

# Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting: 01 December 2021  
Title of Report: **Bereavement service update**  
Lead Member: Councillor Chris Penberthy  
Lead Strategic Director: Ruth Harrell (Director of Public Health)  
Author: Karen Jennings  
Contact Email: Karen.jennings@plymouth.gov.uk  
Your Reference: n/a  
Key Decision: No  
Confidentiality: Part I - Official

## **Purpose of Report**

Bereavement Service briefing paper to update scrutiny

## **Recommendations and Reasons**

That Scrutiny committee note the content of the briefing paper

## **Alternative options considered and rejected**

N/A

## **Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan**

The Bereavement service strives to provide a quality service to get the basics right first time

## **Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:**

All financial implications are covered within existing MTFP and budget models.

## **Financial Risks**

Briefing report only.

## **Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

N/A

**Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:**

\* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**Appendices**

\*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							


**Background papers:**

\*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Sign off:**

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Ruth Harrell											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
<u>RHarrell</u>											
Date agreed: 19/11/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: 											
Date approved: 22/11/2021											

## **Bereavement Service update briefing paper for Scrutiny Committee**

### **Introduction**

PCC manages two crematoria as well as 4 cemeteries and is responsible for maintenance of 4 closed churchyards within the city.

Customer service is key because we are supporting families through their bereavement. Saying goodbye to loved ones is a key part of mourning; and our relationship with families does not end there as families may choose an ongoing link with our facilities through burial or memorialisation. Our staff, with support from St Luke's hospice and the compassionate city initiative are trained to enable us to identify people who may be struggling and offer appropriate support.

Following the fire in Dec 2019 Efford crematorium was closed for repairs and reopened in April 2020 which enabled the service to meet demand at a time that it was at its greatest during the pandemic.

The Bereavement Service has worked through very challenging times during COVID restrictions. We have sought to maintain our customer focus, supporting people to grieve but balanced that with the need to keep people safe. Part of the initial response to the pandemic included planning for the worst case scenario which included our services.

The service has continued to serve our customers by following the government guidelines, by risk assessing our sites and implementing COVID secure safe systems of work for our visitors and staff.

This has enabled families to pay their last respects to their loved ones, to grieve and to have closure working within the constraints that the pandemic has created.

Examples of the ways in which the service has had to adapt during these times have included:

Restricted numbers; Numbers of those attending funerals have been as low as 10 per funeral rising to 20 & 25 when restrictions were eased  
It is now possible to accommodate 40 mourners at our Efford Chapel and 70 mourners at our Weston Mill Chapel.

There have been many funerals during these times where families have chosen to use outdoor spaces to accommodate a greater number of mourners. We have facilitated this safely where possible, including broadcasting the services into the grounds (including a screen at Weston Mill in addition to speakers at both sites).

Webcasting of funerals; In March 2020 a decision was made that the city council would provide its webcasting of funerals service free of charge to all families. There has been excellent feedback from customers particularly those affected by travel restrictions and who were unable to fly back to the UK for close family member's funerals including for example, a lady living in New York who lost her father and let us know that the webcasting service helped her to feel as if she was part of the service.  
Increased cleaning of facilities; it has been a requirement that cleaning has increased and ventilation improved. This has required additional staff to enable the turnaround time of the chapel to be maintained.

The pandemic has presented the service with many challenges however we have continued to provide all of our services by meeting customers at a distance in the grounds during the time that our office was closed and by channel shifting sales of memorials and renewals on line.

Demand for funeral services has been met throughout with no delay to waiting times.

### **Costs**

It should be noted that the fees charged for cremations were not increased in 2020/21, in line with the then portfolio holder decision given that we were entering a pandemic with an expectation of increased deaths.

Additional costs, such as free webcasting, have been covered by various Covid19 grants.

The service played its part in Excess Deaths management plans for the city. This was a particular focus in the early stages of the pandemic when the likely impact of the disease was less well understood and therefore there was a need to plan for the worst case scenario. This process, which involved stakeholders such as Coroners, Registration service and Funeral Directors across the city, highlighted the excellent relationships amongst our stakeholders,

### **The Future crematoria**

Plymouth is a growing city and our current crematory equipment is nearly twenty years old with increasing maintenance costs and high energy consumption. We need to replace the equipment soon but because state-of-the-art technology needs more space, we need to move to a new location.

The proposed new facility will create bigger and better ceremony rooms, modern offices and the brand new equipment for the behind the scenes crematorium operation.

Progress at the new site has been made during the summer with completion of Phase 2 Enabling Works programme which has progressed the Statutory Utilities and Access Road works this includes the internal spine road. Also grounds work continues with major cut and fill across the site to bring the ground to the required levels.

Highways work has been completed with the forming of the new junction into the site.

The next stage is to move to Phase 3 enabling works this is expected to include external drainage, Groundworks, Laying Incoming Services and formation of the initial hedge banks. In addition early procurement of long lead-in items including steelwork, gulam, stonework and copper roofing.

[Plymouth's new crematorium | PLYMOUTH.GOV.UK](https://plymouth.gov.uk/news/2021/07/21/plymouths-new-crematorium)

You may like to view the latest drone footage of the New site on the link below:

<https://youtu.be/Uu8LEO7mVE0>

### **Volunteering/Social Enterprising**

The pre contract phase of the Bereavement centre project includes an employment skills and social enterprise scheme. Working closely with staff from Keir's a successful volunteering programme has

been established with monthly volunteer groups assisting at both Efford & Weston Mill cemeteries enhancing the work of our grounds staff.



Keir volunteers working in the high profile burial plot area – Weston Mill Cemetery