

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013 - 2014**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**2<sup>nd</sup> DECEMBER 2013**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP  
DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL  
SERVICES**

**Agenda Item No. 5**

**BEREAVEMENT SERVICES**

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**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To provide Members with an overview of Bereavement Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf, highlighting key issues for discussion and opportunities for collaboration.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Members:-

2.1 Note the content of this report.

2.2 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Council, as Burial Authority, provides dignified and respectful services for the deceased and their bereaved families at one of the most important and challenging times in people's lives. The loss of a relative is always a difficult experience and it is essential that these important and sensitive services are properly managed for the benefit of the relatives of the deceased.

3.2 The Council has responsibility for 14 cemeteries located across the County Borough and 1 crematorium in Glyntaff, Pontypridd. In 2012, this Council also took over direct responsibility for the grounds maintenance at Llwydcoed Crematorium following the decision of the Joint Management Committee to harmonise operational management arrangements with this Council.

3.3 The Council operates its Bereavement Services in accordance with an agreed set of rules and regulations that apply to all cemeteries and the crematoria. These cover the opening times of the facilities, fees and charges, arrangements for excavation of graves and memorials, cremation procedures, memorial regulations and all other aspects of the operation of a modern and

professional Bereavement Service. These rules and regulations are available on request.

- 3.4 Table I shows the opening times for the cemetery and crematoria grounds during the summer and winter. Opening hours are extended at weekends during the summer to allow access in the early evenings:

**Table I – Cemetery & Glyntaff Crematorium Grounds Opening Hours**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Days Open</b>	<b>Open</b>	<b>Close</b>
Summer:	Monday to Friday	9:00	16:30
	Saturday & Sunday	9:00	19:00
Winter:	Monday to Sunday	9:00	16:30

- 3.5 This report will give a brief overview of the services currently provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf, including demand for those services and the resources available to deliver them. In addition a number of issues for discussion are presented to inform Members of the principal challenges facing the service and the potential opportunities for collaboration.

**4.0 BURIALS AND CREMATIONS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

- 4.1 Both crematoria located within the County Borough deal with a significant number of cremations each year. A breakdown of the number of cremations each year at both Crematoria is provided at Table II.

**Table II – Cremations**

<b>Cremations by site</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Glyntaff	1265	1278	1204	1245
LLwydcoed	1156	1179	1183	1297

- 4.2 The numbers of cremations at each facility appears fairly stable over recent years, although if considered over a longer period of time the trend overall has been for a slight reduction in numbers. Despite this downward trend, both facilities consistently provide in excess of 1,000 cremations per year, serving the populations of Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and other neighbouring local authorities.
- 4.3 In 2012/13 the Council provided for 550 interments of remains across the Council's cemeteries. Of these 244 were in the Rhondda cemeteries, 182 in the Cynon and 124 in Taf Ely.

**5.0 RESOURCES**

- 5.1 The budget summary for Bereavement Services and Llwydcoed Crematorium is presented at Table III.

**Table III – Budget Summary**

	<b>Glyntaff &amp; Cemeteries</b>	<b>Llwydcoed</b>
Salaries	£988,882	£216,080
Supplies & Services	£511,310	£475,990
Income	£1,394, 520	£692,070
Net Budget	£105,672	N/A

- 5.2 The budget for Llwydcoed is dealt with separately due to the particular management arrangements under the governance of the Joint Management Committee with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. Any surplus income each year is held in reserve to pay for capital works such as cremator replacement.
- 5.3 The Council's Bereavement Services have a workforce of 38 full time equivalent (FTE) posts, including an Administration Manager & Registrar and an Operations Manager, 25 FTE cemetery operatives and charge hands, 7.5 FTE technicians, memorial officers and bereavement services officers and 3.5 FTE Assistant Cemetery Managers.
- 5.4 Llwydcoed Crematorium has a workforce of 12.1 FTE posts, including a Superintendant & Registrar and 5.6 FTE bereavement services officers and technicians. The remaining FTE posts are made up of a crematorium assistant, caretaker and gatekeeper.

