

Birmingham City Council

Council Business Management Committee

21 December 2020



Subject: Petition Handsworth Cemetery
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Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

If relevant, state which appendix is exempt, and provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of two Petitions entitled 'Birmingham City Council to protect graves of our loved ones' that combined achieved the threshold of 5,000 signatures (see paragraph 3) that allows them to be submitted to this Committee for consideration.
- 1.2 To seek the view of the Committee as to whether it determines that the petitions are relevant to either City Council or an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and should be debated.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the report be noted;
- 2.2 That, the Committee determines whether the petitions should be debated or not and if so, whether that should be at City Council or by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3 Background

- 3.1 At the Meeting of City Council on 3 November 2020 Councillor Majid Mahmood submitted a petition (a list of names from an external e-petition site) relating to the

recent flooding in Handsworth Cemetery. Following verification, the petition was found to contain 4,881 valid signatures from Birmingham residents; as a large number of the signatures on the e-petition were from outside Birmingham, these were not valid. (see paragraph 5.1)

3.2 Additionally Councillor Zhor Malik at the City Council meeting on 3 November 2020 also submitted a petition on the same matter with the same wording. This was a 'traditional' paper petition which contained approximately 612 signatures most of which were from Birmingham.

3.3 The wording of both petitions is as follows;-

'Birmingham City Council to protect graves of our loved ones

Over the last few months, we have started to see an increase in the number of occurrences where flooding is impacting the graves of loved ones resting at Handsworth Cemetery.

This has been raised to the Cemetery Office, and Birmingham City Council, and has fallen on deaf ears. Assurances have previously been made, yet, again, over the weekend of 3rd and 4th October, multiple graves were flooded, leading to some subsiding, and the families being hurt.

This isn't a lot we're asking for- when families pay in excess of £3,000 for their loved ones to be laid to rest, the least we can expect the Council to do is to care for the graves, and to conduct preventative maintenance. Fobbing off isn't acceptable, **suitable action is**.

With the council's response being slow, and incompetent at best, families, and volunteers are taking the responsibility to fix these graves, but are only permitted to be there during the restricted visiting hours which just isn't enough.

Please join this petition, and sign to help either your loved ones resting at Handsworth, or the families in distress whose loved ones are at Handsworth whose graves continue to be flooded.'

4 Petition Guidance

4.1 The relevant sections of the petition Guidance sets out the following:-

“If your petition achieves the threshold of 20,000 signatures (subject to verification) this will automatically trigger a debate of the petition at City Council. The lead petitioner will be notified of the date of the meeting.

The lead petitioner will also be offered the option of reading their petition at the beginning of the debate or they may choose to request a local Councillor to present it on their behalf.”

“If your petition achieves the threshold of 10,000 signatures (subject to verification) it will be referred to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a Senior Officer to attend and answer questions about the delivering of public services”.

“In addition, in event that that a petition with the number of signatures over 5,000 but below the above threshold trigger, is submitted, it will be considered by the Council Business Management Committee to determine whether an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or City Council should debate the petition, if relevant”

5 Matters for Consideration

- 5.1 The petition from Councillor Mahmood had a number of signatures from people in other parts of the country and a number from around the world which could not be counted as valid. There are 9,516 signatures altogether on the petition which is just under the threshold for consideration at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, the petition has 4,881 valid signatures which is just under the threshold for consideration at this Committee to determine whether it should be debated at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or City Council or not. Some of those signing from outside Birmingham may have relatives buried in Handsworth Cemetery so the number of signatures from immediate adjoining local authority areas were checked and there were approximately 274 such signatures which if added to the total of 4,881 would push the total figure over 5,000.
- 5.2 As Councillor Malik’s petition contains the same wording, the signatures have included in the calculations then the threshold for consideration of petition(s) has been met

6 Appendices

None