

## **CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL**

### **CEMETERY ACTION PLAN (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY) COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ASSETS COMMITTEE**

**Meeting Date:** 16 April 2026

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

This Executive Summary provides Members with a high-level overview of the findings of the ICCM audit (October 2025) at Chigwell Cemetery and outlines the proposed Cemetery Action Plan designed to address identified risks, strengthen governance, and ensure statutory and best-practice compliance.

The report highlights key risks, priorities for action, and the strategic outcomes sought, enabling the Committee to understand the necessity, scope, and implications of the programme without requiring operational detail.

#### **2. Background and Context**

In October 2025, Chigwell Cemetery was independently audited by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM). The audit confirmed that the cemetery is:

- Well cared for and professionally run
- Supported by a committed and effective team
- Providing a dignified and valued service to the community

However, the audit also identified a number of significant compliance and governance gaps which, if not addressed, expose the Council to avoidable legal, financial, health & safety, and reputational risks.

The Action Plan responds directly to these findings and is structured to move the service from largely informal and manual systems to a robust, documented, auditable, and sustainable operating model.

#### **Key Audit Findings – Summary**

While the day-to-day service operates smoothly, the audit identified the following critical weaknesses:

#### **High-Risk / Urgent Issues**

- No formal Memorial Safety Policy or inspection programme, creating a serious public safety and liability risk
- No structured memorial inspection register to evidence compliance
- Operational staff not formally COTS trained, representing a competence and health & safety gap

## **Medium-Risk / Structural Issues**

- Lack of a cemetery-specific Health & Safety Policy and risk register
- Absence of routine tree surveys and formal monthly site inspections
- Reliance on manual and partially reconciled records, creating inconsistency and audit risk
- Under-developed governance, with no single comprehensive Cemetery Management Policy
- Lease renewals (Cremated Remains and Garden of Remembrance) incomplete and not systematically tracked

These weaknesses do not reflect poor service delivery, but rather the historic absence of formalisation, digital systems, and written governance controls.

## **4. Strategic Response – The Action Plan**

The Action Plan provides a phased, prioritised, and proportionate response, aligned with statutory duties, ICCM best practice, and realistic operational capacity.

The strategy is built around five core objectives:

### **Public Safety and Risk Reduction**

Immediate focus is placed on:

- Memorial safety inspections
- Site security and hazard mitigation
- Documented inspection regimes

This directly addresses the Council's duty of care to the public and is treated as the highest priority.

### **Legal and Regulatory Compliance**

The Plan ensures full compliance with:

- Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977
- Burial Acts
- Health and Safety at Work legislation
- Data protection and governance requirements

Formal policies, procedures, registers, and audit trails are central to this objective.

### **Governance and Accountability**

The programme introduces:

- A comprehensive Cemetery Management Policy
- A cemetery-specific Health & Safety Policy and Risk Register
- Clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority

This replaces informal arrangements with defensible governance structures.

### **Digitalisation and Resilience**

The Action Plan transitions the service to a:

- Single digital source of truth for cemetery records
- Automated renewal tracking and audit trails
- Reduced dependency on individual knowledge

This strengthens service continuity and resilience.

### **Financial Sustainability**

The Plan protects and enhances income by:

- Completing outstanding lease renewals
- Introducing structured renewal tracking
- Exploring new memorial options to support long-term sustainability

Financial controls are strengthened through cashless payments and improved auditability.

## **5. Delivery Approach**

The Action Plan is deliberately phased and achievable, with:

- Immediate actions focused on risk mitigation
- Medium-term actions embedding compliance and governance
- Longer-term actions supporting service sustainability

Delivery is overseen through:

- Clear officer ownership
- Weekly internal implementation reviews
- Regular reporting to Council

Importantly, the Plan does not rely on wholesale service redesign but instead formalises and improves existing practices.

## **6. Benefits and Outcomes**

Implementation of the Action Plan will deliver:

- Reduced risk of injury, claims, and enforcement action
- Clear evidence of statutory and best-practice compliance
- Improved confidence for Members, residents, auditors, and insurers
- A professional, transparent, and resilient cemetery service
- A stronger platform for future service development

### **Committee Assurance and Next Steps**

The Committee is asked to note that:

- The risks identified are real, known, and widely recognised across the sector
- The Action Plan is proportionate, evidence-based, and aligned with ICCM standards
- Early action significantly reduces long-term cost and liability
- Delay or inaction increases exposure to foreseeable risk

The Action Plan provides Members with assurance that Chigwell Parish Council is acting responsibly, proactively, and lawfully in the management of an important community asset.

**Note:** Officers received their briefing on the action plan 10 April with further meetings 13 and 17 April with follow up task and finish meetings each week.

**Prepared by:**

**Jason Selvarajah** MSc  
Clerk & Proper Officer  
Chigwell Parish Council