable is set out at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The Executive should note that the procurement for this contract was previously an officer delegated decision. The process was underway when the Scheme of Delegation was changed and given the shorter timescale to bring this matter before Executive the 28-day statutory notice period was missed by four days. As required under Access to

Information Procedure Rules, the Proper Officer has posted a General Exception Notice and notified the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (see Appendix 2). The item is now listed on the Forward Plan as of 12 August 2024.

## **2. Recommendation to Executive**

**That the Executive resolves to:**

Authorise the Strategic Director for Housing and Environment, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Environment and Climate Change, to enter into a new contract for Grave Digging services for GBC Cemeteries up to a value of £250,000 for a term of 5-years.

## **3. Reason for Recommendation**

The Council's existing contract will expire on 30 September 2024 and as a Burial Authority we must have a new contract in place. A grave digging contract is required to fulfil the burial service function as there is no longer an internal team.

## **4. Status of Report**

Open

## **5. Strategic Priorities**

The provision and effective management of Grave Digging service reflects a resilient and well managed Council to the Cemetery functions as required by a Burial Authority.

## **6. Background**

6.1 Bereavement Services current Grave Digging contract ends on 30 September 2024. The service conducts approximately 50 full body burials and approximately 25 interments of ashes per year. We have a commitment to conduct interments for pre-paid plot purchases.

6.2 A grave digging contract is required to fulfil the burial service function as there is no longer an internal team. The new contract

was put out to tender on Wednesday 10 July through an open procedure on InTend. The submission date for suppliers was Friday 9 August and there were two tender submissions, one of which was from the incumbent. A comprehensive evaluation process, in accordance with the tender documents, was completed and a moderation meeting has taken place.

- 6.3 If the Council does not have a contract in place to commence on 1 October, then we will need to close the diary for the period we do not have a contract which will affect any revenue. This could also cause stress and upset to families wanting to conduct burials during this time and may pose a particular problem if a Jewish burial is required, as this has to be turned around within a matter of days.

## **7. Options**

- 7.1 Should we not enter into a new contract; we could not offer burial services as we have no inhouse team. Persons completing the Grave Digging function must be legally trained, which can take some months and can cost thousands of pounds. There would also be an impact on revenue lines, a decline in confidence in the services we offer and unnecessary stress to the bereaved.
- 7.2 It is recommended we conclude the procurement exercise as planned (Appendix 1) and award the contract, in accordance with the tender documents, to a provider who has the ability to provide a professional and sensitive service to the bereaved, funeral directors and our residents.

## **8. Consultation**

Consultation was sought with Procurement and Legal services prior to and during the Procurement process.

The Lead Councillor has been consulted and is in support.

## **9. Key Risks**

- 9.1 If we are unable to carry out burials then this will impact the bereaved who wish to lay their loved ones to rest, which would cause substantial stress and upset to the bereaved with negative impact on the community and reputational damage to the Council.
- 9.2 If we are unable to conduct burials this may impact confidence from local Funeral directors who may use other sites, which would negatively impact revenue lines.
- 9.3 If we delay our contract start date with any proposed supplier, it may cause a lack of confidence in our commitment.

## **10. Legal and Governance Implications**

- 10.1 Procurement and legal advice have been provided throughout the tender process. The procurement has been conducted in accordance with the Procurement Procedure Rules that were in place at the time of the tender and in accordance with the relevant legislation. The submissions have been evaluated and a contract can be awarded to ensure continuity of the service.
- 10.2 The new Scheme of Delegation and Contract Procedure Rules require the Executive to determine whether to enter into a contract where the decision is a key decision. This is a key decision as the value of the contract exceeds the £200,000 key decision financial threshold, and therefore the report seeks a decision from Executive to enter the contract for a 5-year term.

## **11. Financial Implications**

The recommendations would authorise the new contract for Grave Digging services for GBC Cemeteries at a value of £250,000 over a 5-year period. This would be covered by fees charged and existing budgets.

## **12. Human Resources Implications**

There are no HR implications as the activity is not provided in house therefore no posts are affected.

### **13. Equality and Diversity Implications**

As the recommendation does not affect any employees and will improve the service for the public, we do not believe there are any equality implications arising.

### **14. Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising from this report at this time.

### **15. Next Steps**

We have completed the Grave Digging Procurement evaluation of supplier submissions, and the successful supplier will be notified pending approval by the Executive. See timetable in Appendix 1.

### **16. Background Papers**

None

### **17. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Procurement Timetable

Appendix 2: Notice under AIPR Rule 15 – Grave Digging Contract