

BUDGET SCRUTINY

**Top three challenges for delivering within Portfolio budget for 2026/27
Councillor Haydon (Community Safety, Libraries, Events, Cemeteries
and Crematoria)**



I. CHALLENGE I – BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

The growing preference for lower cost direct cremations is placing increasing financial pressure on our service.

Families are choosing simpler, cheaper options, often with fewer or no mourners present, which directly reduces income from traditional funeral services we offer. This financial challenge is further intensified by the opening of a new private crematorium in the north of the city, increasing local competition and further diluting our market share.

The trend is also that there are fewer deaths being registered than our forecasting predicted. The Park's cremation numbers have remained consistently lower this financial year, at an average of 204 cremations (-14 under budget) per month.

These changing trends highlight the need to reflect carefully on our costs and the services we deliver and continue delivering high-quality Bereavement Service within a tightening budget.

I.a. MITIGATIONS FOR CHALLENGE I – BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

The 2026/27 Fees and Charges for cremations will remain unchanged to ensure we stay competitive with other providers in Plymouth and the wider region. Holding our prices steady reflects both the financial realities facing local families and the need to protect our market position within an increasingly competitive environment.

Following discussions with Funeral Directors, the Bereavement Service revised its Direct Cremation offer in August 2025. This change has proved successful, supporting families who seek a dignified but more affordable option during what can be an emotionally and financially challenging time. To further help residents make informed choices, leaflets have also been produced explaining what a Direct Cremation is and promoting the services of local funeral directors—an area highlighted during last year's Budget Scrutiny.

The Bereavement Service management team and staff have continued to adopt a proactive approach in raising the profile of the service at The Park. Over recent months, staff have visited libraries across the city to speak directly with residents about direct cremations and the memorial options available locally. Engagement work is also ongoing with St Luke's Hospice, including participation in Compassionate Schools events and contributions to the Six Steps Programme. Through this work, our team is helping community partners better understand and advocate for the facilities and compassionate support that the Bereavement Service provides.

The team are in the early stages of planning a Funeral Fayre at The Park, likely on a Saturday in April or May. The idea is to invite residents from Plymouth and the surrounding areas to learn more about the services offered by Funeral Directors, officiants, celebrants, monumental masons, and other key partners. The vision is to transform The Park and ceremony rooms into exhibition spaces

where stakeholders can showcase their services. It's an opportunity to come together with stakeholders and highlight the incredible work we all do with local residents.

These efforts not only strengthen community understanding but also play an important role in supporting the long-term financial sustainability of the service—ensuring that residents continue to receive high-quality care at some of the most difficult times in their lives.

2. CHALLENGE 2 – LIBRARY SERVICES

For the 2026/27 financial year, the Library Service's stock fund has been reduced to £166,000—a decrease of £20,000 compared to 2025/26. Since 2022/23, the fund has faced an overall reduction of 40%.

This stock fund is essential for purchasing all physical and digital resources, including books, eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines, and eNewspapers. It also covers the cost of online subscriptions to specialist resources, which library users access both in branches and remotely. Additionally, the fund supports the delivery of the high-profile Summer Reading Challenge and finances replacement furniture, stationery, and other necessary items such as library cards and cataloguing tools.

2.a. MITIGATIONS FOR CHALLENGE 2 – LIBRARY SERVICES

The challenge of reducing the stock fund is expected to be addressed over time through the implementation of the Future Libraries Plan (FLP). However, delivering the FLP will require investment, which will further limit the funds available for purchasing physical and electronic stock.

Library managers will ensure that all stock acquisitions are carefully targeted toward high-demand and popular titles to maximize value for money, a practice already embedded within our stock policy.

We recognise that the wider corporate financial challenges are complex and have no easy solutions, and we are committed to playing our part. Despite reduced funding, we remain confident in our ability to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” statutory library service.

3. CHALLENGE 3 – HOLDING PLACE FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

Plymouth's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) receives no direct or ring-fenced funding despite statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, and Domestic Abuse Act 2021. This creates significant pressure as levels of violence and vulnerability continue to rise locally, with Plymouth recording 84 crimes per 1,000 residents in 2025, including 12,392 violence and sexual offences, and high volumes of ASB.

The CSP's workload is further intensified by increasing Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) and Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews (DARDRs), especially as guidance now includes suicides where domestic abuse may be a factor. This broadening scope adds complexity to information-sharing and review coordination across statutory agencies without the necessary core funding to support delivery.

3.a. MITIGATIONS FOR CHALLENGE 3 – HOLDING PLACE FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

To manage these pressures, enhanced training is being delivered to all staff and partner agencies involved in DHRs and DARDRs to strengthen statutory compliance, improve review quality, and

support safe, consistent information-sharing. Concurrently, requests are being made to statutory partners to establish a shared funding model that reflects collective responsibility for CSP functions and the growing complexity of review obligations, ensuring a sustainable and legally compliant approach to future demand.