

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL  
CLERK'S REPORT TO ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING**

**Meeting Date:** 11 June 2026

**Grave buy back**

A request has been received from the owner of Grave No. 1420 for the Council to repurchase the plot at its original value due to their relocation from the area. A refund of £430 is currently being processed, less a £95 administration fee in accordance with Council policy.

**Victory Hall – Hire Issues and Review**

Following a recent hire of Victory Hall, part of the hirer's deposit has been retained. This was necessary due to significant quantities of non-recyclable waste being left in recycling bins, which required separation, alongside additional cleaning of the premises.

The hire also overran its agreed time, and it was reported that hirers and their guests behaved in an obstructive manner towards Community Hub volunteers delivering food.

As a result, I am currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the Victory Hall terms and conditions and pricing structure. This will ensure that staffing requirements, cleaning, energy consumption, and wear and tear are appropriately reflected and that the Council achieves full cost recovery. This will be brought back for consideration.

**Cemetery Building Condition**

The condition of the cemetery building is also a concern. The rear section is in poor condition, with visible mould and a requirement for significant investment. From a financial perspective, the Council will need to consider whether to refurbish the building or explore the option of relocating staff to the main Parish Office to reduce ongoing costs.

Electricity costs at the cemetery are currently approximately two and a half times higher than those at the main office. This is under investigation. While electric vehicle charging may contribute to this, the lack of basic facilities such as hot water or showers makes this disparity difficult to justify. A further update will be provided once investigations are complete.

**Registrar Relocation and Service Demand**

Since the relocation of the Registrar service to the main Parish Office, there has been a noticeable increase in telephone enquiries and cemetery-related work. This may reflect improved communication with funeral directors and more effective call handling arrangements.

While this has improved accessibility, it has also highlighted several historical administrative issues. For example, incorrect burial times have been communicated on two occasions this week, resulting in inefficiencies for the Open Spaces Team.

I would like to commend officers for their professionalism and teamwork in maintaining service delivery during the Registrar's temporary absence. Additionally, owing to the absence of the registrar, officers are pulling together to ensure service delivery is maintained. As such, some staff have incurred additional hours to work through some of the legacy issues which is likely to incur TOIL and overtime.

I have also completed additional training with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM), which has strengthened my knowledge in areas including Exclusive Rights of Burial, probate processes, and statutory declarations.

### **Cemetery Action Plan – Memorial Safety**

Action 1 of the Cemetery Action Plan, relating to memorial safety, has now been implemented on a trial basis. To date, 25 memorials have been inspected, of which 8 have failed the safety test. However, only one grave owner has made contact following notification.

This situation presents a clear administrative challenge in cases where grave owners cannot be identified or fail to respond. Guidance issued by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) advises that burial authorities should consider allocating a dedicated budget to enable the repair of memorials where owners are unable to undertake the work themselves, or alternatively, to carry out the necessary works directly where owners cannot be traced, thereby ensuring ongoing compliance with safety standards and overall appearance of cemetery.

Whilst this matter will be formally presented to both the Community Services and Assets Committee and Full Council in due course, it is important to emphasise that memorials should not remain in a temporarily secured condition (for example, supported by stakes or barriers) for prolonged periods. The extended use of such measures can detract from the overall appearance and dignity of the cemetery, particularly at a time when burial services are increasing and presentation standards are of growing importance.

The establishment of a dedicated budget would enable essential safety works to be undertaken promptly and effectively. Where appropriate, costs may be recovered from grave owners at a later stage; however, it is recognised that ownership records may, in many cases, be out of date due to relocation or the passing of registered owners.

In addition, it should be noted that ICCM guidance advises that permit fees for stonemasons undertaking remedial works to memorials should not be charged, as such activity is undertaken in the interest of public safety and must not be regarded as a revenue-generating exercise.

This approach will be further supported through the comprehensive review and redrafting of the Council's Cemetery Regulations, which represents a significant and important piece of work currently underway.

### **Operational Risks and Financial Considerations**

Several operational risks have been identified. These include historic graves not being dug to the correct depth, requiring specialist remedial works.

Additionally, there will be a period of approximately one month during the summer when grave-digging qualified operatives are on annual leave. This creates a potential risk to service continuity, particularly in the event of unplanned burial demand.

It is recommended that consideration be given to the use of reserves to ensure continuity of service during this period- reallocate to cemetery contractor budget.

### **Victory Hall – Fire Risk Assessment**

A fire risk assessment has recently been completed for Victory Hall. As a result, the maximum standing capacity is expected to be reduced to 120 persons, with lower capacities applicable for seated and mixed-use events. This is due to only have two double doored fire exits. Council officers will over the next few weeks start work on upgraded the disability compliant pathway.

The final report is awaited, and its findings will be used to inform the revised terms and conditions for hall hire.

#### **Prepared by:**

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