



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

29TH APRIL 2021

DIRECT CREMATATIONS

REPORT OF DIRECTOR - PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH CLLR. RHYS LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES, WELL-BEING & CULTURAL SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to consider the outcome of the pilot project to offer direct cremations in Rhondda Cynon Taf and to approve continuation of this service on a permanent basis.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Approval be given for the continuation of the provision of offering a Direct/Simplicity cremation service at Glyntaff Crematorium, at the reduced prescribed fee of £568 for 2021/22 and in line with the rate applied for the pilot scheme.
- 2.2 Subject to 2.1, the Direct Cremation fee level for 2022/23 onwards be determined as part of Cabinet's consideration of Council fees and charges each year.
- 2.3 An update is reported to the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee seeking implementation of direct cremation arrangements at Llwydcoed Crematorium in line with those approved for Glyntaff Crematorium.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Funeral costs have increased substantially and are becoming increasingly unaffordable to those on the lowest incomes. Many funeral directors are now offering alternative options to families that are lower cost and allow for those who wish to have a simpler, less formal funeral. These are known as "direct" or "simplicity" cremations.
- 3.2 Several burial and cremation authorities across Wales have introduced the facility to accept direct cremations from funeral directors by introducing a reduced

cremation fee for such services. This proposal would ensure that this Council is offering a range of services that reflect demand and providing assistance to those who struggle to meet funeral costs.

- 3.3 During the term of the pilot, the feedback and demand for this service has been very positive and well received by stakeholders and bereaved families. In the initial 12 months of the pilot project, 65 “direct cremations” took place; 28 at Glyntaff and 37 at Llwydcoed Crematorium.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A “direct”, “simplicity” cremation or “cremation without ceremony” is where a funeral director arranges a service with no mourners and brings the deceased directly to the crematorium with no religious service or attendees. The fees and charges to the family of the deceased are significantly reduced making the service more affordable, particularly for those on low incomes.
- 4.2 The average cost of the essential elements of a funeral in the UK was estimated to be nearly £4,300 in 2018 (£3,744 for a cremation and £4,798 for a burial) with another £2,000 being spent on discretionary items such as flowers and catering. In Wales, the average cost of a burial is £3,934 and the average costs for a cremation is £3,142¹. Although these are below the national average, costs have increased substantially across Wales and the UK and are likely to continue to do so.
- 4.3 There has been increasing concern that the overall costs applied by the funerals industry have been increasing substantially and that funerals had become unaffordable for many. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) launched a review of the funerals industry on 1st June 2018, publishing its final report and decision on a market investigation reference on 28th March 2019². The CMA found that over the past 14 years the price of the essential elements of a funeral is estimated to have grown by 6% annually, twice the inflation rate over this period. The average spend on a funeral varies very little by household income, which means that the poorest are disproportionately affected by funeral costs. The cost of a funeral will amount to nearly 40% of the annual expenditure of someone on the lowest income².
- 4.4 In response to the increasing demand and price sensitivity of customers, funeral directors are increasingly offering low cost options to families. These services are often called “direct” or “simplicity” cremations or “cremations without ceremony”. A direct cremation is a disposition option in which the body of the deceased is cremated in the days immediately following the death without a funeral service beforehand or the viewing of the person who has died. This option significantly reduces the cost to the family.
- 4.5 In addition to being more affordable, this also meets the requirements of families or the wishes of the deceased who prefer the lack of fuss and formality that a direct cremation can offer and the flexibility to choose how to celebrate the life of a loved one at a later date if they wish.

- 4.6 With a direct cremation there is no service or mourners present at the crematorium; the cremation takes place at a crematorium of the funeral directors choosing and may not be restricted to a particular time of the day. Many crematoriums that accept direct cremations often do so in the early morning at times that are seldom utilised for full services.
- 4.7 During the pilot period direct cremations have been offered at the 9am timeslot which is rarely requested by families. During the initial pilot period, November 2019 to November 2020, 65 direct cremations took place, 28 in Glyntaff and 37 in Llwydcoed. In the subsequent three months a further 31 direct cremations have taken place across both crematoria.
- 4.8 On the evidence of the pilot scheme, the option of direct cremations is being taken up by bereaved families with increased frequency. If it is agreed to continue the scheme on a permanent basis, with the prescribed reduced fee for 2021/22 of £568, this will bring the arrangements at Glyntaff Crematorium in line with the majority of other burial authorities in Wales. With regard to the setting of the Direct Cremation fee level for 2022/23 (and annually thereafter), it is proposed that this is determined as part of Cabinet's consideration of Council fees and charges each year.
- 4.9 In terms of Llwydcoed Crematorium, the Joint Committee received and approved the 2021/22 Fees and Charges Report on 16th March 2021 and, as part of this report noted that '*...during the past year a pilot has been in place to apply a reduced cremation fee of £568 for funeral directors offering a direct cremation. Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC are currently finalising a review of the pilot and level of charge for the forthcoming financial year, and will update the Joint Committee to enable this to be implemented at Llwydcoed Crematorium in line with the arrangements for Rhondda Cynon Taf.* Therefore, subject to the implementation of direct cremations on a permanent basis at Glyntaff Crematorium, an update will be reported to the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee seeking agreement for the same arrangements to be implemented at Llwydcoed Crematorium and for the setting of the Direct Cremation fee level from 2022/23 onwards.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment screening form has been completed and identified that there are no equality or diversity issues arising from this proposal.

6. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 There are no consultation implications arising from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 The Council currently charges £721 for a cremation. The fee for a direct cremation is £568 which is broadly comparable with the fees set by other burial authorities in Wales offering the same service.

7.2 It is difficult to predict the ongoing level of demand and the financial impact of direct cremations. Based on the pilot period it would be prudent to allow for 100 such services per annum which will be utilising times that would otherwise be unused.

7.3 Based on an estimated 100 direct cremations per annum, the forecasted total savings to bereaved families would be £15,300 each year. This position will be monitored during 2021/22 and, if a budgetary adjustment is required to the Service's budget, this will be built into the 2022/23 budget setting process.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no legal implications rising from this report.

9. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

9.1 This proposal contributes to the Council's well-being goals of People, Places and Prosperity. The growing cost of funerals across the UK has meant that funerals have become increasingly unaffordable for the poorest in society. This proposal supports our local people by making funeral costs more affordable to those in greatest need.

9.2 This proposal contributes to the Well Being goal of 'A Wales of Cohesive Communities'.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The pilot of offering direct cremations to bereaved families has been well received and following consideration from the pilot period it is recommended that the Council continue to offer this option on a permanent basis at Glyntaff Crematorium and report an update to Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee seeking approval for the same arrangements to be implemented.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, CLLR. RHYS LEWIS**

DIRECT CREMATIONS

Background Papers

¹Cost of Dying Report 2018, 12th edition; SunLife

²Funerals market study, final report and decision on a market investigation reference; Competition & Markets Authority; 28th March 2019

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