## **6.0 ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

- 6.1.1 The service has a capital programme of £135k per annum. This budget is utilised for major investment works such as new burial grounds and significant maintenance or improvement costs associated with the many buildings, chapels, crematoria buildings, mess facilities, offices, access roads, cemetery walls and general infrastructure associated with the service. Much of this infrastructure is well in excess of 100 years old and ongoing repair and improvements required can be substantial.
- 6.1.2 In recent years, much of the available capital has gone towards the development of the new cemetery at Dan-y-Cribyn, Ynysybwl. Now that the major ground works to the first phase of development have been completed it is possible to refocus the capital programme onto other essential repair and improvement works. The priorities for the next five years are:
- Abercynon Cemetery - infrastructure & landslip.
  - Glyntaff Columbarium – refurbishment of building.
  - Dan-y-Cribyn, Ynysybwl – further development of burial space
  - Glyntaff Crematory – replacement of flat roof.
  - Treorchy Cemetery – development of further burial space.
  - Trealaw Chapel – refurbishment of building.
- 6.1.3 In addition the service has a structural maintenance revenue budget of £90k per year which is generally used for small and routine repairs to roads and

walls or for emergency repairs. There are also a significant number of mature trees across the cemeteries that are annually assessed and may require necessary works to maintain their safety and health.

## **6.2 CREMATOR REPLACEMENT**

- 6.2.1 The largest single capital expenditure likely to be faced by Bereavement Services is the replacement of cremators. A well maintained cremator can be expected to last between 15 to 20 years before it will require replacement. In addition to the cost of replacing the cremators, recent legislation has introduced the requirement for mercury abatement equipment. In total, the cost of replacing the two cremators at either of our Crematoria and installing the required abatement equipment is in the region of £1.5 million.
- 6.2.2 The cremators at Llwydcoed Crematorium were installed in 1993 and are now 20 years old. Following consideration of a feasibility study the Joint Management Committee has determined that the cremators be replaced and the necessary abatement equipment installed to secure the long term future of the facility. Arrangements are now being made for the works and the project is likely to be undertaken during 2014. The costs of the work will be met from built up reserves held by the Joint Management Committee.
- 6.2.3 The cremators at Glyntaff Crematorium were installed in 1998 and are now 15 years old. A decision will be required on the replacement of the cremators at Glyntaff within the next three years so that the necessary arrangements for replacement can be made prior to 2018. Glyntaff Crematorium was built in 1924 and is the oldest in Wales. The age and location of the facility present some challenges as the building may not be able to support the modern technology required for mercury abatement. Also the access to the facility and car parking provision does not meet modern standards or customer expectations. It will be necessary to commission a feasibility study prior to any decision on future investment at Glyntaff. This decision also needs to be considered in the context of the wider issue of future burial capacity at Glyntaff Cemetery.

## **6.3 CAPACITY FOR BURIALS**

- 6.3.1 The burial capacity of the 14 cemeteries is regularly reviewed to ensure continuity of burials and to enable medium term planning for the capital programme.
- 6.3.2 In the Rhondda Valleys, Trealaw cemetery is estimated to have burial capacity for another 25 years. Penrhys cemetery also has another 25 years of capacity with further adjacent land in Council ownership available if required. Ferndale cemetery has capacity for the foreseeable future. Treorchy cemetery, however, is estimated to have capacity for new burials for only another five years. An additional 1.67 hectares of land adjacent to the cemetery has been purchased and will be developed to ensure continuity of burials at Treorchy.
- 6.3.3 In the Cynon Valley, Abberffrwd cemetery in Mountain Ash has been closed to new burials for approximately 30 years and Abercynon Cemetery no longer has space for new full burials, although there is limited space for new cremated remains interments. Ynysybwll cemetery is nearing full capacity but

a new cemetery is in development at Dan-y-Crybyn in Ynysybwl which will enable continuity of burials. Brynygaer cemetery in Hirwaun has burial space for the foreseeable future. The two principal cemeteries at Aberdare and Maesyrarian are estimated to have burial space for approximately 30 years.

