

# Shallow Graves Policy

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## Document History

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Reviewed & Adopted –

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO) requires that:

- i. No body shall be buried in such a manner that any part of the coffin is less than three (3) feet below the level of any ground adjoining the grave: In suitable soils, a covering of only two (2) feet may be permitted, this discretion will be made by the Council.
- ii. No body shall be buried in a grave unless the coffin is effectively separated from any coffin interred in a grave on a previous occasion by means of a layer of earth not less than six (6) inches thick.
- iii. When any grave is reopened for the purpose of making another burial therein, no person shall disturb any human remains interred therein or remove therefrom any soil which is offensive.

## 2. Procedure

2.1 Generally shallow graves are rare however; in a small number of incidences it has been identified that remaining depth within some graves in the Gainsborough General Cemetery has been insufficient. Due to these occurrences the Council have determined that a 'test dig' of the grave plot is required within a small number of burial sections to ensure that the grave is deep enough to accommodate a further interment. Although the Council do their utmost to expedite this process in an attempt to cause as little disruption to burial planning as possible, this process may sometimes result in a delay of interment.

2.2 A 'test dig' will only be made with the written approval of the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial. The dig will only be a partial excavation to determine the depth of the first interment and no human remains will be disturbed.

2.3 The desire to meet with the needs of the bereaved will not outweigh the Council's legal requirements to comply with burial law and under no circumstances will a burial be carried out in an earth grave if the appropriate grave depth cannot be achieved.

2.4 In circumstances where compliance with LACO cannot be achieved for an earth burial (a shallow grave) the Council may offer a different grave plot, free of charge, to the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial. The Council has delegated this decision to the Town Clerk.

2.5 Alternatively, where a shallow grave is found there is provision within burial law for the construction of a subterranean brick burial vault, as follows:

- i. Excavate to maximum depth achievable leaving 6" of soil above the last coffin buried.
- ii. Ensure that the length and width of the excavation are sufficient to allow the installation of adequate and sufficient shoring, the construction of the walls of a brick burial vault and allow the coffin free passage at the committal.
- iii. Construct a solid foundation in the bottom of the grave by either the preparation of footings around the perimeter of the bottom of the grave or by inserting a pre-formed concrete foundation slab. Alternatively, a layer of dry mix concrete can be spread over the bottom of the grave.
- iv. Construct 4.5" brick walls around the inside the grave. If agreed in writing a proprietary preformed concrete chamber may be employed.
- v. Ensure that there are no gaps in the mortar between bricks, or concrete chamber.

- vi. Carry out the interment with the coffin coming to rest within the brick vault or concrete chamber.
- vii. Seal the top of the vault or compartment by bedding concrete slabs of at least 2" in thickness onto mortar ensuring that no gaps exist.
- viii. Backfill remaining depth with soil.

2.6 In order to remain within the requirements of LACO the cell or compartment must be constructed in such a manner so as to prevent, as far as may be practicable, the escape of any materials from the interior of the cell or compartment.

2.7 The Council's decision as to whether or not it is feasible to construct a brick vault, or concrete chamber, will be based on the individual circumstances of the shallow grave, burial legislation, Health and Safety legislation and any relevant codes of practice etc. The Council's decision will be final.