- 6.3.4 In Taff Ely; Cefn-y-Parc in Llantrisant, Ty Rhiw in Taffs Well and Llanharan Cemeteries have burial space for the foreseeable future. There is however pressure on burial space at Glyntaff Cemetery in Pontypridd which is projected to reach full capacity within ten years with little scope for further extension to the cemetery.
- 6.3.5 Overall, there is adequate provision for burials across the County Borough for the future with the notable exception of Glyntaff Cemetery, Pontypridd. It will be necessary to review arrangements for burials in this area and identify alternative capacity in the vicinity to allow continuity of burials.

## 6.4 FEES & CHARGES

- 6.4.1 The Council charges for the services it provides through its Bereavement Services. There are a wide range of fees and charges depending on the service required. The principal fees & charges are summarised at Table V.

**Table V – Main Fees & Charges**

Service	Fee
Cremation	£550
Grave Purchase (resident)	£402
Grave Purchase (non resident)	£804
Interment Fee	£402
Burial in a cremated remains plot	£198

- 6.4.2 It has previously been the case that the Council's fees and charges for cremation and burials have been lower than those in other Burial Authorities across Wales and the United Kingdom. In recent years the main fees have been increased and are now comparable with other local authorities in Wales.
- 6.4.3 The basic cremation fee varies across Wales, the lowest fee being in Cardiff at £480 and the highest in Barry at £755. The average proposed cremation fee for 2013/14 across Wales using the data currently available is £533. Therefore this Council's fee of £550 is slightly above the average for Wales but significantly lower than the highest fees in Wales.
- 6.4.4 The fees for the purchase of graves for burial and interment fees are included in Table V. It is notable that the Council applies a 100% surcharge for the purchase of a grave to a non resident of Rhondda Cynon Taf. This has previously been applied to give preference to the burial rights of residents of the County Borough but does occasionally lead to inequitable situations. For example when a non resident is purchasing a grave space for the interment of a deceased relative who was themselves a resident of the County Borough the additional non resident fee is applied. Members may wish to reconsider this policy.

6.4.5 The implications of future increases in fees and charges will need to be carefully considered given the prevailing economic climate and that our fees are now comparable with other Councils in Wales.

## **6.5 MEMORIAL SAFETY**

6.5.1 There are estimated to be between 70 and 80 thousand memorials in the 14 cemeteries located across the County Borough. Many of these memorials are very old and some have received little or no maintenance or repair. Despite the responsibility for the maintenance of the memorials being with the grave owners, the Council has a duty of care to anyone entering the cemeteries to ensure they are safe.

6.5.2 The Council has a Memorial Safety Policy which sets out the procedure for memorial inspection, risk assessment and the remedial actions that can be taken to make safe a dangerous memorial. Every effort is made to contact the last recorded owner, however this is sometimes not possible. In all circumstances records are kept of any action taken.

## **6.6 GRASS CUTTING & GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

6.6.1 Each year the Council takes on 20 seasonal staff through its agency arrangements to undertake the grass cutting in the cemeteries. The agency staff are employed from April through to the end of September each year and are split into three teams covering the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf Ely areas.

6.6.2 The grass cutting teams cut the grass on a rotation cycle within each area, cutting the traditional burial areas approximately every four weeks and the lawn burial areas approximately every two weeks. A consequence of this is that at any given time some cemeteries will have recently had the grass cut and others will have been waiting up to four weeks.

6.6.3 At the beginning of the grass cutting season, when grass is growing quickly, the full team of 20 staff are employed. As the season progresses and growth slows, management keep the staff levels under review and reduce staffing levels gradually. This enables the Council to extend the grass cutting season as far as possible and usually to the end of September when grass cutting ceases until the following April.

6.6.4 The Council has a budget of £160,950, for the cemeteries grass cutting, inclusive of staffing and equipment costs, and it is essential that this is managed effectively to maximise the benefit from the grass cutting work each year. Equipment is hired from HireOne as part of the contract negotiated by the Parks Department as this provides a cost effective solution.

6.6.5 The success of the grass cutting work at the cemeteries is subject to the weather and growing conditions which are out of the Council's control. If there is a particularly warm early Spring, as was the case in 2012, then the grass may be high prior to its first cut. If the Autumn is unseasonably warm then the grass may continue to grow after its final cut. By employing agency staff and managing the work proactively throughout the season it is possible to respond to these issues with a flexible approach and maintain the cemeteries in as

good a condition as possible. However, it is impossible to fully anticipate the weather.

- 6.6.5 In 2012 this Council's Bereavement Services took over responsibility for the grounds maintenance of Llwydcoed Crematorium. This has achieved economies of scale, improved management arrangements and resulted in the grass cutting at Llwydcoed starting a full month in advance of previous arrangements. The improvements in the condition of the grounds at Llwydcoed have been remarked upon by visitors and staff.

## **7.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION**

- 7.1 The Council as Burial Authority has a statutory duty to make arrangements for the deceased. Generally this is done by the provision and operation of cemeteries and crematoria by the Council as is the case in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is however possible for the Council to discharge its responsibilities through the private sector and this is usually only feasible in relation to the provision for cremation.
- 7.2 The capital costs of developing a new crematorium are considerable and in some local authorities facilities for cremation are provided by the private sector rather than the local authority.
- 7.3 The Council has occasionally been approached by private sector providers wishing to explore opportunities to develop new crematoria or to operate our existing facilities. Although this is an option that the Council could consider there are potentially significant financial implications. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the cost of operating the crematoria is lower than that of providing and maintaining our many cemeteries. If the Council were to privatise its crematoria but retain its responsibilities for the cemeteries (which are of little interest to the private sector) the result overall would be that the cost of burial services would increase significantly.
- 7.4 The Council sets the fees and charges for cremation at its own facilities and in doing so is mindful of the prevailing economic circumstances of the area and the needs of our residents. Our existing cremation fees are comparable with those of other Council run facilities in Wales. They are however significantly lower than those of the privately run facilities.
- 7.5 At the moment there is no benefit to exploring a private sector partnership in relation to either Llwydcoed or Glyntaff crematorium both of which are run in a cost effective manner by the Council. In the medium to long term it may be necessary to review this position in relation to Glyntaff Crematorium prior to the decisions required on future investment in cremator replacement described in paragraph 7.2.
- 7.6 A further opportunity for collaboration would be to join up the services with a neighbouring local authority thereby realising efficiencies in management and other economies in scale. Initial discussions were held with a neighbouring local authority during 2009/10 and it was determined at that time that such an arrangement would result in neither financial benefit nor service improvement.

## **8.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION**

8.1 In summary the key questions arising from this report for Members to consider are:

- To consider the proposed investment priorities for the capital programme detailed at paragraph 6.1.2.
- To consider the implications of the replacement of the cremators at Glyntaff Crematorium prior to 2018, as described at paragraph 6.2.3.
- To consider the necessity to make provision for additional burial capacity at Glyntaff Cemetery, as explained at paragraph 6.3.4.
- To consider the potential implications of further increases to fees and charges and whether to maintain a differential fee for non residents, as explained at paragraph 6.4.4.
- To consider the opportunities for collaboration set out at section 7 and identify any other options for collaborative advantage that Members may wish the Service Director to explore.

8.2 This report has provided a brief overview of Bereavement Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf, identifying the principal challenges facing the service and highlighting opportunities for collaboration. The service is highly valued by residents and the Council remains committed to providing dignified and sensitive services to the highest possible standard at all times.